



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

CITATION ON

PROF. MICERE M. GITHAE MUGO

ON HER CONFERMENT OF

THE DEGREE OF

**DOCTOR OF LETTERS
(*HONORIS CAUSA*)**

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

ON

11TH DECEMBER 2020



PROF. MICERE M. GITHAE MUGO

MĪCERE M. GĪTHAE MUGO was born in 1942 in Baricho, Kirinyaga District of the then colony of Kenya. She was the third born of ten siblings, whose parents were teachers. It is a blessing to the country and the world at large that she was born to progressive parents who did not view education as the preserve of the boy-child, as was the norm at the time. In her family, all children were given equal chances in their pursuit of education regardless of gender.

From an early age, Mīcere's parents wanted her to become a doctor. She thus joined Embu Girls Primary School, and later proceeded to Kangaru Girls School. Mīcere had attended primary school when Kenya was in political turmoil, especially in Central Kenya, due to the struggle for independence. The fact that she excelled in her primary school examinations and earned a slot in the prestigious Alliance Girls High School shows how determined she was to succeed.

After her Ordinary Level education at Alliance Girls, Mĩcere joined Limuru Girls School for her Advanced Level studies. At Limuru, she marked what would be one of a long series of firsts in her educational and work career. In this case she was the first student of African descent to be admitted to the school along with another girl who was the first student of Asian descent in what was from that point on to become a mixed-race school.

Micere passed her Advanced Levels final examinations, and was thereafter admitted to a Bachelor's degree programme at Makerere University, in Uganda. While at Makerere, Mĩcere studied English and was very active in drama, a skill through which the society would later on derive benefits through her creative works. In 1966, Micere graduated with a Bachelors honours degree and went on to earn a post-graduate Diploma in Education a year later from the University of East Africa, Nairobi.

Mĩcere thereafter started work as a teacher at Kaaga Girls High School, where she taught English. She was later promoted to be deputy principal, transferred as the Deputy Principal of Alliance Girls High School and then, later, Kabare Girls High School. It was after this stint as a high school teacher and deputy principal that Mĩcere left for the University of New Brunswick, in Canada, for further studies. She earned her Masters of Arts in Literature in 1971. She then scored another first when, in 1973, she became the first ever African woman to earn a Doctor of Philosophy in literature. Thereafter, Mĩcere returned to Kenya where she worked first as a lecturer in a teacher's training college before joining the Department of Literature, University of Nairobi, as a lecturer.

Mĩcere found a vibrant Department that was in the throes of Africanisation, and threw her weight behind her colleagues, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who had embarked on reforming

the literature curriculum at the university. Indeed, Mĩcere was instrumental in the national conference that was held in 1974 under the auspices of the Department of Literature with the intention of decolonising the secondary school English curriculum, just as had been successfully done with the University literature curriculum. It was at this point in time that Micere displayed growth in her creativity by joining the song school with her poetry that was published in 1976 in a collection *Daughter of My People, Sing* (1976), which displayed feminist consciousness while incorporating orature in her poetry. This was a radical a departure from the conventional forms that dominated in published texts then.

From then on, Mĩcere resolved to advance literature from an African perspective. Indeed, after watching the staging of Kenneth Watene's *Dedan Kimathi*, she judged that it was written from a British perspective. Together with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Mĩcere aspired to liberate the narrative by writing

and staging *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), which was selected to represent Kenya at the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) of 1977, which was held in Lagos, Nigeria.

In 1980, while still at the University of Nairobi, Mĩcere yet again made history when she emerged victorious in the then hotly contested Faculty of Arts deanship election. Mĩcere emerged as the first, and to-date, the only female Dean of the Faculty of Arts. She was later promoted to the position of Associate Professor.

These were indeed heady days in the politics of Kenya. Mĩcere's creative and critical writings made her a target for the political establishment of the day. Her tribulations started with her association with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who had been detained without trial in 1977. When she voiced her liberal opinions during a period of growing oppression, Mĩcere was

accused of being among the plotters of the 1982 attempted coup d'état. She was then hounded into exile in Zimbabwe and while there, she was stripped of her Kenyan citizenship.

Despite all these setbacks, Mĩcere still pursued her scholarly calling through literature, which she taught at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare from 1984 to 1992. She then moved to the United States of America in 1992, where she taught briefly at Cornell University, before moving to Syracuse University where she taught from 1993 until her retirement in 2015.

In her rich career as an academic, Mĩcere has made tremendous contribution to the discipline of literature and human knowledge broadly. She has over 200 publications comprising journal articles, books, book chapters, monographs, guest lectures, conference presentations, poems, DVDs, and television interviews.

She has been a member of over sixty professional organizations; she has been a member of over 150 International and National Boards and Committees, some of which she has been Chair/President. Micere has also been Advisor/Evaluator/Resource Person in over fifteen Professional Activities.

Micere has always empathized with the forgotten lot in the community. She engages in community service to alleviate suffering. In doing this, she has served in a number of initiatives, including: Board Member, Friends of AIDS Orphans in Africa; Founder and President, United Women of Africa; Founder and President, Pan African community of Central New York; Volunteer, Catholic Charities, Syracuse; Volunteer, Prison Outreach Work in Central New York.

Because of her wide involvement in these initiatives, she has been invited to speak in international forums and universities in in Africa, Europe, and America. She served as Visiting

Professor in several International Universities and served on Boards on International Organizations such as Women's World Organization, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, and the African Studies Association.

Prof. Mĩcere M. Gĩthae Mugo has been honoured for her contributions to knowledge and society at large. Internationally, she was recognised with the Central New York Women of Distinction Award (2008), Distinguished Africanist Scholar Award (2007), Beyond Community Recognition Awards, Inc (2004), Rockefeller Foundation Award for Writing & Publications (1992), Ford Foundation Award for Research on African Orature and Human Rights (1987-1990), and the Marcus Garvey Award (1985). In Africa, she was awarded the Elder of the Burning Spear (2013) by the Government of Kenya, and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Distinguished Lecturer Award (2012) by the University of Dar es Salaam.

Prof. Micere M. Githae Mugo is the mother of Mumbi Mugo and the late Njeri “Kui” Mugo.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is in recognition of her outstanding achievements and contribution to scholarship in literature and the arts, her relentless pursuit of a socially just world, and her broader service to humanity, that the University of Nairobi Senate and Council have decided to award **Prof. Mĩcere M. Gĩthae Mũgo** the degree of Doctor of Letters (D.Litt) (Honoris Causa).

Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honour to present to you, Dr. Prof. **Mĩcere M. Gĩthae Mũgo**.

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PROF. MICERE M.
GITHAE MUGO**