



# African Literature Association NEWSLETTER

NKYIN KYIN — CHANGING ONESELF: PLAYING MANY ROLES

SINCE 1975



## Director of Headquarter's Report

**James McCorkle**  
**Geneva, New York**



HOBART AND WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGES



Greetings! Winter seemed to elude us in upstate New York until just a week or so ago when snow, ice, sleet, rain, and then more snow and more rain fell in a span of a couple of days. More fell in two days than the entire season before that onslaught! Pipes burst, basements flooded, streets were impassable, cities closed down. And then it was gone! And Atlanta beckons!

Headquarters acknowledges the continued support of Hobart and William Smith Colleges: whether it is the management of membership lists, the publication of the Newsletter, or the annual Executive Retreat, institutional support is essential to the well-being of our Association.

Headquarters, with the support of Hobart and William Smith and the Provost's Office, hosted the annual Executive Council retreat during the first weekend of November. In addition to the all-day executive meeting on Saturday, the week-end featured the now-annual Friday evening symposium, "New Perspectives in African Literature." The speakers included Mohamed Kamara, Tejumola Olaniyan, Tsitsi Jaji, and Abioseh Porter. Our all-day

ALA President's Letter.....p. 2	News from ALA 2016.....p. 15
ALA Elections.....p. 6	Call for Media Personnel.....p. 16
Members' Books.....p. 11	Reminders.....p. 17
Remembrances.....p. 12	ALA Executive Council.....p. 18
Distinguished Member.....p. 13	

Saturday meeting was successful as it maps out the future for the Association, addressing many of the challenges facing an academic, professional association.

As I have been looking in the Association's archives, I've noted that from the very earliest newsletters, there has been a steady flow of information useful to the membership. Headquarters welcomes announcements of upcoming conferences, calls for papers, announcements calling for submissions to grants and publications, postings of events specific to the focus of our Association. And we try to share these with all the current members of the ALA in as a timely fashion as possible via e-mail. The smooth functioning of the ALA is due to the work of the ALA officers and the administrative support of Dot Vogt.

This is an exciting time for our Association; as we look ahead to the Atlanta conference, the intersections of our work as scholars seems ever-increasingly connected to yet also always deeply rooted in the conference's theme of justice and human dignity.



## Letter from the ALA President

**Moradewun Adejunmobi**

In times past, the ALA president has typically addressed the membership at large only on two occasions: at the annual banquet and at the annual business meeting. As our association grows in numbers and age, it seems advisable to develop additional opportunities for the president to update members and to keep them abreast of the goals that the association is pursuing. I have decided to use a column in the newsletter for this purpose, and hope that future presidents will do likewise or seek other forums for engaging ALA members. Addressing members well ahead of the annual business meeting also means that everyone has more time to become acquainted with the issues to be discussed and to formulate an opinion that can be shared with other members during the business meeting.

## **JALA**

First, let me start with some good news. The ALA has just signed an agreement with Routledge/Taylor & Francis to take over management of our association journal, the *Journal of the African Literature Association, JALA*. This agreement is valid for six years in the first instance and will bring greater visibility to both the journal and our association. As we celebrate this giant step forward, I would be remiss if I did not thank Abioseh Porter, the founding editor of *JALA*. The ALA will forever be in his debt for founding and stewarding our associational journal with very little help from other ALA members. This is only one of his many contributions to the institutional foundation of our association. I would also like to thank his university, Drexel University that has provided support for the publication of *JALA* since its inception.

## **Awards and Membership**

The number of submissions for the ALA awards continues to grow, especially in the case of our newer awards for scholarship and creative writing. I take this too as a sign of the good health of our association and the respect that our awards are beginning to acquire, even though they have been in existence for only a short while. Nonetheless, I would like to remind ALA members that nominations for these awards must meet the criteria laid out in the call, and must be accompanied by detailed information as required. Much to my surprise and to the surprise of the chair of the award's committee, we have had submissions for award consideration made for and on behalf of individuals who were not members of the ALA. The assumption that many figures connected with African literary studies are members of the ALA is in a sense understandable. The ALA has a host of 'friends' who attend our annual conferences on a regular basis while forgetting to pay either membership dues or registration for the conferences. I would like to use this occasion to encourage the ALA's many friends to join us in paying dues and helping to build a stronger association. The ALA has now reached a size in terms of membership where it can no longer avoid hiring professionals or purchasing software if administrative tasks are to be carried out with some degree of efficiency. To reach this goal of greater administrative efficiency, we will need all beneficiaries of the professional services provided by the ALA to do their part in paying membership dues and conference registration fees. Starting in 2016 therefore, we have begun to take steps and to implement measures that will ensure compliance on the part of everyone who wishes to attend our annual conferences. Many of you who have paid your membership dues for 2016 will have received a request to fill in an on-line profile after paying your dues. Please take some time to do this. Going forward, we will rely increasingly on the contact information provided through your on-line profile to contact you and send you copies of *JALA*. Those who do not complete their on-line profile run the risk of not receiving all the benefits of membership to which they are entitled.

## Elections

Another way in which members can help to build up our association is by nominating someone to stand for election, and, or by accepting to stand for election. Typically our ALA membership does not respond to calls to nominate members for election. As a result, the majority of nominations for elections emanate from the EC year after year. I don't consider this to be healthy for our association. When nominations for election come from the EC and no one else, we face the danger of the EC becoming less representative of the general membership and more detached from the professional and other concerns of our members. I am hoping that we will see a change in the future, with many more of you responding to the annual calls for nominations. And to those who have been nominated to stand for election, especially among our more senior colleagues, I urge you to consider giving the association the benefit of your accumulated professional experience. Let me seize this opportunity to thank those who are already serving the association on a host of committees including the awards committee and the publications committee among others. Thanks to your service, the creative and scholarly accomplishments of our members are receiving well deserved recognition. I would also like to single out our new webmaster, Matt Brown of the University of Wisconsin for thanks. As members, you will have noticed some changes on our website, intended to enhance the functionality of the website. There is still

more to be done on this front, but a lot has been accomplished already.

## Conferences

Finally, I would like to say a few words about conference planning. There was a time when several universities would put in competing bids to host our annual conference, and when we could schedule host locations for our annual conference two or three years ahead. That time is over, and our traditional template for conference planning is no longer sustainable. We find ourselves in a situation where instead of choosing between competing bids, the President now has to expend a considerable amount of time in pitching the conference to potential hosts across the country and the world. At most, and when we are fortunate, we are able to plan a year ahead for the next conference. In some recent instances, a host has been confirmed barely a year ahead of time. For the tradition of hosting an annual conference to continue, it seems increasingly certain that we will have to revise our current models and come up with new templates for hosting our annual conference. We will undoubtedly have to commit more of the association's finances to conference planning. Registration fees for our conferences and for special events at conferences are likely to increase. We may have to make use of the services of individual city convention bureaus or university conference organizers, at significant cost to the association. We may

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have to revisit the kind of events we schedule at our conferences. Going forward, we might have to review our professional profile and what this means for our ability to persuade potential hosts to take on the task of organizing our annual conferences.

I look forward to discussing many of these questions with ALA members at this year's conference and at the annual business meeting. In the meantime, and if you have suggestions on any of the matters raised in this letter, please feel free to email me at: [president@africanlit.org](mailto:president@africanlit.org). Your letters will be noted and the suggestions made will be included in EC discussions on all of these topics.

I will end by giving recognition to our 2016 conveners at Emory University and Kennesaw State University in Georgia. They have put in so much time and labor to ensure a successful conference. Please don't forget to extend a hearty ALA greeting to them when you come across them in Atlanta. I, too, am hoping to see many of you in Atlanta. Until, then...

Moradewun Adejunmobi  
President  
African Literature Association 2015-2016



#### Mission Statement

The African Literature Association is an independent non-profit professional society open to scholars, teachers and writers from every country. It exists primarily to facilitate the attempts of a world-wide audience to appreciate the efforts of African writers and artists. The organization welcomes the participation of all who produce the object of our study and hopes for a constructive interaction between scholars and artists. The ALA as an organization affirms the primacy of the African peoples in shaping the future of African literature and actively supports the African peoples in their struggle for liberation.



# ALA Elections:

## Candidate's Profiles and Statements

Electronic balloting for the ALA elections for the position of Vice President and for four Executive Council members will begin on Tuesday, March 15. Questions regarding the candidates and voting should be directed to Professor Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi  
ALA Vice President.

### Vice President

#### **Adélékè Adéèkó (Adeleke Adeeko)**

My ALA story began at the Cornell meeting in 1987 and, in the intervening decades, I have missed only a few of the yearly gatherings. In 2005, I co-hosted with Mimi Mortimer the memorable—who can forget the live, highlife music concert; who would not remember the apocalyptic blizzard—31st annual meeting at Boulder, Colorado. Three years later, I was elected to serve a 3-year term on the Executive Committee, seeking, as my candidate statement had it, to explore ways of strengthening the rigor of the intellectual platforms that ALA sponsors. One other ALA role I have played, and of which I am extremely proud, is my involvement in convening the series of panels on new books I have helped put together at our annual conferences since 2008. The sole motivation for my wanting to return to the committee and serve as your VP is to pursue ways of consolidating the considerable intellectual gains the association has accumulated in the last 3 years.

Perhaps I should say something about my professional itinerary. My higher education began in Nigeria at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Africa's most beautiful university campus, where I received B.A. Education/English and M.A. Literature in English. In 1991, I completed the Ph.D. in English at the University of Florida, Gainesville, where I also earned a new totemic animal, the alligator. Since the terminal degree, I have had the good fortune of teaching and researching in all my areas of scholarly interests—Yorùbá language and literature, Literary Theory, Anglophone African writing, African American literature, and Postcolonial Literatures—at Modakeke Islamic Grammar School (Nigeria), where I once headed the English department; at Obafemi Awolowo University (Nigeria), where I part-timed for two years; at the University of Florida, where the Yorùbá studies program for which I served as Grad. Teaching Assistant saw me through graduate school; at University of Colorado, where I taught for 15 years and served one term as department chair of Comparative Literature and Humanities; and at The Ohio State University, where I am yet to acquire any title I could add to my praise poetry.

I have authored two published books, *Proverbs, Textuality, and Nativism in African Literature* and *The Slave's Rebellion: Literature, History, Orature*. The fate of a third, *Arts of Being Yorùbá*, lies, as I am writing this, in the hands of a university press editor. A collection of essays that I co-edited with Akin Adesokan on the works of D.O. Fagunwa, on behalf of Fagunwa Study Group, will be published early next year. I have also published numerous articles, reviews, book

chapters, and encyclopedia entries on Fagunwa, Derrida, Okri, William Wells Brown, magical realism, myth, de Man, Owomoyela, Irele, *oríkì*, Morrison, Quayson, Ngugi, Gikandi, Mira Nair, proverbs, Achebe, incantations, and animism.

### **Second Candidate**

A second candidate who had been approved for participation in the election for the position of Vice President unexpectedly requested on January 11 2016 to have his/her name withdrawn from the ballot due to a very challenging personal situation that is out of that individual's control at this point. The candidate provided a detailed explanation to the ALA president and the ALA President concurred with the decision taken. This ALA member's sudden decision to withdraw his/her candidacy was not made lightly; it is deeply regretted but unavoidable.

### **ALA Executive Council**

*There are six members standing for election to the ALA Executive Council; members are asked to vote for four.*

### **Joya Uraizee**

I would like to be elected to ALA's Executive Committee for three reasons. First, I believe in greater participation by ALA's membership in ALA's decisions. As President of ALA's Women's Caucus I have tried to involve the WOCALA membership, particularly its younger members, more actively in caucus decisions. If elected to the ALA Executive Committee, I would work to facilitate dialog between all of ALA's caucuses, whether this be for collaborative speaker luncheons or shared panels. Second, I am deeply committed to scholarly mentoring, and would work to foster mentor-type relationships between senior and junior ALA scholars via roundtables and workshops. My hope is to energize and encourage younger members to be more active within the organization. Third, I would like to enhance ALA's online presence and would work closely with our webmaster to make it easier for groups and caucuses within ALA to post their information on ALA's website.

### **Eleni Coundouriotis**

For the past 22 years, I have immersed myself in the study of the African novel, focusing primarily on its literary history and its complex evolution as form in dialogue with other narrative discourses (history primarily, but also anthropology, journalism, and memoir). In this vein, I have written two monographs: *Claiming History: Colonialism, Ethnography, and the Novel* (Columbia 1999) and *The People's Right to the Novel: War Fiction in the Postcolony* (Fordham 2014). The ALA provides a unique forum that brings together scholars and writers to engage critically with the richness of African literatures. As a scholar, I have had many revelatory moments at ALA hearing writers discuss their work (for example, the late Assia Djebar), and I can think of no other professional organization that succeeds as powerfully in connecting the work of scholars and artists, including in recent years a wealth of film directors. This is work that the ALA must continue to do. We want to inspire young scholars to engage with our field and stay in it for the long term. Our professional organization must work on broadening its base and keeping the membership engaged by developing and sustaining conversations over a time. The ALA has also been exceptional in its willingness and capacity to travel as a conference, connecting a broad constituency to it. One area that I think the ALA could engage in more

energetically is pedagogy: helping link classrooms in Africa to classrooms in the USA and Europe, developing more of a scholarly profile on teaching methods, and even possibly reaching into secondary education.

### **Grace Musila**

I am honored to be considered for membership on the ALA Executive Council.

I am based at the English Department, Stellenbosch University, South Africa; and my teaching and research focuses on Eastern and Southern African literature and popular culture. I have presented aspects of my work at various local and international conferences, including ALA conferences. Apart from conference participation, I have also had a number of opportunities to publish my work in various journals, including the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Africa Insight*, *Nordic Journal of Youth Research*, *Research in African Literatures* and the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. My location at a South African university, coupled with my interest and networks in Eastern Africa offers strategic opportunities for me to contribute towards the promotion of the ALA's initiatives across these two regions. I am an active member of a number of initiatives, among these the Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics (PANGeA)—a partnership of institutions drawn from East, West and Southern Africa [Stellenbosch, Ghana, Malawi, Nairobi, Makerere, Dar es Salaam and Botswana]—and the Eastern African Studies group. PANGeA is primarily invested in the promotion of doctoral training; and strengthening African research productivity in the humanities and social sciences; while the Eastern African Studies group seeks to rejuvenate scholarship on Eastern Africa, in Eastern Africa. Among its activities, the EAS group hosts conferences on Eastern African literary and cultural studies in the region; and recently hosted the second conference in the series at Makerere University, Uganda. In the course of serving on these two initiatives, I continue to gain valuable experience on collaborative work, conference organization, promotion of African research production; and broadly, a shared vision of affirming and promoting African literary and cultural studies; with particular interest in creating space for African voices and thought, in the global academy. I believe the vision of these initiatives neatly aligns with the ALA's vision and mission; and if given the opportunity, I would be well-placed to promote these synergies. While my priority focus is decidedly African, I have also had opportunities to develop collaborative research initiatives with colleagues and institutions from beyond the continent; most notably USA, Sweden, Finland, Germany and the United Kingdom; all of which have been, and continue to be, productive. It would be a great honor to serve on the ALA's Executive Council; and to have the opportunity to contribute to the association, and learn from the experience.

### **Abdourahmane Waberi**

I received my Ph.D. in French and Francophone literature from Paris-Ouest Nanterre La Défense University in 2012. My research and teaching encompass literature, culture and film of Africa and its diasporas in U.S., the Caribbean and Europe as well as creative writing.

I am also a celebrated and prolific novelist, poet and essayist. And last but not least I am a *Le Monde* columnist and an activist with a special interest in human rights issues and democracy.

Though I am a newcomer, I first joined the ALA in 2010 as the FRACALA luncheon speaker, since then the ALA has become an important part of my intellectual and professional space. As



an African writer, I was aware of the spirit and legacy of ALA but as a member, I got a first-hand experience of its mission and commitment and realised how our organization is so precious and needs to be sustained.

Both as an artist and an educator, I especially value ALA's dedication to including novelists, poets and filmmakers in all scholarly discussions and gatherings. As a member of the EC, I would be particularly focused on incorporating authors and other artists and reaching out to the wider creative community to expand the ALA's relevance to contemporary cultural production. It would definitely be an honor and privilege to serve the ALA as a member of the Executive Council.

### **Joyce Ashuntantang**

I am honored to be nominated to the Executive Council of the African Literature Association. It is a commitment to intellectual rigor and service that I take seriously. I joined the ALA in 1999 when I was still a graduate student and since then I have continued to be a regular member of ALA and participant at its annual conferences. I have also been a member of the Women's Caucus (WOCALA) and a consistent presenter of "Soundings in African Languages."

I have accepted this nomination for a number of reasons. First, I believe that one is not committed to Associations per se but rather to the people who comprise them and the values they represent. The ALA has without doubt assembled the cream of African literary scholars as well as nurtured many more over the years. I have tapped into this rich tapestry of scholars for mentorship or collaboration on different academic projects. My nomination is a call for me to give back to an organization that has been a backbone to me in my academic career.

Secondly, I have noted with dismay that many participants neither attend the annual general assembly nor participate actively in the voting process. I hope to bring my public relations skills and organizational experience to assist to reverse the situation. If elected, I would come to the EC with a great deal of experience from being part of the senior leadership of other non-profit organizations in the USA. I am presently the Vice President of ExSSA (Ex Saker Students Association) USA, a robust non-profit organization with over 500 members created to empower women and girls in Cameroon. ExSSA holds an annual well-attended convention in the USA. In addition, I have also been on the board of Trustees for Cameroon Professional Society (CPS), 2010-2015. CPS is an organization which seeks to create and sustain a positive link between Cameroonian professionals in the Diaspora. CPS holds a congress annually. In addition, I am also the Coordinator of the Diaspora region of the Anglophone Cameroon Writers Association.

Above all, I believe in the mission of the ALA which "exists primarily to facilitate the attempts of a world-wide audience to appreciate the efforts of African writers and artists" and remains an organization which "affirms the primacy of the African peoples in shaping the future of African literature and actively supports the African peoples in their struggle for liberation." As a scholar and writer, I look forward to contributing my ideas and energy towards activities and decisions that would uphold this mission statement even under trying circumstances when they do occur on our beloved continent.

Joyce Ashuntantang earned a BA in Modern English Studies and a minor in Theater Arts from the University of Yaoundé, Cameroon, a Master's in Librarianship from the University of Wales, U.K., and MA and Ph.D. in English from the City University of New York. She is also a graduate of the Laura Johnson Initiative for Women Leaders. Ashuntantang's research and teaching interests include Anglophone Cameroon literature and culture, Textual/Bibliographic issues, History and African-American Literature, Women in the African Diaspora, Exile, Memory, and Identity in the Global Era. She joined the ALA in 1999 as a graduate student and has since remained a very active member of the Association.

Actress, poet, and fiction writer, Dr. Ashuntantang is the author of many scholarly and creative publications, including *Landscaping Postcoloniality: the Dissemination of Anglophone Cameroon Literature* and *A Basket of Flaming Ashes*, a poetry collection. She co-edited *Their Campaign Party Will End: A Poetry Collection in Honor of Bate Besong*. Her essay publications include "Publishing and Digital Dissemination of Creative Writing in Cameroon" (*The Book in Africa: Critical Debates*. Eds. Davis, Caroline and David Johns. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); "For Common Corn: Echoing Bole Butake's Concerns in *Lake God*, *The Survivors*, and *And Palm Wine Will Flow*" (in *Re-greening Africanscapes: Ecology and the African Imagination*. Ed. Ogaga Okuyade. African Heritage Press, 2013); "Hollywood and Representations of Human Rights in Terry George's *Hotel Rwanda*" (in *Hollywood's Africa After 1994*. Ed. Mary Ellen Higgins. Ohio University Press, 2012); and "Constructing Identity and Authenticity: The Evolving Cameroon Video Film in English" (*African Literature Today* 28, 2010). Her poems and short stories which project a feminist consciousness have also appeared in recent anthologies such as *Reflections: An Anthology of New Work by African Women Poets*, *We Have Crossed Many Rivers: New Poetry from Africa*, and *Speaking for the Generations: An Anthology of Contemporary African Short stories*. She was an invited poet at the VII International Poetry Festival, Granada, Nicaragua, (2011), 22 International Festival of Medellin, Colombia (2012), and the First Athens World Poetry Festival, Greece, (2013).

### **Ketu H. Katrak**

I have been in the field of African Literature from the 1980s with my book on Wole Soyinka, and my publications on African women writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Bessie Head, among others in published essays as well as in my book on Postcolonial Women Writers. I remain passionate in my commitment to African Literature. Most recently, my research includes working on the drama and dance by South Africans of Indian origin. As a member of the Executive Council of ALA, I would like to include writers from the African continent and in the diaspora in our yearly conferences, along with a more global emphasis on Literature of the Black Diaspora. I would like, with members of the EC, to run organized workshops focused on mentoring junior faculty in African Literature at US institutions. I would also welcome working with the EC on future ALAs in the US as well as on the African continent, and in the Caribbean.



## Member Book Publications

The Newsletter welcomes notices of recent publications—both scholarly and creative—by ALA members. Please send publication data to James McCorkle, Headquarters Director, at [mccorkle@hws.edu](mailto:mccorkle@hws.edu). A short description of the publication is welcome and may be included if space allows in the Newsletter.

Peter Wuteh Vakunta: *Tori Shweet for Cameroon Pidgin English* (Langaa, 2015)

*Tori Shweet for Cameroon Pidgin English* is a compendium of short stories written in Cameroonian creole, commonly called Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE). The grassfields of Cameroon serve as the nursery of these stories. These stories bridge the gap between the near and the far. In determining the order of presentation of the stories, the author has intentionally steered clear of chronology. Many readers will want to turn first to a story the title of which intrigues them the most. Whether you read the stories in the order in which they are presented or dart about as your fancy dictates, you will appreciate the narrative verve of this storyteller and sense the abundance of enjoyment that this book holds in store for you.

Peter Wuteh Vakunta. *Stream of Consciousness: Poetics of the Universal* (Langaa, 2015)

Poetry has the potential to serve as a double-edged weapon. In *Stream of Consciousness: Poetics of the Universal*, Vakunta stirs the hornet's nest; Vakunta refuses to sit on the fence and watch the world go by. Strong in the conviction that poets must adjudicate upon the affairs of men, the poet picks up the cudgels to do battle with forces of evil the world over. *Stream of Consciousness: Poetics of the Universal* is the poet's loud cry against the reign of impunity and the endemic moral crisis that has become the canker of this blighted planet.

Peter Wuteh Vakunta: *Takumbeng and Other Poems from Abakwa* (Langaa, 2015)

This collection of poems celebrates the prowess of the *Takumbeng*, a militant female secret society in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. The poems address human rights violations, rape of democracy, misgovernment, and other forms of societal ills that plague post-colonial Cameroon. It is written in impeccable Standard English. The strength of the book resides in the vastness of the thematic terrain broached.

Peter Wuteh Vakunta: *Poems from Abakwa in Cameroon Pidgin English* (Langaa, 2015)

*Poems from Abakwa in Cameroon Pidgin English* is the poet's attempt at capturing in print the speech mannerisms of the proverbial man in the street in Cameroon. Pidgin English, also called Cameroonian Creole, is a lingua franca spoken throughout the national territory of Cameroon and beyond. Although for a long time, Pidgin has survived as a lingo used mostly by the uneducated and semi-literate, this mixed language has now gained currency among the educated in Cameroon. It is important, I believe, to conceive of language mixing as an

attempt to make language respond more realistically to the prevailing circumstances under which discourse takes place.

Peter Wuteh Vakunta: *Requiem pour Ongola en Camfranglais: une poétique camerounaise* (Langa, 2015)

Using linguistic stylings as subversive as the messages nestled between the lines, Vakunta's *Requiem for Ongola in Camfranglais: Cameroonian* poetics presents a scathing critique of the corruption of democracy into "democraziness" running rampant in the "Sick Man of Africa". Written in Camfranglais, this is resistance poetry at its best: 'tokking' through the mouth of the voiceless", the author pulls no punches in condemning the general climate of impunity that has created an atmosphere of frustration and hopelessness.



### *Remembrances*

Ranjana Ash  
Marjorie Jones  
Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye

Fatema Mernissi  
Asenath Bole Odaga  
Grace Ogot

## ALA DISTINGUISHED MEMBER AWARD 2015: ABIOLA IRELE



Educated at the Ibadan campus of the University of London, and the Sorbonne University in Paris, Abiola Irele's contributions to the study of African literature, African humanities, and to the profile of the African Literature Association can hardly be overstated. Few scholars of African literary studies have been more widely read within the discipline. Fewer still have been so widely consulted and cited by students of African societies beyond the realm of literary studies. Abiola Irele belongs to a generation that made African literary studies central to scholarship on African culture and 'African letters,' to borrow a term he once used to describe the object of his scholarly investigation in a 1991 essay.

In an extremely productive career spanning decades, Irele generously shared his store of knowledge with students and colleagues on many continents. He held positions at the University of Ibadan (1977 to 1987), Obafemi Awolowo University (formerly the University of Ife), the University of Lagos, and was most recently Provost of the College of Humanities at Kwara State University in Nigeria. He was

Professor of African, French, and Comparative Literature at Ohio State University from 1987 to 2003. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Dakar (1979 to 1980), the Andrew Mellon Visiting Professor at Tulane University, (fall 2001), and a Visiting Professor of African American and African Studies and of Romance Languages and Literature at Harvard University from 2003 to 2010. In 1999, he held a position as Overseas Fellow at Churchill College, University of Cambridge.

Professor Irele has over one hundred publications to his credit, including essays, monographs, edited works and others. A review of his entire output offers one of the best guides to the debates that animated the study of African literature from the 1970s to the early twenty-first century. He is the author of four justly famous monographs: *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (1981), *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (2001), *Négritude et condition africaine* (2008), and *The Négritude Moment: Explorations in Francophone African Literature and Thought* (2011). He is the co-author of some of the most influential reference works for African literature today, including *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature* (co-edited with Simon Gikandi in 2003), *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel* (2009), as well as *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought* (co-edited with Biodun Jeyifo). He was also a contributing editor to the *Norton Anthology of World Literature*. Other edited works include *Theatre in Africa* (co-edited with Oyin Ogunba 1978).

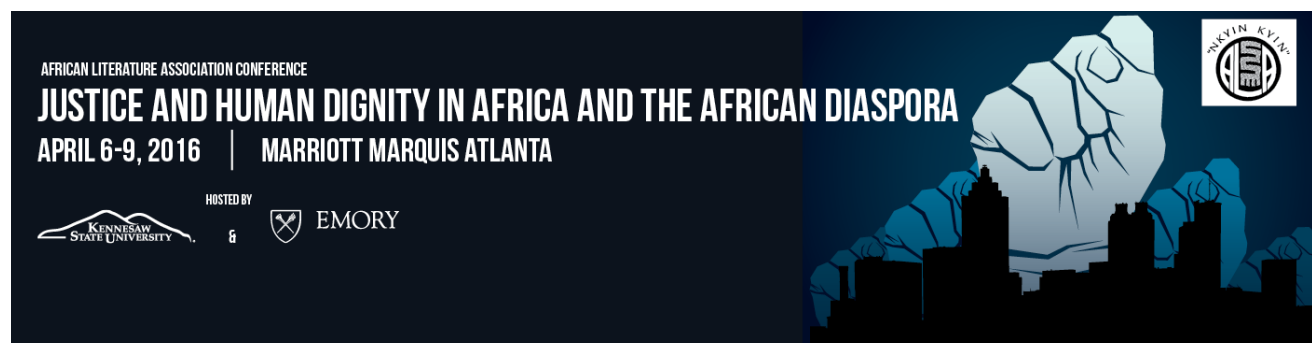
Some of his most widely cited publications include “In Praise of Alienation,” the title of his Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan in 1982. His essays on Aimé Césaire, Camara Laye, Hampaté Bâ, and Cheik Hamidou Kane among several others launched the study of literatures written in French among critics in English-speaking Africa. He was perhaps the most notable critic in English-speaking Africa to seek to popularize Negritude at a time when it was viewed with considerable skepticism in such essays as “Negritude Revisited” (1971), “What is Negritude?” (1977) and “The Negritude Debate” (1986). Publications like his annotated volume of Senghor’s poetry, *Selected Poems of Leopold Sedar Senghor* (1997) and edited anthology *Lectures Africaines: A Prose Anthology of African Writing in French* (1969) were major contributions to this goal. His commitment to making intellectual maneuvers in the francophone African and Caribbean world legible to fellow travelers speaking other languages extended beyond the realm of literature. His introduction to the English language translation of Paulin Hountondji’s *African Philosophy, Myth and Reality* attracted justifiable attention for its rich insights. His interventions with respect to authors writing in English and in Yoruba were equally incisive and notable. When in his later work, he returned to some of the most pervasive questions in the study of African literature in his book, *The African Imagination*, the results were similarly impressive. Simon Gikandi described the book as a “brilliant rereading and rethinking of both canonical and emergent texts of African literature” while Biodun Jeyifo noted that the work confirmed “Irele as the doyen of Africanist literary scholars worldwide.” Recognition of his stature in scholarship on African cultures continues even in his retirement as evidenced by the invitation extended to him to deliver the Basorun MKO Abiola Lecture at the 2014

annual conference of the African Studies Association in Indianapolis. In 2013, he was conferred Nigeria’s National Merit Award by the country’s president. Many members of the ALA count themselves as students and or beneficiaries of Abiola Irele’s legacies to the study of African literature.

Irele has been at the helm of some of the most important journals in our profession and in African studies writ large. These include *Research in African Literatures* where he was editor from 1998 to 2003, and *Transition* where he was editor from 2005 to 2010. Most recently, he has served as editor of *The Savannah Review* based at the Kwara State University. At the same time, his dedication to supporting African-based publishing ventures is longstanding. To this end, he founded the New Horn Press in Ibadan in the 1980s.

Irele’s record of service to the profession and to the study of African letters is equally distinguished. While there are many famous scholars of African literature who have charted a path for themselves without reference to the ALA, Abiola Irele has remained steadfastly committed to the ALA over many decades. He was elected as President of the African Literature Association in 1992. In 1995, he was convener of the annual conference of the ALA at the Ohio State University, with the theme: “The Postcolonial Condition.” Even in his supposed retirement, Professor Irele remains a regular presence at the annual conferences of the ALA, making time to attend various panels and to engage younger scholars in spirited debate. Irele’s record of service to our association, to our discipline, to the profession and to his many former students, now professors around the world, is most deserving of the Distinguished Member Award of the African Literature Association.





## News From the Conveners

Plans for the 42<sup>nd</sup> annual conference of the African Literature Association are unfolding well as the hosting institutions, Emory University and Kennesaw State University, are gearing up to welcome more than 400 participants from Europe, Africa, North and South America to Atlanta in April.

The opening reception will be held at Atlanta's National Center for Civil and Human Rights (NCCHR), which opened its doors to the public for the first time in 2013. The NCCHR is partnering with the host universities to give conference participants a wonderful opportunity to visit two of its permanent exhibits "Rolls Down Like Water: The American Civil Rights Movement" and "Spark of Conviction: The Global Human Rights Movement" during the reception.

Panels will take place at the Marriott Marquis hotel starting at noon on Wednesday April 6<sup>th</sup> and through the early afternoon of Saturday April 9<sup>th</sup>. Confirmed speakers are Nigerian novelist Chris Abani, Franco-Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck and Angolan poet Ana Paula Tavares. In addition, the Zambian writer and 2015 Caine Prize Winner for African fiction in English, Namwali Serpell will participate in a prose and poetry reading and a roundtable. The Italian-Ghanaian filmmaker Fred Kuwornu will also give a lecture on Race and Diversity in Media. Films directed by Peck and by Kuwornu will be screened during the conference.

We have an exciting schedule that is currently in preparation with seminars and panels on a variety of topics related to justice and human dignity in Africa and the African diaspora. Two new caucuses will also meet at our Annual conference this year, one dedicated to Film and Media and another to African languages.

On the evening of Friday April 9<sup>th</sup>, participants will have the opportunity to attend a play on the Selma protest written and directed by KSU theatre professors Margaret Baldwin and Karen Robinson, respectively, and performed by KSU theatre students at the NCCHR.

We are looking forward to welcoming our participants to the birthplace of Martin Luther King and to a vibrant city whose past and present speaks of an ongoing engagement with justice and human dignity.



**ALA** AFRICAN  
LITERATURE  
ASSOCIATION  
ATLANTA | APRIL 6-9, 2016



## Call for Volunteer Media Personnel (Photographers, Videographers)



The African Literature Association (ALA) is inviting applications from members to serve as volunteer media personnel. Volunteers will participate in the conference social mediaplatform, and film and/or photograph general events and proceedings at the ALA's 2016 Annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia. This content will be used for archiving, reporting, promotional purposes, and on the ALA website, Facebook, and may also be sent to media organizations.

The theme for this year's conference is "Justice and Human Dignity in Africa and the African Diaspora." The conference will be held on April 6-9, at the Marriot Marquis Atlanta hotel. For additional information about the conference, please visit the ALA's conference page: <http://africanlit.org/annual-conference/upcoming-conference/>

Photographs, videos, and prose will remain the intellectual property of the volunteer, but the ALA reserves the right to use photographs, videos, and writing in the future for publicity and archival purposes. The volunteer will be acknowledged in any not-for-profit use, will be consulted in the unlikely event that the media is used by the ALA in a for-profit project, and will be free to negotiate their own terms of use for use outside the ALA organization.

Compensation: While this is volunteer opportunity, financial compensation will not be offered. However, the ALA will however offer the following benefits:

- a) complimentary night of lodging at the 2016 Annual Meeting hotel, The Marriot Marquis Atlanta.
- b) one ticket to the Annual Meeting banquet.
- c) waiver of registration fee.

Eligibility: Volunteer applicants must be registered participants or presenters. Individuals with demonstrable photography/film experience are especially welcome to apply. Selected volunteers should have suitable photography/video equipment, with the ability to capture footage of large events and gatherings. Video equipment should be able to deliver clear footage and quality sound, with minimal background noise interference.

Duties: Engage with the designated social media platform of the conference. Photograph/video record selected main events and snippets of others. The volunteer will have freedom in deciding where their conference time is spent, but will be required to attend certain major conference events, decided in consultation with an ALA Executive Committee liaison.

To Apply: If you are interested in applying, please send a letter of interest, detailing your photography or videography experience to date, the equipment you have at your disposition, and your availability (i.e. will you be available for the duration of the conference, or only for certain parts of it?). Send as email attachment to the ALA Publicity and Media Relations Committee, c/o Beth Willey ([aewilley@louisville.edu](mailto:aewilley@louisville.edu)).

Applications received by March 28 will be given priority.

# Reminders to ALA Members

**1. Pay ALA membership fees.** If you have not paid your annual membership fees, please do so now. Your name will not appear in the program and you will not be able to present your paper if you do not pay your annual due. Please visit <http://africanlit.org/membership/> for payment

**2. Pay ALA 2016 registration fees.** Every conference attendee must pay registration fee. Your paper may have been accepted for the conference, but your name will be removed from the program if you do not pay your conference registration fees by March 15 2016. To pay, please visit: <http://ala2016.com/>

**3. Make hotel reservations.** The ALA 2016 conference hotel is the truly gorgeous Marriott Marquis Atlanta. Pay your ALA membership fees first, then your conference registration, and finally reserve your hotel room: <https://resweb.passkey.com/go/ala2016>

**4. Review the schedule.** The preliminary schedule for the ALA 2016 conference is now online at: <http://ala2016.com/> Click the Call for Papers tab on the left side.

The success of our conference depends on a sufficient number of attendees staying at the conference hotel. The special ALA discounted hotel rate will only be available until Friday March 18, 2016.

If you have any questions regarding the conference, please direct them to the conference conveners at [atlanta@ala2016.com](mailto:atlanta@ala2016.com)





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All inquiries should be addressed to the Headquarters Director, James McCorkle.

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