V.-Y. : May we honour you not only with our grief, but with our thinking

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May 31, 2025, marked the 40th day since the passing of philosopher, essayist, poet and novelist Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, a founding figure in African studies. Professor Toussaint Kafarhire, S.J., editor of Global Africa, co-organized a webinar with Professor Zubairu Wai to celebrate the thought, struggles, and humanity of this exceptional man. We wished to share a few powerful moments from this tribute.

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Zubairu Wai

We chose this date because in Africa, at least in Sierra Leone where I'm originally from, and I confirmed this with the Reverend Professor Toussaint Kafarhire, S.J., that in Congo also, when someone dies, the 40th day is important because that is the final stage of funeral rites. And then you wait until one year later before you meet again and so on. So, we thought that this could be a good day in which we could remember Professor Mudimbe.

One thing before I pass this (floor) to Pr. Toussaint Kafarhire is that Professor Mudimbe had a very complicated relationship with the church. Well, as he, himself, recognized in some of his writing that is a relationship that was never severed. He tried, and he even told us that being agnostic was kind of an intellectual and public posture.

If you have been to his home, especially those of us who visited him in his home in North Carolina, he would wake up and start the morning with Gregorian music. He had a Chapel and a meditation room in the house. Also, I think, on his 60th birthday, I remember

this vividly, Pope John Paul had sent him, I forgot the name for it, but it was kind of a prayer and benediction. This gesture means that even though this relationship was a complicated one, it was still a (real) relationship, and we have to honor that.

Therefore, we wanted to start this with a prayer before we go through the list of recitals that we already have. Then we will open the floor to anyone who wants to say something about their relationship or the way Professor Mudimbe impacted their lives, etc. So, this is not an academic setting, in the sense that people are really going to give academic papers, but this is more like a reflection, remembering fondly of somebody who has touched us in so many ways. Now, Professor Toussaint, I will pass the floor to you.

Toussaint Kafarhire

Thank you so much, Zuba! Thank you so much because as you just mentioned, we gathered here because we are a community, that was built through the world, surely through history, and through Professor Mudimbe. We all have known him in one way or another, either closely or from a distance, through his writings or personally. And it is truly right to be able to pay this tribute to him and to recognize that he was a soul who deeply sought God.

I am speaking in French because I believe we are a very global community, and those who come from non-English-speaking countries really feel that this space is made for all of us. Maybe some will speak in Portuguese, some in Spanish, because Mudimbe was a universal man, a global man.

I would just like to take this small moment of introduction to offer a short prayer, and this prayer I will divide into four small parts. First, I will read a short passage from Scripture. Then, I will read a small poem by Khalil Gibran. After that, I will offer a brief exhortation and a prayer.

As I just said, Mudimbe was a universal man. Zuba told us that Mudimbe had rather difficult relationships with the Church, with his faith. I was privileged to hear him share his story of entering and leaving the monastery. And I shared with Zuba that Mudimbe once came to visit me in Chicago. At one point, I was going to leave to fulfill my priestly duties. The chaplaincy had students, and I was supposed to celebrate Mass. And Mudimbe told me: " I'm coming with you." I was surprised. He quickly reassured me: "No, no! I am not going to interfere. I won't disturb you, Father. I will sit in the back, at the end of the church. I will read my breviary, and you will continue with your altar service." And that's exactly what he did.

So, I think what we are doing now, we are doing as believers, Christians, Catholics. We are doing it as Muslims, Buddhists. We are doing it as Africans, meaning with that ancestral faith that we carry, and that leads us to this strong belief that death does not actually end life. And that Mudimbe, in one way or another, will continue to live with us, inspire us, and push us forward. So, for those who are Catholic like me, and according to the traditions represented in this virtual room, I would like to begin this moment in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Reading from the Gospel according to Saint John. We read from chapter 14, verses 1–4. It is written:

> Do not let your hearts be troubled. If you believe in God, believe also in me. My father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going, the gospel, the good news of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Jesus.

I said the second part would consist of just bringing to your attention a short poem by Gibran Khalil, whom I said to myself could have been a great friend of Mudimbe's had they lived in the same epoch. So, I want to open this space and this moment by quoting from Gibran instead of quoting directly from Mudimbe who, as we all know, has written tremendously.

Because, you will agree with me, the words that you are about to hear sound like sharp truth written for Professor Mudimbe himself. Gibran says:

> Do not love half lovers,
> do not entertain half friends,
> do not indulge in works of half talented,
> do not live half a life, and do not die a half death.
> If you choose silence, then be silent.
> When you speak, do so until you are finished.
> Do not silence yourself to say something, and do not speak to be silent.
> If you accept, then express it bluntly. Do not mask it.
> If you refuse, then be clear about it, for an ambiguous refusal is but a weak acceptance.
> So do not accept half a solution.
> Do not believe half truths.
> Do not dream half a dream.
> Do not fantasize half hopes.
> Half a drink will not quench your thirst.
> Half a meal will not satiate your hunger.

I love these words by Gibran Khalil because they seem to refer to the giant V.-Y. Mudimbe, who did not go halfway, who went all the way when he believed in something. His quest for knowledge was something that he really took to the ancestors.

And if we are here now to celebrate his legacy, it is because we know and recognize him as a role model. We recognize his light will continue to shine and inspire many of us as we seek and try to produce knowledge about our peoples, our continent, and the world. And so we believe in meaning and we believe in eternity, just as Mudimbe did. And I think actually that is why even V.-Y. Mudimbe adopted most of us in the first place.

So, we are here because we loved a man whose earthly journey ended forty days ago, but whose spiritual strength will never fade when we are here, because we are men and women of faith, each one in their own way. Faith in life, faith in love, faith in friendship, faith in humanity, faith in God, You name it.

We are here because precisely forty days ago, someone we truly loved breathed his last breath, and closed his eyes to the light of the sun, only to open them on the other side of this life. We are his family and friends. We are his students and his mentees. We are his colleagues and heirs. We are also his sons and daughters, not always in biological terms but also in a spiritual and intellectual sense.

Everyone in this space can claim to have known V.-Y. Mudimbe, an elder now and assistant in one way or another, closely or from afar. His heritage, his legacy, is that of the mind. And that is why, again, we are gathering people from all over the world to commemorate his life. We have come together to celebrate the gifts of the life of Professor Mudimbe.

For those who had the chance to share with him about his faith, he made it clear that he knew how to draw a line between his intellectual quest and his spiritual thirst. When he came and (quietly) sat at the back of the Church while I celebrated the Eucharist, I could only remember the humility of a man whose experience of life had taught him how to be silent, how to listen to others, how to listen to God, how to listen even to the silence.

Elisio Macamo, University of Basel

Well, I will not speak about him in a personal capacity, even though I can claim that I have known him since the late 80s when I first bought his book *The Invention of Africa* and read it. It played a major role in my own intellectual development. So much so that ten years later when I wrote my PhD, it was basically drawing from his work.

Reverend Professor Toussaint mentioned the Gospel of John. I think that what Jesus says in that gospel, which he so eloquently interpreted for us, speaks to hearts that are troubled, offering not only reassurance but the vision of a home prepared, a place where love does not end and no one is forgotten.

So, we gather here tonight to honor a thinker whose passing leaves a silence only thought itself can begin to feel. Professor Mudimbe was more than a scholar. He was a force of intellect, subtle, rigorous, unyielding. Through concepts like *The Colonial Library* and *The Invention of Africa*, it revealed how deeply the structures of knowledge had been shaped to contain and misrecognize Africa. But it didn't stop the critique, Mudimbe's work pointed to something more demanding, the need to rebuild the disciplines, drawing from African worlds of meaning, from African voices and from African truths. He showed us that Africa was never lacking in thought, it was only lacking in recognition. And through his scholarship, he made the final case, if one was ever needed, that Africans can hold their own against anyone, not just by participating in global scholarship, but by transforming it, like he did. Professor

Mudimbe never sought applause, but his quiet audacity, his insistent on asking the other question, left a mark on all. We take ideas seriously. So tonight, I don't think that we are mourning alone. We mourn with books, with questions, with a flame he leads in our minds. May we carry it forward with courage, with care and with clarity. May he rest in peace, and may we honour him not only with our grief, but with our thinking. In a world of uncertainty. He lived with purpose.

In a time of noise, his presence brought calm. And now, as he walks a path we all as one day take, we take comfort in knowing that the way is prepared, that the rooms are many, and that there is a place for him as there will be for us. He has not vanished into nothingness. He has gone ahead. And though we grieve, we also give thanks for our life lived with honor, for the footprints he leaves behind, and for the love that continues to speak his name.

Thank you, and thank you, our Reverend Professor Toussaint and Zuba, my friend, for organizing this event.

Ainehi Edoro, University of Wisconsin-Madison

It's a privilege and an honor to be in this community today. And I think it's special that what connects all of us is the fact that we have in some way been touched by Professor Mudimbe. I'm not going to speak about the ways that Professor Mudimbe's ideas have entirely reshaped our assumptions and knowledge of African thought. I think I'm going to talk more about the personal encounters I had with him and the influence he had on me as a student.

I met Professor Mudimbe, in 2010 when I got to Duke University and his course titled "Sacre and Existentialism" was the first set of courses I took when I started my PhD program at Duke University. As you can imagine, a PhD program can be rough, especially your first year. You might have a lot of insecurities about what you know or don't know. The workload is also tough. So, this was all new to me. On top of that, I was always aware of my identity, I'm Nigerian. I was an African woman in an American institution trying to become an academic. All of those experiences were daunting and felt new to me. I realized that there were aspects of it that were going to be challenging, which is why I consider myself very lucky that Professor Mudimbe was literally one of the first spaces that I entered as a PhD student in academia.

He was a very special person, and you could tell from the ethos of the course. When he came into the class, the entire room would completely hush immediately because there was this sense that you were in the presence of someone powerful, someone who you looked up to and whom you understood the significance of their presence; that you were in a class where Professor Mudimbe, who wrote *The Invention of Africa*, was going to teach.

He had this very distinct look. He always wore black, and had his glasses on, which just made him seem like he was always paying attention to things that we weren't saying. When he comes to class, usually the board is in front and we are sitting in front of him. It's like a seminar-style room and there's a window on the left. Sometimes he would speak looking out the window, contemplating nature, and just speaking. And then other times he would turn toward us and reconnect with us. So, there was this kind of presence and unique performance of the self that felt very true, that was so distinct.

I was really in the presence of somebody who was special in this really lovely way. He was somebody who used the board a lot. And when I teach today, and there's a board in my classroom, I use it completely, mostly because of that initial experience I had with him. There was one day I thought about taking a photograph of the board in the class, because by the end of the (Professor Mudimbe's) class, there would be writings all over the entire board in Greek, in Latin, in French, in English. That just gave you a sense of the breadth and the depth of his knowledge.

As a doctoral student, sitting there and seeing the way that Professor Mudimbe embodied knowledge with such authenticity was something I never encountered in my entire years as a scholar; the way that somebody just connected with the ideas that he worked with and that he thought through. The class was titled Sacre and Existentialism. We began with Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and Husserl, and then we ended up being a nothingness, which is a massive tone. He then took us through this text, page by page, chapter by chapter, with a clear-mindedness and intensity. His love for Philosophy was palpable. The class was very open. No question was ever too rudimentary, or silly. He answered everybody with care and a way that made them feel that they were seen. So, for somebody who is so vastly knowledgeable but who can make students feel comfortable and welcomed into knowledge, especially in a discipline like philosophy where many students feel excluded from that kind of space of learning. Certainly, I felt that way.

But being in that class, there was a sense of welcoming that made you feel like, whoever you are, as far as you are here, you're doing the work every day, reading, trying, thinking; Look, we are a family and we're going to figure out the problem or the question, no matter how hard it is.

So, many people know Professor Mudimbe as a scholar, through his books. But I think there's something special about encountering a scholar through their teaching. Because, a teacher is a scholar, but also much more. That intimate moment where you're trying to shape minds and introduce people to ideas that might be really difficult, takes patience. And he had a lot of them. Later, I will find out that he is somebody who actually sees himself as very patient. He's talked about in interviews how his training as a Benedictine monk had instilled in him a very extraordinary capacity to be patient. This was visible in his classes with the way he spoke, the way he carried himself: *"We are not rushing anywhere. We're going to be here for 3 hours. Let's take our time to think and talk and explore texts."* I would often go to his office just to visit, and that shows the openness that he brought.

His office was filled with books, books from so many different traditions, forms, and languages. You could sense that this was somebody who really valued learning, heterogeneity, or "cosmopolitanness" in knowledge. I would go to him with all kinds of questions and problems. If I'm working on a paper and I've hit a roadblock, I would stop by his office and we would just talk. In certain ways, I would say that he felt almost like a kind uncle who was always willing to support and be helpful.

I just want to reiterate that as a Nigerian and African woman trying to make my way in the space of academia, it was important that I met somebody like Professor Mudimbe early run, because he was able to instill a certain type of confidence and support in me that I was going to hold onto all through my years. I just want to celebrate his life and say that he's lived such a full, and beautiful life. Though he's passed on and I already miss him, I do realize that I want to celebrate the fact that he lived a full life. Thank you very much for giving this space to share my experience with him.

Professor Gertrude Mianda, York University, Glendon

Thank you, Professor Zuba, and Professor Reverend Toussaint, for organizing us to celebrate Professor Mudimbe's life, and to remember who he was.

I'm not going to talk about Professor Mudimbe as a scholar, but as someone very close to my family and to me. In speaking about Professor Mudimbe in past tense sentences, I wonder where I can start. Since I know Professor Mudimbe did not want to be labeled as I think of him today, I hope he will forgive me for saying he was a true humanist. He believed in human beings regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality, disability. He was opposed to injustice and discrimination.

He was a man of great humility. He did not put himself on a pedestal despite his international reputation as a brilliant and highly esteemed African scholar. He wanted me to call him V.-Y., but following the conventions of my Luba educational background, I used to call him Professor, which he did not like. In reply, he would tease me by calling me Doctor Mianda, or Professor Mianda. So, today I will simply refer to him as V.-Y. He was an approachable person who could engage in conversation with anyone.

I have had a constantly recurring image of him since he left this world. I see him with a glass of wine, sitting at his table, writing a few lines, Gregorian music playing in the background. I have had this image of him for years, since the day I regularly assisted him as he wrote his book *Le Corps Glorieux des Mots et des Êtres* in 1993. Did he always remain a Benedictive in spirit?

He kept saying that he was agnostic. One of the last times he was here in Toronto, I think was through Professor Pablo's Idahosa invitation to York University. Jean Pierre and I went to pick him up at Schulich Building. He was reading the Bible when he was waiting for us. We were curious. He told us it was a book that needed to be dissected.

For me, he was a mentor, an intellectual father, a big brother and a friend. In the early 1990s, when it was not easy to be accepted as a feminist in the academia or in my African and Congolese community, he was the first to support me. Those personal relationships between us began at my PhD defense, when he was my external examiner. After the Jury's deliberation, he offered me his novel *Les Carnets de Mère Marie Gertrude*. After having read it, I had to read each of the other novels. At my PhD defense, he asked me to hold on to what I believe because advocating for equity and equality for women as a human being was a good and just struggle. He kept telling me this several times. I will keep in my memory those long conversations we had about justice, gender inequalities, race and capitalism, our shared Luba traditions and customs, colonisation and Belgian colonisation in particular. When I look back, I think those conversations shaped my reading of his work in important ways.

Amidu Mutaru, University of Toronto

I was his student and to me, he was *Mwalimu*. He was not V.-Y., he was not Professor, but he was Mwalimu, a master in the deepest sense of the word. I went to Duke as a graduate student to work with him, The *Invention of Africa* had come out and was the big news of the day, if not the decade, if not the several decades after. And I wanted to work with him. So, I went there, got to work with him most closely in the late 80s and 90s. I won't go into details in terms of his teaching and, the impact that he had on students, but I'll talk a little bit more about other professional networks that he introduced me to.

So, I would spend an enormous amount of time in or outside his office. We used to go outside and stand under the tree. And those were some of the most joyous conversations that I had and most educative and informative conversations. There was never a time, not once, over the several years that I worked with him when I showed up to his office and he said he was sorry that he was busy or if we could meet another time. He always took the time, to step out of the office and talk. And I was not the only person, he was working with other students in my cohort who also similarly got as much of his time as they needed. If he worked at home, he must have worked in the evenings and nights because during the regular school day, he was always in his office. So, you never had to worry about whether you would see him unless he was teaching in the classroom. You knew that if he was not in the classroom, he was in his office. So, he was always available. Some of his classes back then were not only populated by students like me who are in person, but very advanced at Zoom, he used to have some classes that were televised through a language lab network.

We would have guest speakers who would come and meet. This was also a time at which he was very actively heading SAPINA, *the Society of African Philosophy in North America*, and I assisted him with some of those projects. We brought in many speakers including people like Lucius Outlaw, Bogomil Jasinski. We met these people and worked with them at the main African Studies Association conference. So there was a series of years in which SAPINA organized two to three panels each year. And I was fortunate to help orchestrate some of those as well as the SAPINA newsletter that came out. Professor Mudimbe was very gracious. Not only did he include his students in some of that collective work, but he also helped publish some of us. So, some of my earliest writings of interviews with people like Richard Rorty and Nawal El Saadawi were published in SAPINA, and I was very grateful to him for that.

I had an interview with him in 1990, which was published in the journal *Kalalu*. It has been 35 years since that interview. But in order to recollect that, I went back and reread that interview just to refresh my mind. I noticed that one of the questions that I had asked him was about death and partying. Because, I had heard that he had been misdiagnosed with a terminal illness at one point earlier on in his life. So, I asked him about it. I want you to hear, since we have not heard from Mudimbe himself so far yet. I wanted to voice his own words from that interview. I asked him about death and how he thought about it back then. This is what he said:

> "I would think that there is a complementarity between the ritual regularity of the Benedictine life, which is divided into three parts of eight hours, eight hours of prayer, eight of sleep, and eight hours of intellectual work and manual labor, distraction, physical exercise and so on. That's one thing. Another thing is that one of the most interesting things about the Benedictine tradition, from my viewpoint, is that these people are, as they claim, very special. They reproduce themselves by integrating new members, new adults, new young people into a philosophy, into a tradition, by giving them a simple motto: *Ora, y Labora* (Pray and Work). And this means you can do whatever you wish after your education and integration in the order. Nothing is excluded and everything is possible. You know that you belong to a tradition that goes back to the very foundation of Western monasticism. And you also know that after your time, this tradition will continue. So, in many ways you think, you live *sub specie aeternitatis* (from the viewpoint of eternity). The time is there, yet you transcend it thanks to a spiritual and genealogical affiliation. The accident that happened to me was a misdiagnosis, a case of an incompetent Belgian Dr. in Lubumbashi and also another one in Switzerland, in Geneva, both of whom told me that I had bone cancer and that I was dying. Well, how do you respond to that? To begin complaining or crying? So what? My reaction was to keep myself busy and not to think about this diagnosis. The best way for me to keep busy was to write. Since I was not teaching, I began writing three completely different things, a collection of poetry, a novel and a book of theoretical essays. I could shift when I was tired of dreaming about a novel to something more solid intellectually and check my reasoning. Then when I was tired of that, I could write a poem. And at the same time, I had with me my two children.: my eldest son came from Zaire and a goddaughter of mine from Belgium. So, I was very busy."

So, we are of all, of course, very grateful that it was a misdiagnosis and that he had several years of a worthy life ahead of him. But I wanted to share those words about passing from the Master himself. May he rest in peace.

Alírio Karina, Université of Warwick

I'm very grateful to be here among so many people who cares so deeply for Professor Mudimbe. I will be brief in my own remarks. I did not have the privilege of meeting V.-Y. Mudimbe the man, and I must say I feel quite envious of all of us here today who had the chance to know the man behind the books. Instead, I met V.-Y. Mudimbe, the author, a series of times.

First as a young undergraduate student at the University of Cape Town, where he was not on my curriculum, but he was everywhere in the notes, most often in that citation to the title of invention and idea that we have all come to roll our eyes at. Yet, thinking back now that strange, lazy citation allowed Professor Mudimbe's charisma to reveal itself to me as a nineteen-year-old who was seeing all sorts of other titles. Yet, there was something there and it allowed it to have an effect on me and to draw me into the real work. I returned to his work time and time again through my doctoral studies since then. I know I always felt too shy to bother the great professor with an e-mail which I now deeply regret. But the shyness led me to return to the books to seek out the enigmas that perplexed me and that seemed so essential to his thinking.

And, what I found in the books was a remarkable gift for me as a young thinker, especially as someone wanting to engage the theoretical questions shaping African thought. As a young person in the African continent, surrounded by debates that seemed to be trapped in a kind of machinery of post-colonial anxiety, Mudimbe's writing offered me a sort of schematic for navigating this machinery. It revealed a set of questions I didn't know were even possible to ask. His work did so with a profound humor and playfulness I hadn't realized we were allowed to have as thinkers. I still remember the very first time I read *The Invention of Africa*, which I barely understood, and being amazed at the poison skewering Carl Sagan. How funny that passage still is! Also how clear it was that Professor Mudimbe was holding back!

And as I learned to ask more questions, I found he had, across his work, laid the groundwork for answering nearly all of them. I found myself returning more to his work than even to some of the contemporary African theorists that claimed to have surpassed it. And eventually, when I had absorbed enough of his questions that I could meaningfully ask my own, I still continue to find in his work a set of orientations that undermine easy answers and push to productive ends.

Mudimbe began his inquiry in what was a bereft theoretical landscape for African thought. His work made a peerless contribution to it, without which I believe it would have remained one. I think I can speak in one voice for all of us in expressing my gratitude for how he has made my thinking possible and created a space in which we can think common questions. So thank you, Professor Mudimbe, for your work, and for bringing us together.

Zubairu Wai, University of Toronto

I want to start by saying that my relationship with Professor Mudimbe started by accident. I was a graduate student at York University in Toronto. I had survived the Sierra Leonean civil war. So, I wanted in my doctoral studies to really try to understand why is it that when I was growing up in Sierra Leone, we used to say "Saloona peace country" (Sierra Leone is a peaceful country). Then, all of a sudden, we degenerated into this killing of each other. Then the war ended, and everybody went back to being nice to each other. It's kind of crazy.

So, I was trying to understand that. Then I started reading about the war, and I realized that academic accounting of that war was not capturing my experience as someone who had lived through it. So, there was a dissonance. One day, a colleague and I were at the York bus stop expressing our frustration with the way people write about the countries that we come from, the regions that we

come from. It was a colleague from Bosnia Herzegovina. And a Professor who was standing behind told me: "you have to read Mudimbe". I was surprised, I didn't know him. I had never heard of him before. She basically (told me): "you have to read *The Invention of Africa*". I didn't get on the bus. I went to the library and got *The Invention of Africa*. For the next two days, I poured over it. I was so pumped because some of the language was so cryptic, but in some places like Alírio was saying, it was so funny as well. So, I sent him an e-mail and telling him "I don't know if I understand what you have written, but this is what my doctoral dissertation is, and I think that you will be the person to guide me through this amazing stuff." He responded that same day.

We started having this back-and-forth conversation, but via e-mail. And then finally, at some point he said he was going to be in Toronto. So, I'd finished writing the proposal and sent it to him. I still have the proposal that he brought back to me with his handwriting all over it. I have kept it to this day.

When he came to Toronto for the defense, that's when I won his friendship and that friendship grew. So, our relationship had grown to such a point that Justin Bisanswa started calling me V.-Y. Mudimbe's son. That's not something I took lightly, not son in the physical sense, but as he (Mudimbe) would refer to Professor Mianda as an intellectual daughter. I saw him as an intellectual father. And some of the work that I have done has always been sitting on his shoulder in order to be able to ask the kinds of questions.

Similarly to what Karina (mentioned earlier) in relation to how she would go back to him and it allows her to be able to pose her own questions. One thing for me is that everything else that I read, even with decolonial people such as Mignolo and others, I had already found it in Mudimbe. So, I take Mudimbe very seriously. I want to end with the final section of the afterward to the book that we published last year. Because, I think it captures the kind of gratitude that I want to express, which I can't express off the cuff. So, bear with me. So, to end, I said :

> To conclude, allow me in three registers to sanction a way of honoring a lifetime of intellectual labor and achievement. First, an appreciation of your extraordinary passion and commitment to Africa and the remarkable contribution your scholarship represents for African systems of thought. As attested by this collection of essays, your vast and expansive body of work, the singularity of your voice, the prescience of your interventions, and remarkable contributions to numerous bodies of scholarship in fields such as philosophy, anthropology, literature, post-colonial studies, literal criticism, and African Studies more broadly, have not only opened up numerous vistas in the social and human disciplines, challenging the way they encounter and construct Africa as an object of discourse, but have also brought to our consciousness new ways and reasons for developing additional strategies for engaging the discursivities of the modern disciplines, their modalities, trends, fetishes, possibilities and limitations, as well as ways of pluralizing their sources and rethinking their epistemic region of possibility, how they encounter Africa and construct it as an object of knowledge, the discourses they make possible and the implications that this have for the continents and its people. Furthermore, your work has challenged us to take a fresh look at the African condition. The set of historical and contemporary circumstances that have connived to constitute it as such and to be epistemically vigilant in the way we produce knowledge about it and proposed strategies for its rejuvenation. Second, a recognition of your remarkable brilliance and powerful erudition as a thinker in a class of your own, as well as your extraordinary humility and generosity of spirit. Someone recently remarked that African philosophy can broadly be divided into two epochs: before and after Mudimbe. This is not an exaggeration. As has already been noted, the impact of your work in this regard has been unrivaled. Every major philosophical debate in African philosophy, and indeed every major text in the field since the 1980s has been influenced by your work, especially *The Invention Of Africa*. For more than four decades, you held a touch and illuminated blind spots through various critical engagements, archaeological excavations, and genealogical explorations of colonial modernity, and especially the discursivity of the modern disciplines for and about Africa, offering conceptual and methodological lessons for Africa and the disciplines. This

is indeed a magnificent accomplishment, and it speaks to the power of your intellectual authority. It's the actualization of complex intellectual processes that qualifies disposition and testify both to your orthodoxy and subversive intentions and the transdisciplinary demands of your scholarship. I stand in awe of your brilliance and breathtaking erudition, and the measure of your extraordinary humility and generosity. Finally, a celebration of your exemplary accomplishment, an extraordinarily impactful contribution to African systems of thought, and in various disciplinary fields. The prolificity of your intellectual output, the complexity of your ideas, and your ethical commitment to Africa are all reasons to honor and celebrate you. For decades, you challenged us, you inspired us, and you showed us ways of proceeding by holding up lights to illuminate blind spots. From this angle, we can only celebrate the remarkable archive that your scholarship and intellectual vocation represents and the ethical lessons it offers, the critical challenge it poses, the discerning grounds and principles for manners of inscription in the social and human disciplines. Gratitude, one can only acknowledge the measure of your exemplary commitment to Africa, admire the quality of your discipline, practice of the disciplines, and appreciate the value of your extraordinary humility and generosity. This is an indelible mark. It is an unpayable debt that we owe you.

Zubairu Wai.

Professor Jean Paul Biruru, University of Lubumbashi

Thank you very much for this opportunity you've given us, to be able to share in this grand event, centered around a truly remarkable figure. Remarkable, and yet, as far as I'm concerned, I didn't really have the chance to get close to him. But there were at least two events, two things that drew my attention to him.

First, around 1976, when I was starting university, he was already a Professor in our faculty here in Lubumbashi. He was someone I saw quite often in the hallways, in the classrooms. And his presence, his demeanor, his comportment, his way of life, all of that was enough to captivate my attention. I couldn't take his classes since I wasn't studying Romance literature, but I never missed any of his lectures. That time was profoundly significant, because it was the first generation of Congolese professors after the missionaries and the white professors who had been in our faculty. It was the beginning of a generation of great Congolese scholars. Along with him, we knew other major names, like Professor Kä Mana (Godefroid Kangudie Tshibembe) in Philosophy, Professor Célestin Dimandja in History, and Professor Mufuta Thsimanga, who later became my mentor in African literature. It was a time of great minds. But he stood out through the way he worked, through his intellectual independence. He carved out a unique path that drew everyone's attention. So I watched him from a distance, full of admiration. I'm deeply happy to be here, to learn from those who were close to him, those who engaged deeply with his work. He was an immense figure, so immense that he transcends Congo and even Africa itself. It is a privilege for me to contribute, in my own way, to expanding this space that he opened up for Africa in the world.

The second episode that brought me closer to him was the fact that he served as Dean of our faculty. I believe I had just arrived when his term ended. And imagine, years later, I became the seventeenth Dean of that same faculty. So, it was with a very particular emotion that I assumed that role, sitting in the same chair I had once seen him occupy, at the same desk where he used to work. Holding that position filled me with emotion. I ended up serving the longest term of any Dean in the history of our faculty. The regard I held for him had a significant influence on how I managed the faculty. There were stories, anecdotes told about him. He was a very unique intellectual. He might have had disagreements with colleagues, but he would never argue in person. He engaged intellectually. He would write, and the other would respond in writing. These were battles of ideas, not hallway scuffles or office confrontations. That's the legacy I tried to uphold and promote as Dean. By then, the faculty had grown significantly, probably ten times larger than in his time. Still, I made sure to emphasize those same values when speaking with my colleagues: "This is the image, the legacy that Mudimbe left us. University professors, intellectuals, must not clash in public or private. Rather,

they must engage through ideas, through intellect. That's how we express who we are, how we challenge one another." This deeply marked me. I never stopped reminding my colleagues of that approach. That's the example I carried from Mudimbe.

As I progressed in my research, as a linguist and Africanist, I gradually moved toward Congolese literature and Francophone literature. That's when I started engaging with some of his works: his novels, poetry collections, and so on. And slowly, I began to understand the unique place he occupied, and still occupies, in the history of Congolese Francophone literature.

In the 60s, 70s, and even the 80s, Francophone literature from Congo was marginalized, overshadowed by West African Francophone literature. Because of Belgian colonization, Congolese literature wasn't valued or recognized. It was barely reviewed, barely visible. But then Mudimbe came along with his writings and opened up that literary field, placing it on the public stage, within the broader landscape of Francophone literature across the continent. He brought Congolese literature into continental and even global recognition. That is something we must absolutely acknowledge, and for which I am deeply grateful. Because through the course of my own research, I ultimately chose to work on Congolese literature. That led me to highlight his most important novels and major works in an anthology I contributed to, edited by Professor Dr. Vilicis in Georgia (USA). Later, I published my own book, *Histoire Abrégée de la Littérature Francophone Congolaise* (*A brief history of Congolese literature*), where I gave him a very special place, in recognition of the critical role he played in opening up the field of Francophone Congolese literature.