

# DAWORD

The Vienna African Writers (VAW)  
Quarterly Newsletter



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Department of African Studies  
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## Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in Vienna 2-4 May

*"We should embrace the quantity of African languages, but then come up with ways of enabling conversation among the languages and the literatures. One of it is clearly translation."  
"Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his lecture on  
"Translation and the Language of African Literature,"  
on May 2nd, 2017 at the Institute for African Studies.*

With Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, we were able to welcome one of the most renowned African authors and intellectuals in Vienna at the beginning of May. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine, has been invited by the Department of African Studies and the Global African Diaspora Research Platform. His visit has been a highlight for the Kenyan community in Vienna and an inspiration for the 400 people who attended his lecture "Translation and the language of African literature" on the 2nd of May at the Department of African Studies and his reading from his memoir *The Birth of a Dreamweaver* on the 4th of May at the Reading Hall of the main university library. Many VAW members also attended the events.

The power of translation and practical visions on writing in African languages were at the heart of Prof. Ngũgĩ's opening lecture of the workshop "Strategies for the Promotion of African language literatures". According to Ngũgĩ, translation is the key to strengthening the prestige of African languages as medium for culture and identity; as a successful example he named the translation project which he realized with the pan-African authors' collective, *Jalada* in 2016. Moses Kilolo, the editor in charge of the magazine, who also visited Vienna at the beginning of May, had asked him for a short story to publish it in said magazine.

The story, titled *Ituĩka rĩa Mũrũngarũ*, *Kana Kĩrĩa Gĩtũmaga Andũ Mathiĩ Marũngĩ*, written by Ngũgĩ in Gikuyu and translated by him into English under the title *The Upright Revolution or Why Humans Walk Upright*, has since then been translated into over 64 languages, 47 of them African, at the initiative of Jalada. Thus, within a short period of time, the story became one of the – if not the – most translated short stories. Until August you can see the exhibition dedicated to this translation project. By the way, as Ngũgĩ mentioned, it is custom in his family in South California to exchange stories instead of material gifts on birthdays and holidays.

On May 4th, Ngũgĩ read from *The Birth of a Dreamweaver* and revived his time as a young student at the Makerere University College in Kampala in the beginning of the 1960s. The reading was organized in cooperation with the Vienna University Library and the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC).

We experienced Professor Ngũgĩ not only as a great and inspiring speaker, intellectual and author but as a generous and attentive listener. Our conversations with him remain unforgettable.

Martina Kopf



