

Sisterhood ON SAFARI

A Journey of 19 Female Academicians Exploring Europe.



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When women unite around a shared purpose, distances shrink, possibilities expand, and sisterhood becomes stronger.



Message from the Chairperson



It is with immense pleasure that I welcome you to the second edition of *Sisterhood on Safari*, a publication that celebrates the spirit, journey, and achievements of

women united by friendship, empowerment, and a shared commitment to growth.

Sisterhood on Safari was founded on a simple yet powerful belief: women thrive when they create spaces to connect, support one another, and grow together. As women in academia and professional life, we carry multiple responsibilities; as educators, researchers, leaders, mentors, mothers, wives, daughters, and active members of our communities. In balancing these important roles, it is often tempting to overlook the need to invest in ourselves and in the meaningful relationships that sustain and inspire us.

This **initiative was established to provide a platform where women can build lasting friendships, share experiences, encourage one another, and pursue opportunities for learning, wellness, and personal development.** It celebrates both professional success and the personal journeys that shape us.

One of the most valuable lessons we have learned through this journey is that **professional success and personal well-being are deeply interconnected.** When we support, inspire, and empower women, they contribute more meaningfully to their institutions, families, and communities. We have also learned that women achieve their aspirations more readily when they pursue them within a community built on trust,

encouragement, and a shared sense of purpose.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to every member of this sisterhood for their commitment, enthusiasm, and willingness to contribute to this growing initiative. The friendships forged, the lessons shared, and the memories created serve as a powerful reminder that the true strength of any community lies in its people.

As we continue this journey together, **may we remain committed to uplifting one another, embracing new opportunities, and creating spaces where women can learn, lead, and flourish.** May the spirit of sisterhood strengthen our resolve to dream boldly, support generously, and pursue excellence with confidence, resilience, and purpose.

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Together, we have demonstrated that when women unite around a shared vision, the possibilities are truly limitless.

Dr. Harrieth G. Mtae
Chairperson,
Sisterhood on Safari

PREFACE

Some journeys begin with a destination; others begin with a conversation.
The story of this magazine belongs to the latter.

In 2025, a group of women academics from The Open University of Tanzania came together with a simple idea: to create opportunities to connect beyond lecture rooms, offices, and research engagements. This was triggered by a conversation among 3 female academicians who led this group. **Dr. Harrieth G. Mtae - Chairperson, Dr. Daphina L. Mabagala - Secretary, and Dr. Janeth N. Isanzu - Member.** The result was the inaugural **Sisterhood on Safari**-a memorable journey of 14 female academics through Tanzania's breathtaking landscapes, from **Lake Manyara** and the **Ngorongoro Conservation Area** to the **Serengeti National Park**.

What started as a local adventure soon became something much greater. During reflections following the safari, a new aspiration emerged, to take the spirit of **Sisterhood on Safari beyond national borders** and create an opportunity for international academic and cultural engagement. The enthusiasm was immediate and overwhelming. This time, with **Dr. Janeth Kigobe on board, strengthening the leadership team as the Safari Coordinator.**

That shared aspiration gave birth to the **Women in Academia European Academic and Cultural Exchange Visit 2026.**

This publication chronicles the experiences of nineteen women academics who traveled

across **Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France.** It captures not only the places visited and institutions engaged but also the stories behind the journey; the preparations, the conversations, the laughter, the lessons, and the meaningful connections that developed along the way.

Within these pages, readers will encounter personal reflections, photographs, travel narratives, and accounts of **academic and cultural experiences that demonstrate the transformative power of travel, international exposure, and human connection.** More importantly, this magazine illustrates how a simple idea, nurtured through collective commitment and shared purpose, can evolve into an experience that enriches both personal and professional lives.

As you turn these pages, we invite you to travel with us once again, from the wilderness of Tanzania to the historic cities of Europe; to experience a journey defined not only by geography but also by friendship, discovery, and the courage to dream beyond familiar horizons.

Editorial Team

Women in Academia European Academic and Cultural Exchange Visit 2026



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Women in Academia European Academic and Cultural Exchange Visit 2026 was made possible through the collective efforts, dedication, and goodwill of many individuals and institutions whose contributions transformed an ambitious vision into a memorable reality.

First and foremost, we express our sincere appreciation to the **nineteen women academics** who embraced this initiative with enthusiasm, courage, and commitment. From the earliest planning stages to the completion of the journey, your flexibility, cooperation, and positive spirit shaped every aspect of this experience, making it truly special.

As we reflect on this remarkable journey, we extend our sincere appreciation to the **Management of The Open University of Tanzania**, particularly the Office of the **Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Alex B. Makulilo**, for recognising the value of this initiative and supporting its successful implementation. Your encouragement and support affirmed the importance of investing in staff well-being, international exposure, academic networking, and personal development. This gesture not only enriched participants' experience but also

demonstrated the University's commitment to nurturing holistic growth among women in academia.

We also express our heartfelt gratitude to the **Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority (NCAA)** for its generous support during both the Tanzania and European Safaris. Through this valued partnership, participants proudly carried the spirit of Tanzania wherever they travelled. The beautifully designed safari fleeces, shirts, and other materials provided by the NCAA not only showcased our country's rich tourism heritage but also strengthened our identity as ambassadors of Tanzania, enabling us to share the beauty, culture, and pride of our nation on the global stage. We remain deeply appreciative of the NCAA's continued partnership in making the spirit of Sisterhood on Safari visible far beyond our borders.

We further acknowledge the **Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania in France** for the warm and gracious reception extended to us by His Excellency Ambassador Saidi Othman Yakubu and his team. We are equally grateful to the academic institutions and partners visited during the European Exchange Visit, including KU Leuven in Belgium, Bielefeld University in



Germany, and UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, for their warm welcome, meaningful academic engagement, and valuable platforms for dialogue on education, research collaboration and culture. Collectively, these engagements enriched our intellectual exchange, broadened our perspectives, and strengthened international networks for future collaboration.

Special appreciation is extended to **Dr Janeth E. Kigobe**, Coordinator of the European visit, whose dedication, meticulous planning, and tireless efforts in managing logistics, travel arrangements, communication, and institutional engagements were instrumental to the programme's success.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge our families, friends, colleagues, well-wishers, and all those in Tanzania and across Europe who contributed directly or indirectly to the

success of this initiative. Your encouragement, understanding, hospitality, and acts of kindness made it possible for us to undertake this journey with confidence and peace of mind. Every gesture of support, however small, became part of an experience that will remain meaningful and cherished for years to come.

May the friendships formed, the lessons learned, and the partnerships established through this experience continue to inspire future initiatives that promote learning, collaboration, and the empowerment of women in academia.

With sincere gratitude,

Sisterhood on Safari Leadership Team
Women in Academia European Academic and Cultural Exchange Visit 2026



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FROM SLEEPLESS NIGHTS TO LASTING MEMORIES: MY EUROPEAN SISTERHOOD JOURNEY

By Dr. Bahati D. Mbilinyi



Every memorable journey begins long before the departure date, and ours was no exception. It all started on a quiet early morning, when a dream that had lived in our conversations for months was finally becoming reality. The excitement of travelling to Europe was mixed with sleepless nights, endless preparations, and the anticipation of connecting, learning, and exploring. Alongside the excitement came uncertainty and **fear of the unknown**. Yet, despite our different personalities, expectations, and experiences, our leaders skilfully brought us together, turning the challenges and joys into one of the most memorable journeys of our lives.

Preparing for the trip proved to be an adventure in itself. Amid our demanding academic schedules, we found ourselves discussing exchange rates, safari attire, luggage limits, hotel choices, transport arrangements, visa applications, photographers, and travel dates. At times, it felt overwhelming, but **every challenge was met with careful planning and mutual**

support. As departure approached, time suddenly moved faster than expected, and I sacrificed my final two nights of sleep to finish packing and ensure that everything was in order.

The long-awaited day finally arrived. We gathered at Julius Nyerere International Airport, filled with excitement, anticipation, and nervous energy. It was the **moment when months of planning suddenly became real.** I arrived with two suitcases, which amused some of my fellow travellers. Ironically, despite carrying so much luggage, I had forgotten one of the things that mattered most to me: my Ngorongoro jacket. Realising my mistake, I urgently arranged for it to be brought from home by motorcycle. Until it arrived, I felt strangely incomplete. When I finally received it, relief replaced anxiety, and I knew I was truly ready for the journey ahead.

Travelling across Europe became an experience unlike any I had imagined. Every country revealed a different story. From a distance, Europe can appear remarkably similar, but travelling through Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France taught me just how diverse each nation truly is. Their **politics, cultures, traditions, climates, landscapes, and economies all possess unique identities.**

Belgium welcomed us with friendly people and refreshingly cool weather. Amsterdam captivated us with its beautiful canals and unforgettable cruise experience. France impressed me with its multicultural society, vibrant atmosphere, and fast-paced lifestyle, while Luxembourg surprised me with its cleanliness, tranquillity, and remarkable organisation. Germany, on the other hand, demonstrated the efficiency and flexibility of its transport systems, even when they occasionally challenged our travel plans.

The academic and diplomatic engagements added even greater value to the journey. Our visits to universities in Belgium and Germany **broadened my understanding of higher education, research, and international collaboration.** Equally memorable were our engagements at the **Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania** in France and **UNESCO Headquarters**, where discussions opened **new perspectives on diplomacy, education, and global partnerships.** These encounters also created opportunities to connect with fellow academics, exchange contacts, and build relationships for future research collaborations.

One aspect of the journey that fascinated me was watching our group naturally evolve over time. During the first few days, we moved almost everywhere together, sharing



every attraction and experience as one large team. As we became more comfortable with one another, our individual interests gradually emerged. Smaller groups naturally formed: those who loved shopping, those eager to explore every historical site, those fascinated by culture, and those who simply wanted to relax and enjoy the moment. Yet despite following different paths, we often arrived at the **same destinations** and captured photographs from similar angles. It was a **beautiful reminder that although we travelled differently, we remained united by the same shared experience.**

As our European adventure drew to a close, we gathered for our farewell dinner, elegantly dressed in our polka-dot attire. There was a quiet sadness in knowing that the journey was coming to an end, but it was accompanied by **gratitude and optimism.** Throughout the tour, I learned valuable lessons not only from our academic engagements but also from the remarkable women who travelled beside me. Their stories, achievements, discipline, and commitment to healthier, more purposeful lives deeply inspired me. I admired the **personal and professional growth reflected in each of them,** and I returned home determined to apply those lessons in my own life.

Looking back, this journey was about far more than travelling across Europe. It was about embracing new cultures, building lasting friendships, expanding academic horizons, and discovering new possibilities within myself. I returned with **unforgettable memories, meaningful professional connections, and a renewed determination to continue growing, not only as an academic but also as a person.** In many ways, the journey's greatest destination was the transformation it inspired within me.





WOMEN IN ACADEMIA: A EUROPEAN JOURNEY OF LEARNING, LEADERSHIP, AND SISTERHOOD

By Dr. Bilhuda S. Chamshama



What began as a dream became an unforgettable journey across Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France. Together with fellow women academics, I embarked on a unique learning adventure to explore how women in Europe advance in academia, attain leadership positions, and balance professional success with personal responsibilities.

Yet the journey began long before we boarded the plane. Long evenings spent coordinating travel logistics with Dr. Janeth reminded me that **every successful expedition starts with careful planning, teamwork, and commitment.** As departure day approached, excitement grew, along with anticipation of discovering new places, meeting inspiring people, and creating lifelong memories.

From the beauty of Brussels and the iconic Atomium to the vibrant cities of Amsterdam, Luxembourg, Paris, and The

Hague, every destination offered a fresh perspective. **Germany impressed us with its technological advancement and academic excellence, while Luxembourg amazed us with its remarkable development despite its small size.**

Not every moment was easy. A train cancellation between Germany and Brussels forced us to spend an unexpected night at a hotel near the station. Later, while travelling from Luxembourg to Paris, delays during ticket verification left a large group of us behind as the train departed without us. There were moments of rushing through crowded stations, carrying heavy luggage up and down staircases, and **working together to find solutions.** At the time, these experiences felt exhausting. Looking back, however, they became some of the most valuable lessons of the journey. **They taught us resilience, patience, teamwork, and the importance of remaining calm when plans suddenly change.**

Paris became one of the highlights of the trip. The warm welcome we received at the **Tanzania Embassy** made us feel at home, even though we were thousands of kilometres away. Our visit to **UNESCO Headquarters** exposed us to global efforts in education, science, culture, and sustainable development, while our time in The Hague deepened our appreciation of international law and global governance.

At the heart of the journey was academic engagement. Visits to **KU Leuven University** in Belgium and **Bielefeld University** in Germany provided opportunities to **interact with inspiring women professors and scholars who shared their experiences in leadership, research, and academic advancement.** Their stories reinforced a simple but powerful lesson: **determination, excellence, and perseverance create opportunities and open doors.**

Beyond the academic lessons, however, the friendships we built became the greatest treasure of all.

One of the most memorable aspects of the safari was the **Secreto activity**, which brought excitement, laughter, and anticipation throughout the trip. I was delighted to discover that Dr. Victoria Lihiru, our energetic gym trainer, was my Secreto. We bonded through our shared interests in photography, design, exercise, and active living. Her thoughtful gift and heartfelt letter touched me deeply. And yes, I will never forget our gym session together, accompanied by her famous expression, "Squirting aaah!" a phrase that still makes me smile whenever I remember it. Secreto, jua nakupenda sana.

I was equally honoured to be the Secreto of Dr. Hellen Kiunsi, a mentor, leader, and mother figure whose wisdom and guidance continue to inspire many. Seeing her joy during the reveal reminded me of the power of appreciation, kindness, and meaningful connections.

Sharing a room with Dr. Mbiki was another blessing. Through countless conversations, laughter, and daily adventures, our friendship grew stronger with each passing day. Her caring nature and the way she would always ask, "**Mate uko vizuri?**" left a permanent **footprint on my heart. Nakupenda sana Mate wangu.**

The gym sessions shared with Dr. Mbiki and Dr. Victoria Lihiru became some of the most enjoyable moments of the journey. **Imagine exercising at the Radisson Blu Hotel** in Amsterdam while watching airplanes land and take off in the distance, what an experience! As Dr. Lihiru would enthusiastically remind us, "**What an experience!**" Those early morning sessions were filled with energy, laughter, and

motivation. Whenever the exercises became particularly challenging, and our muscles began to complain, we would jokingly tell our trainer, “MUNGU anakuona!” The phrase quickly became part of our daily humour and a source of encouragement during every workout. Looking back, those gym sessions were about far more than fitness. They reflected friendship, joy, sisterhood, and the spirit that defined our entire European journey.

The countless train rides, busy stations, and heavy luggage shared alongside Dr. Kigobe, Zakia Ituja, Dr. Prisca Mbezi, Dr. Winfrida Malingumu, Dr. Hella, Dr. Juliana Kamaghe, and many others reminded me that no challenge is too great when faced together. I also cherish the moments shared with Dr. Bahati Mbilinyi and Dr. Ruth John, especially during our visit to the Tanzania Embassy in Paris, where conversations, laughter, and discussions about future plans strengthened friendships that I will always value.

As a passionate photographer, I spent much of the journey capturing memories. My fellow photography enthusiasts; Dr. Daphina, Dr. Ruth, Dr. Victoria, Dr. Isanzu, Dr. Mtae, Dr. Doreen, Zakia Ituja, and my

Mama, Dr. Shavega, would often call out, “Billy, nipige picha hapa!” Those simple requests became part of the joy we shared throughout the trip and helped preserve memories that will last a lifetime.

Most importantly, this experience connected us with inspiring women leaders, expanded our professional networks, and created friendships that will endure far beyond this journey. I remain deeply grateful to the leadership of the Open University of Tanzania, particularly our Vice Chancellor, for making this opportunity possible. I also extend my sincere appreciation to all the leaders and coordinators for their dedication, which ensured the success of the safari.

What began as a study visit evolved into a life-changing journey of learning, resilience, friendship, and sisterhood. While the trip eventually came to an end, the memories, lessons, and relationships it created will remain close to my heart for years to come.

To my sisters in this journey, thank you.
Love you all.





MORE THAN A JOURNEY: FINDING SISTERHOOD IN EUROPE

By Dr. Catherine G. Mkude



When I joined the Women in Academia European Academic and Cultural Exchange Visit 2026, I anticipated an opportunity for academic networking, cultural exposure, and professional growth. What I did not fully anticipate was the profound sense of sisterhood, friendship, and personal connection that would emerge throughout the journey.

Organized by the academic women of the Open University of Tanzania, the exchange brought together women from different disciplines, career stages, and leadership positions. While the itinerary would eventually take the group through several European countries, my experience focused primarily on the group's first destinations: Brussels, Belgium, and Amsterdam, the Netherlands, where the foundations of our journey and our sisterhood were laid.

Our adventure began with our arrival in

Brussels after a long journey from Tanzania. The excitement was evident from the moment we gathered at the hotel. Despite the exhaustion of travel and the months of preparation that had preceded the trip, there was **an unmistakable energy** among the group. Women from diverse academic backgrounds and faculties quickly connected through conversation, curiosity, and a shared enthusiasm for the experience ahead.

As we explored Brussels, visiting iconic landmarks such as the Grand Place, the European Quarter, and the Atomium, we gained valuable insights into European culture, architecture, and urban development. Yet, **beyond the impressive landmarks and historical sites, it was the interactions among the women that left the greatest impression on me.**

During meals, walks, and informal discussions, we shared stories about our academic journeys, leadership responsibilities, research interests, and career aspirations. **What began as professional conversations soon evolved into something much deeper.** We spoke openly about family life, motherhood, balancing personal and professional responsibilities, relationships, and the realities of navigating academic careers as women.

One of the most **remarkable aspects of the journey was the honesty** with which these experiences were shared. Despite our differences in discipline, experience, and background, we discovered common challenges and aspirations. Through these conversations, we **developed a deeper understanding of one another and built a strong sense of empathy, trust, and solidarity.**

By the time we arrived in Amsterdam, the atmosphere of sisterhood had grown

even stronger. The city's beautiful canals, vibrant streets, and relaxed environment provided the perfect backdrop for deeper conversations and stronger friendships. Every shared meal, city tour, and evening gathering became an opportunity to learn more about one another.

And, of course, there was the unforgettable experience of Amsterdam's famous Red Light District, a destination that sparked curiosity, lively discussions, and plenty of laughter among the group. It became yet another reminder of how travel exposes us to different cultures, perspectives, and ways of life.

One of the highlights of the visit was the **sisterhood gift-exchange activity.** Through a secret selection process, participants surprised one another with thoughtful gifts and heartfelt messages. The activity created moments of **joy, excitement, and genuine appreciation.** Beyond the gifts themselves, it demonstrated how quickly meaningful relationships had formed among women who, only days earlier, had known each other primarily as colleagues.

Throughout the journey, there were countless moments of laughter, storytelling, and honest conversation. Some women shared experiences and life lessons they had never previously discussed with colleagues. These **moments of vulnerability strengthened our connections and created a safe and supportive environment where everyone felt valued, respected, and heard.**

The experience reminded me that while academic collaboration and institutional networking are important, the **personal relationships we build are equally valuable.** Mentorship, friendship, and peer support play a critical role in both **professional success and personal well-being.** The exchange demonstrated the importance of

creating spaces where women academics can connect beyond formal meetings, conferences, and professional obligations.

The journey also highlighted the **strength that comes from diversity**. Although participants represented different disciplines, leadership roles, and career stages, we discovered that **our shared experiences often outweighed our differences**. Together, we reflected on how women can continue supporting one another in advancing academic excellence, leadership, research, and personal growth.

Traveling through new environments also encouraged personal reflection. Observing different cultures, interacting with fellow travelers, and experiencing unfamiliar settings broadened my perspective and reinforced the value of international exposure in both academic and personal development.

As the days passed, I became increasingly attached to the group and the positive atmosphere we had created together. It was therefore with mixed emotions that I had to leave the exchange before its conclusion in order to travel to the People's Republic of China on official duties. While I was grateful for the professional opportunity that awaited me, I was saddened to leave behind a journey that had become so meaningful.

Each day seemed to bring new lessons, deeper friendships, and memorable experiences.

Although my departure came earlier than planned, I left carrying far more than souvenirs and photographs. I carried unforgettable memories, valuable friendships, meaningful conversations, and a renewed appreciation for the power of sisterhood.

The **Women in Academia European Academic and Cultural Exchange Visit 2026** was far more than a study tour. It was a **journey of learning, connection, reflection, and empowerment**. It strengthened professional networks, fostered lasting friendships, and reminded us that when women support one another, remarkable things happen.

I remain deeply grateful to the management of the **Open University of Tanzania**, particularly our **Vice Chancellor, Prof. Alex Makulilo**, for supporting this initiative and for championing opportunities that **empower women in academia**. As I reflect on this experience, I do so with gratitude, renewed motivation, and the conviction that the friendships and lessons gained during this journey will continue to inspire me for many years to come.





FROM SERENGETI TO EUROPE: A JOURNEY OF SISTERHOOD, LEARNING, AND DISCOVERY

By Dr. Daphina L. Mabagala



Some journeys begin with a destination. Ours began with friendship.

In 2025, a group of women academics from the Open University of Tanzania travelled together to Serengeti and Ngorongoro for a social adventure and learning experience. Amid breathtaking landscapes, shared meals, laughter, and meaningful conversations, we began imagining a bigger journey; one that would take us beyond Africa in pursuit of academic networking, cultural exchange, and international collaboration.

At the time, it was simply a dream.

In May 2026, that dream became a reality through the Women in Academia European Academic and Cultural Exchange Visit. Together, we embarked on a remarkable journey across Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France, proudly representing our university and our country while learning from new cultures, institutions, and experiences.

Belgium welcomed us with **warmth and hospitality**. One of the highlights of our visit was KU Leuven, where engaging discussions on women in academia, research collaboration, and academic leadership broadened our perspectives and strengthened international networks. The experience reinforced the **importance of creating partnerships that transcend geographical boundaries and advance knowledge**.

The Netherlands offered **unforgettable cultural experiences**. Cruising through Amsterdam's famous canals provided a unique perspective on a city renowned for its history, innovation, and urban planning. As we explored its streets and waterways, we gained valuable insights into cultural diversity, sustainability, and how cities can successfully balance heritage with modern development.

Visiting The Hague was particularly meaningful for me. It was **a destination I had long hoped to see**, and standing in a city known globally for international justice and diplomacy was both inspiring and humbling.

Germany brought together academic engagement and unexpected adventure. At Bielefeld University, we participated in stimulating academic discussions and experienced exceptional hospitality from our hosts. Cologne offered a different kind of inspiration. As a Catholic, visiting the magnificent Cologne Cathedral was a deeply moving experience. Standing within its historic walls and taking time for prayer allowed me to **connect with centuries of faith, history, and tradition**. It remains one of my most treasured memories of the journey.

Germany also provided one of our greatest travel lessons. Following our activities in Bielefeld, we missed a train connection

by only a few minutes. What followed was a long and challenging night involving missed connections, unexpected delays, and a search for alternative routes. Yet even in those difficult moments, the **strength of teamwork prevailed**. Through determination, cooperation, and the kindness of a bus driver who helped us reach another station, we eventually arrived in Belgium in time for our scheduled activities. The experience reminded us that **resilience is often one of the most valuable souvenirs we bring home from any journey**.

Luxembourg was another highlight. Its **beauty, cleanliness, and efficiency left a lasting impression**. Travelling through the country on its comfortable, free public transport system, while enjoying the picturesque scenery, made the experience even more memorable. Luxembourg had always been one of my dream destinations, and it exceeded every expectation.

Our final destination was France. In Paris, we visited the **Embassy of Tanzania**, where we engaged in meaningful discussions on the **role of women academics and opportunities for international collaboration**. We also visited **UNESCO Headquarters** and participated in **conversations on teacher development, higher education, gender, and inclusion**. These engagements reflected the **true purpose** of our journey: **learning, networking, and representing Tanzanian scholarship on the international stage**.

Of course, no visit to Paris would have been complete without seeing the Eiffel Tower. Standing before one of the world's most iconic landmarks was both exciting and inspiring. Adding to the experience was the festive atmosphere that filled the city following Paris Saint-Germain's victory over Arsenal. The celebrations transformed Paris into a vibrant sea of excitement, **energy, and joy, creating memories that will remain**

with us for years to come.

As I reflect on this journey, I realise that it was about much more than travelling across Europe. It was about **friendship, learning, resilience, and the power of women supporting one another**. It demonstrated how shared aspirations can grow into extraordinary opportunities and how meaningful relationships can open doors to new experiences and perspectives.

Most importantly, it showed how a simple conversation during a trip to Serengeti and Ngorongoro could evolve into an **international experience that expanded our horizons, strengthened our networks, and deepened our commitment to academic excellence**.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the Open University of Tanzania, particularly the Office of the Vice Chancellor, for supporting this initiative, and to our hosts across Europe for their warm hospitality and valuable engagements throughout the journey.

**Some dreams begin as conversations.
Ours became a journey.**





ACROSS BORDERS, BEYOND CLASSROOMS

By **Dr. Doreen F. Mwamlangala**



Between 21 May and 1 June 2026, a group of women lecturers from the Open University of Tanzania embarked on an enriching academic and cultural tour across Europe. The primary objective of the programme was to engage with women professors in leading European institutions of higher learning, learn from their academic experiences, leadership journeys, research, and professional achievements, and strengthen opportunities for international collaboration. At the same time, the tour provided participants with valuable exposure to diverse cultures, educational systems, and historic cities, while offering opportunities for networking, reflection, and personal growth.

The journey took the group through five European countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France; combining academic engagements with cultural experiences, institutional visits, sightseeing, and informal interactions that broadened participants' perspectives

on higher education and international cooperation.

Our journey began with a trip from Tanzania to Brussels via Istanbul. Upon arrival, we checked into the Thon Hotel before preparing for the activities ahead. The following day, we explored Brussels on a guided city tour, visiting its most iconic landmarks, including the Atomium, Grand Place, Mini-Europe, and the European Union Headquarters. The tour provided **valuable insights into European history, architecture, governance, and the important role Brussels plays as the administrative centre of the European Union.**

From Belgium, we travelled by train to Amsterdam in the Netherlands. There, we explored the city's vibrant streets through guided walks, canal-side visits, shopping excursions, and a visit to the Rijksmuseum. A scenic canal cruise offered a unique perspective of Amsterdam's historic architecture and waterways while deepening our **appreciation of Dutch culture, history, and urban planning.**

Our next destination was Cologne, Germany, where we visited the magnificent Cologne Cathedral (Kölner Dom), one of Europe's finest examples of Gothic architecture and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Walking through the historic city centre allowed us to appreciate Cologne's rich cultural heritage before proceeding to one of the tour's most significant academic engagements.

At Bielefeld University, we met researchers from the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (IKG). The discussions **focused on research collaboration, interdisciplinary scholarship, and opportunities for academic partnership.** The exchange of ideas provided valuable insights into research culture, institutional collaboration, and universities'

contributions to addressing contemporary social challenges.

Our journey then reminded us that travel does not always follow the itinerary. While travelling from Germany to Belgium, we missed a connecting train, and the subsequent service was cancelled, so we had to spend the night in a hostel near the railway station. The following morning brought another unexpected challenge when our train from Aachen to Leuven was cancelled. After exploring alternative options, we found a replacement bus that allowed us to continue our journey and arrive at KU Leuven in time for our scheduled meeting. Although stressful at the time, these **experiences strengthened our resilience, adaptability, and teamwork.**

At KU Leuven, we held a productive and enlightening meeting with women professors who **shared their experiences in academic leadership, research, mentorship, and gender equality in higher education.** The discussions broadened our understanding of international academic practice while encouraging reflection on opportunities to strengthen women's participation and leadership within our own institutions. Before departing, we also explored the university library precinct and Leuven's historic town centre, adding another memorable cultural experience to the visit.

Later that day, we travelled to Luxembourg, where the pace of the journey slowed, allowing us to appreciate the city's rich history, beautiful public spaces, cafés, and unique blend of tradition and modernity. Exploring Luxembourg offered **an opportunity to reflect on the experiences gathered during the academic programme while enjoying another dimension of European culture.**

Our final destination was Paris, France.

During the journey, some members of the group missed a connecting train at Metz-Ville but later that day rejoined the rest of the team safely. Upon arrival, we proceeded directly to the Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania, where we received a warm welcome and enjoyed a productive discussion over a home-style lunch generously prepared by the Embassy staff. The hospitality reminded us that even thousands of kilometres from home, the warmth of Tanzanian hospitality remains unmistakable.

Later that afternoon, we visited UNESCO Headquarters, where discussions with UNESCO officials deepened our understanding of international cooperation in education, science, culture, and sustainable development. The visit reinforced the importance of global partnerships in advancing higher education and expanding research and innovation opportunities.

Beyond the academic engagements, Paris offered unforgettable cultural experiences. Visits to the Eiffel Tower, a scenic cruise along the River Seine, shopping, sightseeing, and photography sessions allowed us to experience the beauty, history, and vibrant atmosphere of one of the world's most celebrated cities.

The tour concluded with our return to Brussels, where we shared a farewell dinner and reflected on the lessons learned, friendships formed, and experiences that had shaped our journey. The following day, we departed for Tanzania and arrived safely in Dar es Salaam. Although one piece of luggage was delayed, it was delivered a few days later, a small reminder that every memorable journey comes with unexpected stories.

Looking back, the Women in Academia European Tour successfully achieved

its intended objectives. The academic engagements at Bielefeld University and KU Leuven enriched our understanding of research, leadership, mentorship, and international collaboration while creating opportunities for future professional partnerships. Visits to UNESCO Headquarters and the Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania further strengthened our appreciation of global academic cooperation and diplomacy.

More importantly, the journey demonstrated that learning extends far beyond classrooms and conference rooms. Every city visited, every conversation shared, every challenge overcome, and every new perspective gained contributed to our professional growth and personal development. The tour reminded us that international exposure broadens not only academic horizons but also our appreciation of different cultures, strengthens our resilience, and reinforces the value of collaboration. We returned home with renewed motivation, stronger professional networks, lasting friendships, and memories that will continue to inspire our academic journeys for years to come.





THE DAY THE TRAIN LEFT: MISADVENTURES AND MEMORIES ON THE TRACKS TO LEUVEN

By Dr. Harieth M. Hellar



Our ten-day study tour to Europe in May 2026 as Women in Academia from the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) was an unforgettable blend of professional growth, cultural discovery, and pure adventure. For weeks, if not months, we had meticulously planned every detail to ensure seamless coordination for our nineteen-member delegation. Our schedule was packed with train journeys across multiple countries, academic engagements, and visits to cultural landmarks.

To manage this logistical puzzle, we introduced a daily leadership system. Each day, one member served as the “Group Leader,” responsible for ensuring that the entire delegation stayed on schedule. I was assigned to lead on Tuesday, 26 May 2026; a day that would test my leadership, split our group in two, and ultimately leave us with one of the most unforgettable stories of the entire trip.

The day began flawlessly.

We were scheduled for an official engagement at Bielefeld University in Germany at 10:00 a.m. Determined to start strong, I woke up extra early, becoming a human alarm clock to ensure that nineteen women were ready, organised, and moving on time. We boarded our morning train from Cologne and arrived in Bielefeld with time to spare.

Dressed proudly in our vibrant Kitenge attire, we represented our university with **confidence and elegance**. As the designated presenter for the day, I delivered our group's PowerPoint presentation to our German hosts. The discussions that followed with fellow women academics were **engaging, insightful, and collaborative**. By late afternoon, we were energised and pleased with how smoothly everything had gone.

Our next destination was Leuven, Belgium, where we were scheduled to visit KU Leuven the following morning. The journey required four train connections across

international borders. We boarded our first train at approximately 6:30 p.m., expecting to arrive at the Holiday Inn in Leuven around midnight. Although it would be a late arrival, we anticipated having enough time to rest before our 10:00 a.m. engagement the next day.

Then reality intervened.

At one of the transit stations, a train delay reduced our transfer window to only a few minutes. Navigating a busy railway station with nineteen travellers and numerous pieces of luggage was no easy task. As we hurried up staircases and across platforms in search of our next train, every second mattered.

Then came the moment none of us will ever forget.

As the train doors began to close, **the group was split in an instant**. Half of us managed to board, while the others remained stranded on the platform. Before anyone could react, the train pulled away, separating our



delegation into two groups.

I happened to be among those who made it onto the train.

As the Group Leader, **my heart sank**. I felt responsible, frustrated, and deeply worried about our colleagues left behind. The mood among those on board quickly shifted from **relief to concern**. At the next station, we immediately disembarked and waited for the rest of the group to catch up. Reuniting took nearly two hours, and by then our carefully planned chain of train connections had completely unravelled.

By midnight, instead of resting comfortably in Belgium, we found ourselves **stranded on a dimly lit platform** somewhere in western Germany with no remaining trains to Leuven.

Determined not to spend the night on a station bench, we boarded the only train still operating, a local service heading to Aachen. Exhausted and disappointed, we arrived well after midnight and managed to secure a few hours of rest in a modest hostel near the railway tracks.

At that moment, it felt like the day had ended in failure.

But travel has a way of turning setbacks into stories.

As dawn broke over Aachen, my frustration gradually gave way to something entirely different. Fourteen years earlier, in 2011, while pursuing my PhD at the University of Antwerp in Belgium, I had attended a specialised short course at Aachen University. Stepping into the city once again brought back a **flood of memories** from an earlier chapter of my academic journey: youthful ambition, international friendships, and the excitement of discovering new worlds through education.

Suddenly, our **unexpected detour** felt less like a misfortune and more like an **unexpected gift**.

What had seemed like a **leadership failure the night before became an opportunity for reflection**. Aachen reminded me of how far I had travelled, not only geographically, but also professionally and personally. It connected my past and present in a way I could never have planned.

As we gathered our luggage that morning and prepared to continue our journey to Belgium, our spirits had changed. We were tired, certainly, but we were also laughing again. The previous night's frustrations had already begun transforming into the kind of story that would be told and retold long after the trip had ended.

In the end, the day the train left us behind taught me an important lesson: **even the most carefully planned journeys can be disrupted, but sometimes the unexpected detours become the most meaningful parts of the adventure**. The missed train may have delayed our arrival in Leuven, but it gave us something far more valuable: a **reminder that resilience, friendship, and reflection often emerge when things do not go according to plan**.



SISTERHOOD ON SAFARI: A JOURNEY BEYOND BORDERS

By Dr. Harrieth G. Mtae



As I reflect on the Women in Academia European Academic and Cultural Exchange Visit 2026, I am reminded that some of life's most meaningful journeys begin with a simple conversation. What started as an idea among a few women academics, to connect beyond our offices, lecture rooms, and research environments, grew into an unforgettable adventure that took us from Tanzania to Europe.

When we first discussed taking Sisterhood on Safari beyond our national borders, the idea seemed ambitious. Yet through collective determination and careful planning, what was once a dream became a reality. Looking back, seeing nineteen women academics travelling together across Europe remains one of the most fulfilling experiences of my journey as Chairperson of Sisterhood on Safari.

Our adventure began in Belgium, where the Grand Place and Brussels' historic architecture reminded us of the richness of history and the importance of preserving

cultural heritage. As we walked through the city's streets, our excitement was unmistakable. Our engagement with fellow academics at KU Leuven further reminded us that education knows no borders. In those moments, we became companions on a shared journey of learning, discovery, and growth.

In the Netherlands, the picturesque canals of Amsterdam, charming streets, and relaxed atmosphere created space for deeper conversations and stronger connections. We shared meals, exchanged stories, laughed freely, and discovered more about one another beyond our professional identities. It was in these simple yet meaningful moments that friendships deepened, and the spirit of sisterhood flourished.

Germany offered yet another dimension to our experience. Our engagement with scholars at Bielefeld University strengthened academic connections and opened the door to future collaboration. The interactions inspired new ideas, encouraged reflection, and reinforced the value of international

partnerships and lifelong learning. As our journey continued through Luxembourg and France, each destination offered its own lessons and moments of wonder. Luxembourg impressed us with its beauty, efficiency, and blend of tradition and modernity. In France, we received a warm welcome at the Embassy of Tanzania, where Ambassador H.E. Saidi Othman Yakubu and his team made us feel at home. We are deeply grateful for their hospitality and support.

A visit to UNESCO Headquarters was equally enriching. As a global hub for international cooperation in education, science, culture, and communication, UNESCO provided valuable insights into the role of knowledge and collaboration in addressing global challenges. The experience reinforced our commitment to advancing education, research, and inclusive development.

Beyond the formal engagements, every day presented opportunities to learn, adapt, and appreciate unfamiliar environments. From navigating train stations and travelling across borders to overcoming unexpected challenges, each experience strengthened



our resilience and reminded us of the importance of supporting one another. Even the occasional setback became part of the adventure and another reason to celebrate the strength of our sisterhood.

Yet if I were asked what I would remember most about this journey, my answer would not be a particular city, monument, or photograph. I will remember the people. I will remember the conversations that extended beyond academic discussions to include our families, aspirations, challenges, and life experiences. I will remember the laughter that filled our journeys, the helping hands whenever someone needed assistance, and the genuine care that characterized our interactions.

This experience reminded me that women in academia often carry many responsibilities. We dedicate ourselves to serving our institutions, supporting our families, mentoring students, conducting research, and contributing to our communities. In doing so, we sometimes overlook the importance of investing in ourselves. This journey reaffirmed that taking time to travel,

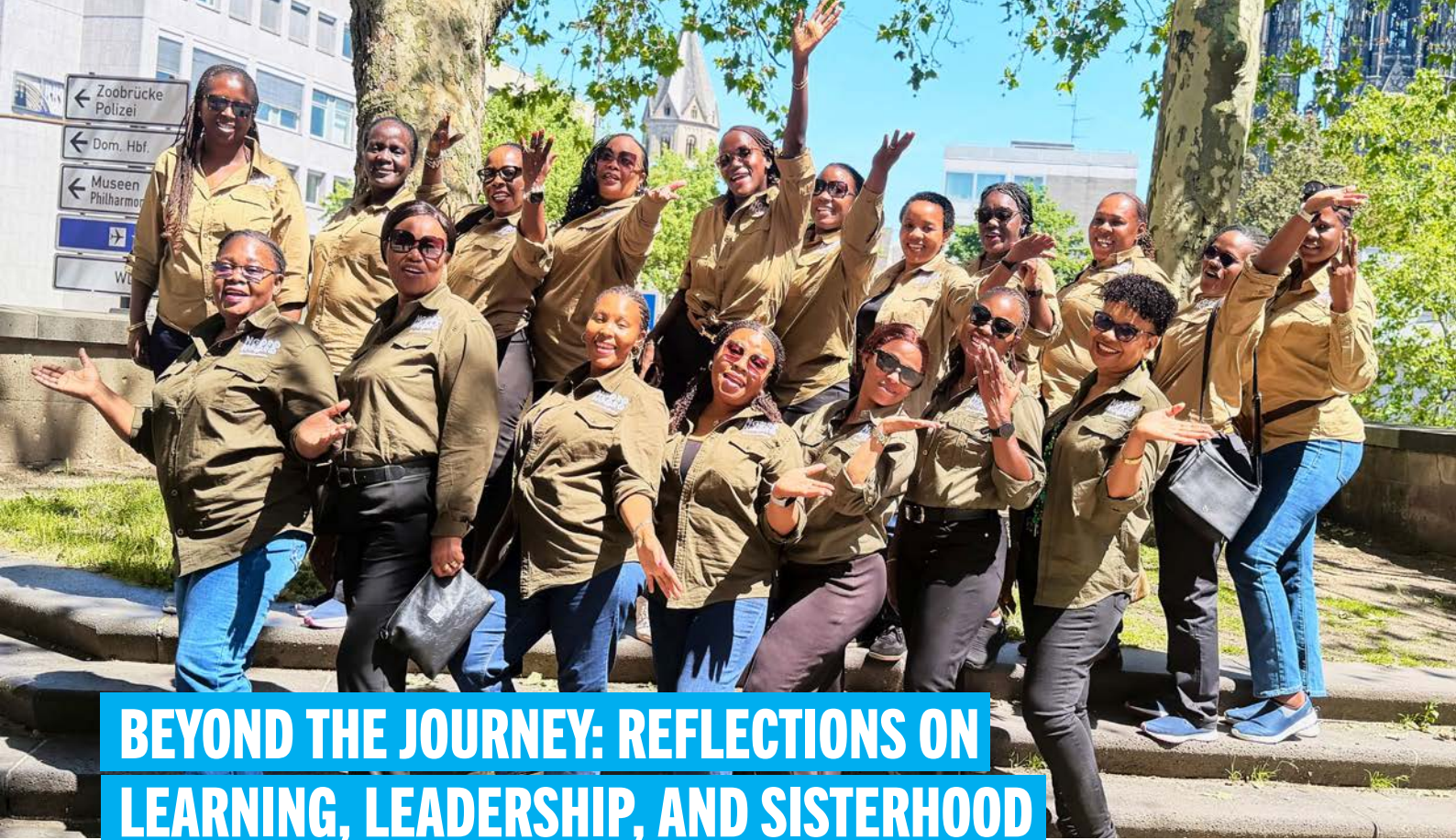
learn, reflect, and connect with others is an investment in our well-being, personal growth, and capacity to serve with renewed purpose.

As I look back on this remarkable adventure, one thing is certain: Sisterhood on Safari has become much more than a travel initiative. It is a platform for friendship, learning, wellness, empowerment, leadership, and professional growth. The European journey demonstrated that when women unite around a shared purpose, distances shrink, possibilities expand, and sisterhood becomes stronger.

The memories we created across Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France will remain with us for years to come, not merely as memories of places visited but as reminders of what can happen when women dare to dream together and turn those dreams into reality.

Until the next safari, may the sisterhood continue to march on with courage, purpose, and the shared spirit that carried us across borders.





BEYOND THE JOURNEY: REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING, LEADERSHIP, AND SISTERHOOD

By **Dr. Helen B. Kiunsi**



Participating in the Women in Academia European Academic Benchmarking Tour was a rewarding and inspiring experience. The opportunity to visit Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France provided much more than international exposure; it offered valuable academic insights, strengthened professional networks, and reinforced the importance of collaboration among women in higher education.

The tour was designed to expose women academics from the Open University of Tanzania to international best practices while encouraging them to pursue senior academic positions, including professorships and leadership roles within universities. Through academic engagement, research collaboration, and professional networking, the programme demonstrated how women can strengthen their academic careers while contributing meaningfully to institutional growth.

Among the highlights of the journey were our visits to KU Leuven, Bielefeld University, the **Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania** in France, and **UNESCO Headquarters**. The discussions at these institutions focused on **academic leadership, research development, funding opportunities, publications, mentorship, and strategies to support women in academia**. Beyond the knowledge we gained, the tour created opportunities for **collaboration between the Open University of Tanzania and our host institutions while opening doors for individual researchers to establish international academic partnerships**. The experience reminded me that creating opportunities is only the first step; it is our responsibility to build on them through research, collaboration, and continuous professional development.

Beyond the academic programme, the journey was personally enriching. As it was my first visit to Europe, **every destination offered something new to learn and appreciate**. Among all the countries we visited, Luxembourg left the greatest impression on me. Its beautiful surroundings, welcoming atmosphere, efficient public transport system, and the convenience of free Wi-Fi on public transport reflect a society that values accessibility and high-quality public services. Equally memorable was the ease of travelling by train across several countries with minimal border formalities. Experiencing such **seamless regional connectivity broadened my understanding of how infrastructure can facilitate mobility, integration, and economic cooperation**.

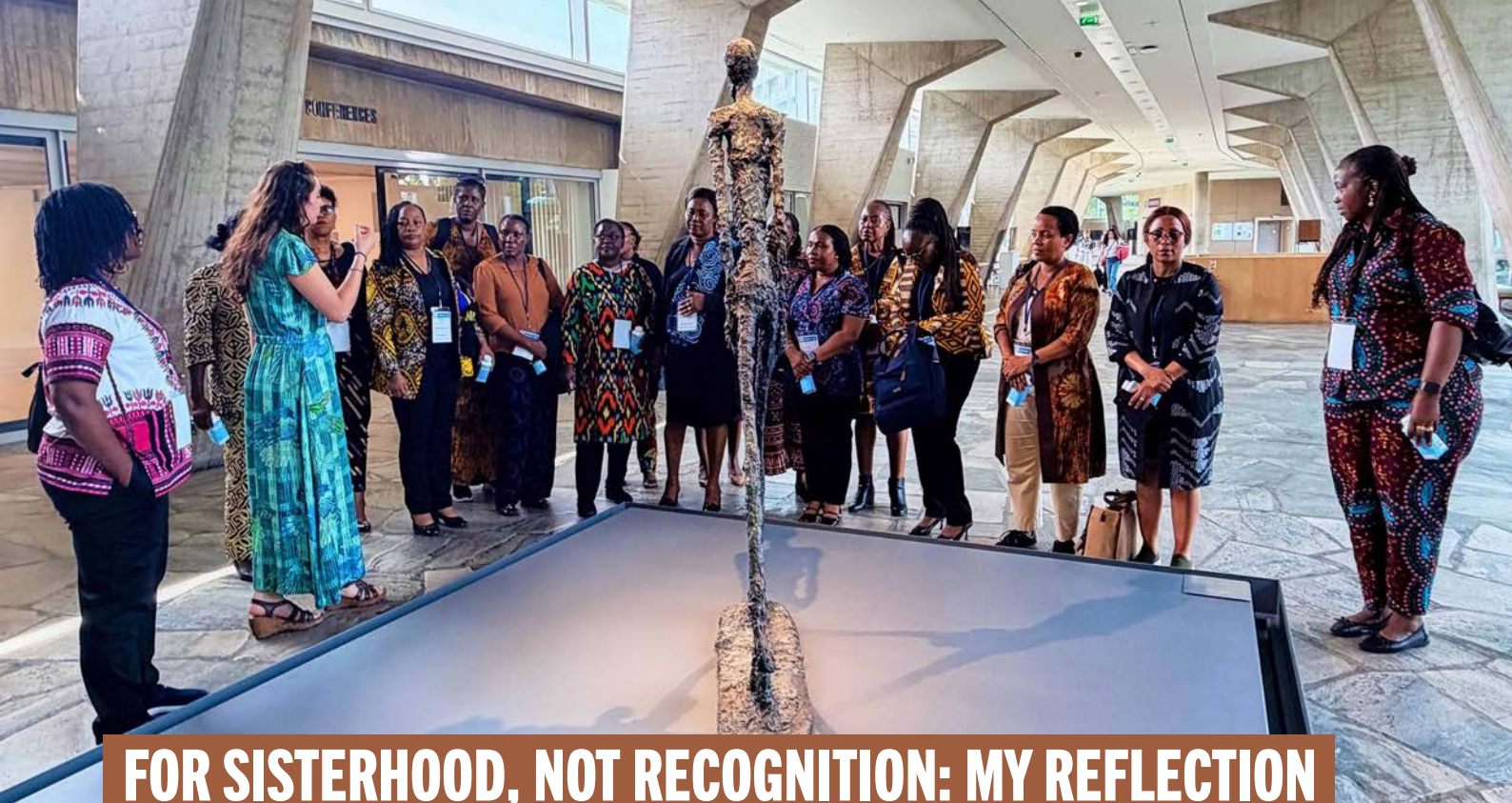
Perhaps the **greatest treasure of the journey was the spirit of sisterhood that developed among us**. Throughout the tour, we supported one another in countless ways, helping with luggage during challenging train transfers, sharing meals after long

days, participating in Secret Sister activities, and enjoying shopping adventures in cities across Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. These **simple acts of kindness transformed a professional tour into a genuine community of friendship, care, and mutual encouragement**.

I remain especially grateful to my Secret Sisters, Dr Bilhuda and Dr Doreen, whose thoughtful gestures made the experience even more meaningful. I also sincerely thank my roommate, Dr Harriet Hellar Kihampa, for her wonderful companionship throughout the journey, and my younger sister, Dr Mbiki, whose constant encouragement and reassuring words, **"Senior, uko vizuri! Tupo pamoja!"** always lifted my spirits. Those moments reflected the genuine relationships that flourished during our time together.

My sincere appreciation also goes to Dr Janeth Kigobe, whose exceptional coordination made this ambitious journey possible. From securing invitation letters and coordinating travel arrangements to providing practical guidance throughout the planning process, her dedication ensured the programme ran smoothly. I am equally grateful to our leaders, Dr Harrieth G. Mtae, Dr Daphina Libent Mabagala, and Dr Janeth Isanzu, for their commitment, leadership, and tireless efforts in making this vision a reality.

As I reflect on this remarkable experience, I return home with **renewed academic motivation, stronger professional networks, lasting friendships, and a deeper appreciation of the value of women supporting women**. This journey demonstrated that international academic exposure extends beyond institutional visits and conferences; **it creates opportunities for personal growth, lifelong collaboration, and shared purpose**.



FOR SISTERHOOD, NOT RECOGNITION: MY REFLECTION ON THE OUT WOMEN IN EUROPE ACADEMIC JOURNEY

By Dr. Janeth E. Kigobe



I dedicate this reflection to Prof. Karla Van Leeuwen; my PhD supervisor, mentor, research partner, and sister in academia, whose belief in me continues to inspire my commitment to opening doors for other women.

When people see the photographs from our European academic journey, they see beautiful cities, official meetings, universities, UNESCO Headquarters, train stations, hotels, and smiling women dressed in coordinated outfits. What they may not see is the story behind those photographs: **planning, sacrifice, uncertainty, faith, determination, and love.** For me, this journey was never simply about travel. It was about sisterhood.

The idea grew from a simple but powerful belief: **women academics deserve spaces where they can be seen, inspired, connected, and reminded that their dreams are valid.** Many women in academia carry immense responsibilities. We teach, supervise students, publish research,

manage offices, raise families, support communities, and still strive to build our own academic identities. In the process, **we sometimes forget to create spaces for ourselves and for one another.** This journey was my way of saying: let us create that space.

The planning was far from easy. It began with reaching out, explaining the vision, and securing academic invitations. I remember the effort involved in communicating with Prof. Karla Van Leeuwen and other partners, shaping the idea so that it would be recognised not as a leisure trip, but as a serious academic benchmarking and exposure programme. From there, the work expanded to include coordinating flights, hotels, internal European train connections, institutional schedules, official letters, meeting arrangements, transport logistics, group communication, and countless document revisions. There were days when the logistics felt overwhelming. We had to think about visas, routes, luggage, meals, timing, hotel locations, train transfers, institutional protocols, and, above all, the safety and comfort of every participant.

At times, I carried the weight quietly. I knew that if one important detail failed, the entire journey could be judged harshly. I also knew that many women were placing their trust in the process; some were travelling to Europe for the first time, others seeking academic renewal, networking opportunities, visibility,

inspiration, and professional growth. That trust motivated me and reminded me that **leadership is not always about standing in front.** Sometimes leadership means **working behind the scenes, staying awake while others sleep, checking details that no one will ever notice, solving problems before they become visible, and carrying pressure so that others can experience peace of mind.**

When we finally arrived in Europe, I saw the true meaning of the work. I watched women academics from the **Open University of Tanzania** walk confidently into universities, embassies, and international organisations. I saw them engage in discussions, ask thoughtful questions, share experiences, build networks, and imagine new possibilities for themselves and for the University. At Bielefeld University, KU Leuven, the **Embassy of Tanzania** in France, and **UNESCO Headquarters**, I witnessed something far greater than official engagements. I saw **doors opening in women's minds. I saw confidence growing. I saw exposure transforming perspectives and expanding horizons.**

What touched me most, however, was not only the formal meetings. It was the quiet moments between them. **Women helping one another** with luggage, checking whether everyone had eaten, waiting patiently for colleagues at train stations, offering encouragement after long days of



travel, and still showing up professionally and elegantly for every official engagement. Those moments reminded me that **sisterhood is action. It is patience. It is care. It is choosing not to leave anyone behind.**

People sometimes ask what I expected to gain from coordinating such a demanding initiative. My answer is simple: **nothing. I did not do it for payment, recognition, or personal reward.** I did it because I believe in women. I did it because I understand the impact that one woman can have when she chooses to open a door for another. I did it because I wanted women academics at the Open University of Tanzania to see themselves beyond routine, workload, fear, and institutional boundaries. I did it because **sisterhood, when practised sincerely, becomes a powerful form of leadership.**

This journey taught me that women do not always need permission to dream bigger. Sometimes they simply need someone willing to start the conversation, make the first call, write the first letter, seek the first invitation, prepare the first itinerary, and say, "We can do this." Once the door opens, many others find the courage to walk through it.

As I reflect on the journey, I feel deeply grateful to the management of the Open University of Tanzania for believing in the initiative, to our international hosts for welcoming us so warmly, and to every woman who participated with **trust, discipline, humour, resilience, and courage.** Most importantly, I am grateful that together we proved something significant: **when women organise with purpose, travel with dignity, learn with humility, and support one another with genuine care, a journey becomes more than a movement from one country to another. It becomes a movement of the heart.**

For me, the **OUT Women in Europe**

Academic Journey was not the end of a dream. It was the beginning of a greater calling: to strengthen women's academic leadership, mentorship, visibility, research collaboration, and confidence. If this journey inspires even one woman to apply for promotion, pursue a research grant, publish her work, seek leadership opportunities, mentor another woman, or believe more deeply in her own potential, then every sleepless night was worth it.

**I did this for sisterhood.
And sisterhood is enough, always.**





I CAME, I SAW, I CITED – EUROPEAN EDITION

By **Dr. Janeth N. Isanzu**



Once again, I found myself embarking on another adventure. After last year's unforgettable journey through the wilderness and breathtaking sunsets of the Serengeti Plains, the women of Sisterhood on Safari decided it was time to dream even bigger. In 2026, we set our sights on Europe. Yes, Europe! Our itinerary included five countries; Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France. For me, the journey was exciting, slightly intimidating, and, most importantly, a dream come true.

Like any major journey, preparation began long before departure. This time, nineteen women academics were involved, meaning planning had to start early and move quickly. We formed WhatsApp groups to coordinate logistics, share information, and make collective decisions. Once the travel requirements were clear, the next important step was obtaining visas. That was the moment I realised this journey was

actually happening. I found myself among the first group scheduled for visa interviews and, in fact, was the second person to be interviewed. My mind was filled with countless "what ifs." To avoid any possibility of being late, I arrived well before my appointment time. Fortunately, the entire process was smooth and friendly. Then came the waiting period. When the results were finally released, I was among the first to receive the good news. My visa had been approved and stamped into my brand-new passport. Hurray! That was when the real preparations began.

Permissions had to be secured, travel plans finalised, and daily group leaders assigned to ensure smooth coordination throughout the trip. Then came what may have been the most challenging part of all, the dress code discussions. As ladies in academia who also appreciate travelling in style, we carefully planned outfits for every occasion. After lengthy debates and countless decisions, we settled on a beautiful combination of **Khanga and Vitenge** to showcase **Tanzanian culture**, complemented by smart jeans, animal prints, tracksuits, trench coats, and elegant earth tones. **The results were worth every minute of discussion.**

At last, the long-awaited day arrived. Our Turkish Airlines flight was scheduled to depart at 3:00 a.m., meaning we had to arrive at Julius Nyerere International Airport well before midnight. As I entered Terminal 3, I found the other ladies already gathering, many accompanied by family members who had come to see them off. I, too, was escorted by my family. After all, who would miss the opportunity to visit the beautiful Terminal 3 at midnight? The atmosphere was filled with excitement. **Smiles were everywhere. We were ready to strengthen friendships, learn from one another, and embark on an unforgettable adventure.**

After a brief stop in Istanbul, we landed in Brussels in the late afternoon. Everything seemed larger than life; the airport, the number of aircraft, and the constant movement of people. We checked into the Thon Hotel Brussels before heading to dinner at the Hilton Garden Inn. That evening marked the beginning of our sisterhood bonding sessions, where we openly discussed the joys and challenges of being women in academia. The following day, we explored Brussels through a guided city tour. We visited the iconic Atomium, admired the famous comic strip murals, and walked through the magnificent Grand Place. Belgium also gave us one of the trip's academic highlights: a visit to KU Leuven, one of Europe's oldest universities. Our discussions on **gender equality in academia, research collaboration, and professional networking were both enriching and inspiring.**

Travelling by train soon became part of the adventure as we made our way to the Netherlands. One of the first places we visited was The Hague, home to the International Criminal Court. That evening, we participated in the much-anticipated **Secreto gift exchange**. Through this activity, we expressed appreciation, friendship, and sisterhood in a fun and memorable way. I was delighted to receive a beautiful gift from my Secreto Dr.Mbiki. Amsterdam itself was fascinating. We visited museums, enjoyed a scenic canal cruise, and explored the city from a completely different perspective. Our guide introduced us to Amsterdam Centraal, the famous dancing houses, and the city's rich history. We learned that many of the narrow canal houses were built on marshland, which caused them to tilt over time. We also discovered that **wealthy residents once paid taxes based on the number and size of windows in their houses**, which led to some of the city's unique architectural designs. It was a true

eye-opener.

From Amsterdam, we continued to Germany. Since it was Pentecost, the atmosphere was lively. We enjoyed lunch at a Jewish-owned restaurant before beginning our sightseeing tour of Cologne. Among the highlights were the magnificent Cologne Cathedral, with its centuries of history, and the famous Chocolate Museum. The following day, we travelled to Bielefeld University, where women academics exchanged ideas on leadership, collaboration, gender equality, and strategies for increasing women's visibility in senior academic positions. The discussions reinforced the importance of supporting women throughout their academic careers and reminded us that many of the challenges we face are shared across borders.

Luxembourg may be one of Europe's smallest countries, but it left a lasting impression on me. The country combines

history, culture, natural beauty, and modern development in a remarkable way. One feature that amazed us was the free public transport system. Buses, trams, and trains were available at no cost, making it easy to explore the country. We visited museums, the Notre-Dame Cathedral, and learned about the legendary Melusina, the mermaid associated with the origins of Luxembourg. According to local legend, Melusina married Count Siegfried on the condition that she would never be disturbed on Saturdays. When the secret was eventually broken, she disappeared forever, though it is said she returns every seven years. Stories like these made Luxembourg even more fascinating.

Our final destination was France, and it truly felt like saving the best for last. We began with a visit to the Embassy of Tanzania in France, which felt like a home away from home. Meeting the Ambassador and discussing opportunities and challenges for women in academia was both encouraging and insightful. We also enjoyed beloved



Tanzanian dishes, including muhogo and kachumbari, which made us feel even closer to home. A visit to UNESCO Headquarters followed, where we learned more about education, culture, science, and humanity. One quotation displayed at UNESCO particularly touched me: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defense of peace must be constructed." Those words remained with me long after our visit.

That evening, we finally experienced the Eiffel Tower. The atmosphere was magical. The area was packed with visitors, music filled the air, and fireworks illuminated the Parisian sky. It felt like a movie scene. The next morning, we returned to capture photographs before enjoying a cruise along the Seine River and taking in the beauty of Paris from the water.

Eventually, it was time to return home. We travelled back to Brussels for our farewell dinner, shared reflections on the journey, packed our bags, and prepared for departure. The following morning, we headed to Brussels Airport and began our journey back to Tanzania via Istanbul. Everything went smoothly, until I arrived in Dar es Salaam and discovered that my suitcase had apparently decided to continue enjoying Europe without me. Fortunately, after five adventurous days of its own, it returned safely and completely intact.

Looking back, the journey taught me many valuable lessons. It reminded me that women in academia need strong institutional support to achieve leadership positions. It demonstrated that sisterhood, when nurtured, creates confidence, collaboration, and lifelong friendships. It showed me how quickly the world is embracing digital payment systems and the importance of being prepared for that reality. Above all, it taught me a practical

lesson that I may never forget: travel light whenever possible.

We returned home with beautiful memories, stronger professional networks, countless photographs, a few souvenirs, and perhaps a few kilograms less and I added a new dress code mkanda nje thanks to Dr. Lihiru. Most importantly, we returned with a renewed appreciation of the power of friendship, learning, and exploration. I remain sincerely grateful to the management of the Open University of Tanzania for making this remarkable journey possible.

I came. I saw. I cited.
And what an experience it was.





SISTERS ACROSS BORDERS: A JOURNEY OF LEARNING, FRIENDSHIP, AND SHARED PURPOSE

By Dr. Juliana S. Kamaghe



As our plane landed in Europe, I knew we were beginning an important academic journey. What I did not anticipate was how profoundly it would shape me, not only as an academic but also as a colleague, traveller, and member of a remarkable community of women. Over the next ten days, our journey through Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France became much more than an international study tour. It became a journey of learning, cultural discovery, friendship, and shared purpose.

Our first destination was Brussels, where the beauty of the Grand Place and the city's rich history immediately captured our attention. As we explored the city over meals and informal conversations, we exchanged experiences on leadership, research, and the challenges women continue to face in higher education. Those discussions laid the foundation for friendships that continued to grow throughout the journey and reminded us of the importance of

supporting one another in our academic careers.

Amsterdam introduced us to a society where **innovation is woven into everyday life.** Beyond its beautiful canals and remarkable urban planning, the experience encouraged me to reflect on **how emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, can contribute to more inclusive learning environments and support solutions to challenges facing our communities, including climate-smart agriculture.** Some of the most meaningful learning took place outside formal meetings, during the conversations we shared while exploring the city together.

Paris offered another perspective by bringing together history, culture, and international engagement. Our discussions centred on issues that are close to my professional interests, including **assistive technologies for learners with disabilities and the responsible use of artificial intelligence in education.** These conversations reinforced my belief that **technological innovation should always be guided by inclusion, ethics, and the goal of creating equitable opportunities for all learners.**

One of the highlights of the tour was our academic visit to KU Leuven. Meeting women professors and researchers provided valuable insights into academic leadership, mentorship, research collaboration, and institutional support for women in higher education. The discussions also explored **emerging digital technologies that strengthen academic integrity and create new opportunities for international collaboration.** The visit encouraged me to reflect on how African scholars can contribute more actively to global knowledge while ensuring that research remains relevant to local priorities and communities.

As our journey continued through Germany and Luxembourg, I realised that **academic collaboration is built not only through formal meetings but also through shared experiences.** Long train journeys, unexpected travel delays, moments of laughter, and the support we offered one another strengthened our friendships and reminded us that genuine collaboration begins with trust, understanding, and mutual respect.

One aspect of the journey that filled me with pride was **representing Tanzania** wherever we travelled. Wearing the beautiful attire generously provided by the Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority gave us an opportunity to showcase our country's rich cultural heritage and tourism potential. Everywhere we went, our clothing attracted admiration and sparked conversations about Tanzania, allowing us to **serve as informal ambassadors while celebrating our identity with confidence and pride.**

As I reflect on this **unforgettable experience,** I realise that its greatest value lies not only in the institutions we visited or the cities we explored, but in the relationships we built and the ideas we exchanged. I returned home with renewed professional motivation, stronger academic networks, and fresh inspiration to continue promoting **inclusive education through technology while strengthening cross-border research collaborations.**

Above all, this journey reaffirmed a simple but powerful truth: **when women learn together, travel together, and support one another, they do more than expand their own horizons; they create opportunities that inspire innovation, strengthen institutions, and leave a lasting impact on the communities they serve.**



A JOURNEY OF LEARNING, DISCOVERY, AND ACADEMIC EXCHANGE ACROSS EUROPE

By **Dr. Mbiki M. Msumi**



Between 21 May and 1 June 2026, nineteen women academicians from the Open University of Tanzania embarked on an academic and cultural tour across Europe. The programme was designed to strengthen international academic collaboration, expose participants to different higher education systems, and provide opportunities to engage with women professors and researchers in leading European universities. The tour also offered valuable cultural experiences, professional networking opportunities, and personal growth through visits to Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France.

Our journey began with a flight from Tanzania to Brussels via Istanbul. Upon arriving in Belgium, we checked into the Thon Hotel and rested in preparation for the activities ahead. The following day, we explored Brussels through a guided city tour that introduced us to some of the city's most significant landmarks, including the Atomium, Grand Place, Mini-Europe,

and the European Union Headquarters. The tour provided **valuable insights into European history, culture, architecture, and governance**, while allowing us to appreciate Brussels's role as the administrative heart of the European Union.

From Brussels, we travelled by train to Amsterdam in the Netherlands. After settling into our hotel, we explored the city's picturesque canals, vibrant streets, and shopping districts. Our visit continued with a tour of the Rijksmuseum, where we gained a **deeper appreciation of Dutch history, art, and culture**. A canal cruise offered a unique perspective of Amsterdam's remarkable urban design and architectural heritage, making our stay both educational and enjoyable.

Our next destination was Cologne, Germany, where we visited the magnificent Cologne Cathedral (Kölner Dom), one of Europe's finest examples of Gothic architecture and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Walking through the historic city centre allowed us to appreciate Cologne's rich cultural heritage before continuing to one of the tour's most significant academic engagements.

At Bielefeld University, we met researchers from the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (IKG). The discussions focused on **research collaboration, interdisciplinary scholarship, academic leadership, and universities' contributions to addressing contemporary social challenges**. The visit provided valuable opportunities to exchange ideas and explore future academic partnerships between our institutions.

Not every part of the journey unfolded as planned. While travelling from Germany to Belgium, we missed a connecting train, and the subsequent service was cancelled, forcing us to spend the night in a hostel near the railway station. The

following morning, our train to Leuven was cancelled, presenting another challenge. After considering alternative transport, we eventually boarded a replacement bus that enabled us to arrive at KU Leuven in time for our scheduled meeting. Although stressful at the time, these **unexpected experiences strengthened our teamwork, adaptability, and resilience**.

Our visit to KU Leuven became another highlight of the tour. We held productive discussions with women professors who shared **valuable insights on academic leadership, mentorship, research development, gender equality, and strategies to increase women's participation in higher education**. The exchange encouraged meaningful reflection on academic practice and highlighted opportunities for future collaboration. Before departing, we also explored the university library area and Leuven's historic town centre, adding a cultural dimension to our academic visit.

Later that day, we travelled to Luxembourg, where we explored its rich history, attractive streets, cafés, and public spaces. The relaxed atmosphere offered **an opportunity to experience another dimension of European culture while reflecting on lessons learned throughout the journey**.

Our final destination was Paris, France. After overcoming another train disruption during our journey, we arrived safely and proceeded directly to the Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania, where we received a warm welcome from embassy staff. The visit offered an **opportunity to discuss academic and professional matters while enjoying the comfort of Tanzanian hospitality away from home**.

Later that afternoon, we visited UNESCO Headquarters, where discussions with UNESCO officials deepened

our understanding of international cooperation in education, science, culture, and sustainable development. These engagements reinforced the importance of global partnerships in advancing higher education and creating opportunities for academic collaboration across borders.

Beyond the academic programme, Paris provided unforgettable cultural experiences. Visiting the Eiffel Tower, enjoying a cruise along the River Seine, exploring the city's vibrant streets, and capturing photographs of iconic landmarks brought our European journey to a memorable conclusion.

We returned to Brussels for our final evening together, sharing a farewell dinner and reflecting on the experiences, lessons, friendships, and challenges that had shaped our journey. The following day, we departed for Tanzania with renewed motivation, valuable professional networks, unforgettable memories, and a deeper appreciation of international academic collaboration.

The Women in Academia European Tour successfully achieved its objectives. Our engagements at Bielefeld University, KU Leuven, UNESCO Headquarters, and the Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania strengthened academic partnerships, broadened our understanding of higher education systems, and created opportunities for future collaboration. Equally important, the tour demonstrated the value of international exposure in building confidence, expanding research perspectives, and encouraging women to pursue leadership within academia.

Like any international journey, the tour also provided practical lessons. Future programmes would benefit from allowing more time between train connections, encouraging participants to travel with lighter luggage, confirming academic

appointments well in advance, allocating time for structured reflection after institutional visits, documenting agreed areas for future collaboration, maintaining a contingency budget for unexpected travel changes, and preparing institutional presentations that facilitate richer academic discussions.

Looking back, the European tour was far more than a series of institutional visits. It was a journey of learning, discovery, resilience, friendship, and professional growth. It reminded us that international academic exchange extends beyond conferences and classrooms, it creates lasting partnerships, broadens perspectives, and strengthens women academics' confidence to contribute meaningfully within their institutions and beyond.





FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE HAGUE: AN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL LAW LECTURER'S JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

By **Dr. Prisca D. Mbezi**



As an International Criminal Law lecturer at the Open University of Tanzania, I have spent many years teaching students about the International Criminal Court (ICC), discussing landmark cases, explaining the Rome Statute, and analysing the challenges of international justice. For much of that time, the ICC was part of my professional life through textbooks, journal articles, court decisions, and classroom discussions. Yet I never imagined that one day I would stand in the very city that hosts the institution I teach with such passion.

My unforgettable European journey began on 21 May 2026, when I joined eighteen fellow women academicians from the Open University of Tanzania on an academic and cultural exchange visit across five European countries. While the trip offered many remarkable experiences, one destination stood above all others for me: The Hague, internationally recognised as the City of Peace and Justice.

After arriving in Amsterdam, we travelled to The Hague to visit the International Criminal Court. As we approached the Court, I felt excitement, pride, and deep professional fulfilment. For years, I had introduced students to concepts such as **complementarity, jurisdiction, admissibility, state cooperation, and crimes under the Rome Statute**. Suddenly, those concepts became tangible. I was no longer teaching about the Court from thousands of kilometres away; I was standing at the place where international justice is pursued and administered.

Visiting the ICC was truly a dream come true. It is difficult to describe the feeling of finally seeing in person an institution that has shaped my academic career and research interests. I found myself reflecting on the countless lectures I had delivered about the Court's structure, the Darfur situation, and the ongoing debates surrounding international criminal accountability. Standing in The Hague reminded me why I chose this field of study, and it **renewed my commitment to educating future generations on the importance of international justice, accountability, and the rule of law**.

Another memorable experience during our stay in Amsterdam was our visit to the famous Red-Light District. For many of us, it offered an opportunity to observe a social and legal environment that differs significantly from what we are accustomed to in Tanzania. Beyond curiosity, the visit provided valuable insights into how different societies approach questions of morality, regulation, and individual freedoms. As a result, experiencing this aspect of Dutch society **broadened our understanding of the diversity of legal and social systems worldwide**. It reminded us that travel is not only about seeing new places but also about **appreciating different perspectives and ways of life**.

One cultural difference that particularly caught my attention was the atmosphere inside European trains. Unlike public transport in Tanzania, where passengers often engage in lively conversations and storytelling, the trains we used throughout Europe were remarkably quiet. Most passengers spent their time reading, working on laptops, listening to music, or simply sitting silently. At first, the silence felt unusual. However, as a Tanzanian, I am accustomed to the warmth and social interactions that often characterise long journeys. The experience helped me **appreciate different cultural practices** and reminded me that **people create comfort and coexistence in many different ways**. Interestingly, the silence also made me appreciate even more the vibrant and friendly atmosphere that often accompanies public transport back home.

One of the most magical moments of the trip came during our stay in Paris. Seeing the Eiffel Tower illuminated against the night sky was an experience I will cherish forever. Like many visitors before me, I stood in awe of one of the world's most iconic landmarks. The beauty of Paris, combined with the joy of sharing the moment with colleagues and friends, made the evening unforgettable.

Beyond the academic engagements, the journey was filled with **moments of exploration, sightseeing, and, of course, shopping**. From chocolates in Brussels and souvenirs in Amsterdam to fashion stores in Paris, Bielefeld, and Luxembourg, each city offered something unique. Like many first-time visitors to Europe, I often found myself tempted by the variety of attractive shops and products on display. As searching for gifts for family and friends back home became part of the adventure, shopping itself became an enjoyable experience shared among colleagues. In many ways, it added another layer of excitement to the discovery of Europe.

Like every memorable journey, ours was not without challenges. Delayed trains, missed connections, and unexpected changes to travel plans tested our patience. Yet these moments brought us closer together and created stories we still laugh about today. What initially seemed frustrating eventually became some of the trip's most memorable highlights. Spending unexpected nights away from our planned destinations, rushing to catch connecting trains, and helping one another navigate unfamiliar stations **strengthened our friendships and reinforced the spirit of teamwork that characterised the journey.**

Another challenge, though much happier, involved our ever-expanding luggage. As the days passed and shopping became one of our favourite activities, suitcases that had left Tanzania half empty gradually filled with chocolates, souvenirs, clothes, gifts, and keepsakes from the places we visited. Some of us jokingly discovered that our luggage seemed to grow larger with every destination. Carrying heavy bags through

train stations and between platforms became an adventure in itself and often provided moments of laughter that remain among my favourite memories of the trip.

Looking back, I realise that we returned to Tanzania with much more than photographs and souvenirs. We **brought home renewed academic inspiration, a deeper appreciation of international cooperation, stronger professional networks, and unforgettable memories.** Above all, my visit to The Hague transformed years of teaching International Criminal Law into a lived experience.

Indeed, moving from the classroom in Tanzania to the heart of international justice in The Hague was more than a journey across continents; **it was the fulfilment of an academic dream.** It reminded me that **the ideas we teach, research, and discuss every day are not merely theories in books.** They are living realities that **shape the world around us.** For that reason, this journey will remain one of the **most meaningful experiences of my academic career.**





A EUROPEAN ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE: REFLECTIONS FROM AN UNFORGETTABLE JOURNEY

By Dr. Ruth W. John



On 21 May 2026, we arrived at Brussels Airport and proceeded to the Thon Hotel Brussels, where we stayed for two nights. After settling in and recovering from the long journey, we eagerly anticipated the experiences that lay ahead. The following morning, we travelled by train to the city centre, where we met Eliud and our cameraman before boarding the Tootbus sightseeing tour. The guided tour introduced us to Brussels' rich history, culture, and administrative significance as the headquarters of many European Union institutions. Along the route, we viewed several iconic buildings that play an important role in the governance and administration of the European Union.

One of the highlights of our stay in Brussels was visiting the Atomium, one of Belgium's most recognisable landmarks and a remarkable symbol of scientific innovation and architectural excellence. Constructed for the 1958 Brussels World's Fair (Expo 58), the Atomium stands 102 metres tall and

represents an iron crystal magnified 165 billion times. The structure consists of nine stainless-steel spheres, each measuring 18 metres in diameter, connected by tubes containing escalators and walkways. Visiting this **internationally renowned monument allowed us to appreciate both its historical significance and its unique architectural design.** We captured numerous photographs to preserve memories of this remarkable site. After exploring Brussels' major tourist attractions, we shopped for gifts for our Secretos before heading to a large international restaurant for dinner. I was fascinated by the variety of cuisines from around the world. We were welcomed with complimentary juice, after which I decided to try Indian cuisine. It was an excellent choice, and I thoroughly enjoyed the meal.

On 23 May, we woke up very early to catch the train to Amsterdam Schiphol. Upon arrival, we checked into the Radisson Hotel, left our luggage, and immediately travelled by bus to The Hague to visit the International Criminal Court (ICC). The visit was particularly meaningful for the lawyers in our group, who were excited to stand at one of the **world's most important institutions for international justice.** Many of us had closely followed the work of former ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, making the experience even more memorable. Visiting the Court deepened appreciation for its role in promoting international justice, accountability, and the rule of law.

The following day was dedicated to exploring Amsterdam. We visited several popular shopping outlets, including TK Maxx, Primark, and Zara, before enjoying a scenic canal cruise with Lovers Canal Cruises. Viewing Amsterdam from the water offered a unique perspective of its historic architecture, picturesque canals, elegant neighbourhoods, and remarkable urban planning. Our guide shared fascinating

insights into the city's history, culture, and development, making the **experience both educational and enjoyable.**

Later that evening, we visited Amsterdam's famous Red-Light District, one of the city's best-known tourist attractions. Beyond its reputation, the district reflects Amsterdam's unique legal and social framework, where the adult entertainment industry operates under regulated conditions. For many members of our group, particularly those from Tanzania, it was the first time witnessing such establishments operating openly within a city centre. The visit provided an **opportunity to appreciate the cultural, legal, and social differences across countries and reminded us that travelling is also about understanding different ways of life and broadening our perspectives.**

From Amsterdam, we travelled by rail to Cologne, Germany, arriving in the morning. Three vans transported our group to the Steigenberger Hotel, where we stayed overnight. During our visit, we explored the magnificent Cologne Cathedral (Kölner Dom), one of Germany's most significant landmarks and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its magnificent Gothic architecture and centuries of history made the visit both **educational and inspiring.** We later joined a guided sightseeing tour of Cologne, which introduced us to the city's historical, cultural, and modern attractions. One particularly memorable moment was seeing a Ferrari up close for the first time. As someone who appreciates luxury and high-performance vehicles, I was delighted to have the opportunity to see and even touch the car. It was a small but **unforgettable highlight** that added a personal touch to the day's experiences.

Our journey then continued to Bielefeld University, where we participated in one of the most important academic engagements of the visit. Bielefeld University is a

medium-sized public institution with fourteen faculties, including medicine and technology, and is **internationally recognised for its commitment to promoting women in science**. The university also maintains a Memorandum of Understanding with the Open University of Tanzania, which strengthens academic collaboration between the two institutions.

Upon our arrival, we were warmly welcomed by Mr Eliud, who had been introduced to us by Dr Janeth Kigobe. He generously hosted our luggage at his home before we proceeded to the university, where Professor Tobias and his colleagues received us warmly. We also had the opportunity to enjoy breakfast at the university cafeteria, where quality meals were offered at very affordable prices.

The discussions at Bielefeld University centred on gender equality in higher education, with particular emphasis on women's representation in professorial and leadership positions. We learned that Germany has invested in gender equality policies for more than three decades, supported by dedicated Gender Equality Officers, specialised funding schemes, and institutional programmes that **encourage women to pursue academic careers**. Unlike many systems that focus primarily on biological age, German universities often consider academic age when evaluating researchers, creating more equitable opportunities for career progression. We were also impressed by the strong support available for academics with family and caregiving responsibilities, enabling them to balance professional advancement with personal commitments.

The discussions also highlighted the challenges faced by women researchers in Tanzania. While Germany benefits from well-established funding mechanisms and programmes, such as BINKA, that support

women in research and leadership, **limited research funding remains a significant obstacle for many Tanzanian academics**, particularly in the social sciences, where fieldwork is often expensive. Another aspect that stood out was the German emphasis on identifying and nurturing potential during recruitment and career development, rather than relying solely on previous performance indicators. This approach helps create more **inclusive opportunities for women** and other underrepresented groups in academia.

Not every part of our journey went according to plan. During our travels through Germany, we experienced delays and missed train connections, eventually arriving in Aachen after our final connecting train had departed. With no further trains available that night, we stayed in a hostel before purchasing new tickets the following morning to continue our journey to Leuven. Although unexpected, the experience reminded us that **flexibility and teamwork are essential companions on every international journey**.

As I reflect on these experiences, I realise that the journey offered far more than visits to famous landmarks and prestigious institutions. It **broadened my understanding of different cultures, strengthened my appreciation of international academic collaboration**, and provided valuable lessons about **gender equality, resilience, and teamwork**. Above all, it reminded me that **meaningful learning often happens beyond the classroom, where new environments, diverse perspectives, and shared experiences combine to create lasting personal and professional growth**.



STRENGTHENING ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS: REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN IN ACADEMIA EUROPEAN TOUR

By **Dr. Theresia J. Shavega**



The Women in Academia European Tour organised for women academicians from the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) provided a unique opportunity to combine academic engagement, professional networking, cultural exchange, and personal growth. Our journey across Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France demonstrated the value of international collaboration while offering valuable insights into higher education systems, gender equality initiatives, and cultural diversity across Europe.

Our journey began in Belgium, where academic engagement formed the cornerstone of our visit. At KU Leuven, we met distinguished women academicians, including senior professors who generously shared their experiences in academic leadership, research, and career progression. Their stories were both inspiring and encouraging, particularly for highlighting the importance of perseverance, mentorship, and institutional

support in advancing women's careers in higher education. We also learned about opportunities for international cooperation, including collaborative research projects, joint publications, and short-term academic exchanges. KU Leuven's willingness to support women researchers through future collaborations offers valuable opportunities for female academicians at the Open University of Tanzania to strengthen their research capacity and international networks. Beyond the university, Belgium also introduced us to a **multicultural society that reflected Europe's diversity.**

In the Netherlands, our **experience combined cultural exploration with international exposure.** Although I did not personally participate in the visit to The Hague, colleagues who attended shared their memorable experiences at one of the world's most recognised centres for international law and justice. The remainder of our stay allowed us to discover Amsterdam through walking tours and a scenic canal cruise, during which we learned about the **city's history, urban planning, architecture, and cultural heritage.** Visits to museums and other historical sites further enriched our understanding of Dutch society, making our time in the Netherlands both educational and enjoyable.

Germany offered one of the tour's most significant academic components. Our visit to Bielefeld University focused on strengthening academic collaboration, particularly in science and higher education. **Discussions centred on gender equality in academia provided an opportunity for mutual learning between our institutions.** We learned that Bielefeld University has established strong mechanisms to promote women's participation in academic leadership, supported by dedicated gender equality policies, mentoring programmes, and government-funded initiatives that enable female researchers to advance their

careers. These discussions encouraged us to reflect on similar opportunities that could further strengthen support for women academicians in Tanzania.

Our visit to Luxembourg offered a different perspective. Although much of our time there focused on **cultural exploration and leisure, we gained valuable insights into the country's rich history, heritage, and efficient public services.** Experiencing Luxembourg's unique blend of tradition and modern development broadened our appreciation of the diversity that exists across European societies.

In France, we had the privilege of visiting the Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania, where we exchanged ideas with embassy officials on academic collaboration and issues affecting women in higher education. We also visited UNESCO Headquarters and met with UNESCO delegates to **discuss inclusion, gender equality, teacher development, educational innovation, and international cooperation.** These engagements reinforced the importance of global partnerships in strengthening education systems and promoting equitable opportunities for women and girls. Beyond the academic programme, we visited several cultural and historical landmarks, including the Eiffel Tower and enjoyed a cruise along the River Seine, **experiences that highlighted the importance of preserving cultural heritage while promoting tourism and the arts.**

Looking back, the European tour provided valuable lessons that extended far beyond the classroom. It strengthened our understanding of **research, innovation, women's leadership, and international collaboration** while exposing us to diverse cultures and different approaches to higher education. The experience also reminded us that leisure and personal well-being are important components of

professional development and should be embraced alongside academic excellence.

The tour benefited us in many ways. It expanded our academic and professional horizons, strengthened international networks and partnerships, increased women academicians' confidence, and deepened our appreciation of cultural diversity. Working and travelling together also taught us the **importance of patience, tolerance, teamwork, and understanding different perspectives**, particularly when making decisions within a large group. Although we encountered occasional challenges during the journey, they became valuable learning experiences that strengthened our resilience and reinforced the spirit of collaboration that defined the entire tour.

Overall, the Women in Academia European Tour was a rewarding and transformative experience. It demonstrated that international exposure, academic partnerships, and meaningful cultural exchange not only enrich professional knowledge but also inspire personal growth and strengthen women academicians' capacity to contribute more effectively to their institutions and society. It provided a **unique opportunity to combine academic engagement, professional networking, cultural exchange, and personal growth**. Our journey across Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France demonstrated the value of international collaboration while offering valuable insights into **higher education systems, gender equality initiatives, and cultural diversity across Europe**.





BEYOND THE BENCHMARK: MEMORIES, LAUGHTER, AND SISTERHOOD ACROSS EUROPE

By **Dr. Victoria M. Lihiru**



The Women in Academia European Academic and Cultural Exchange Tour was undoubtedly one of the most memorable professional experiences I have had in recent years. For ten unforgettable days, from 21 May to 1 June 2026, I had the privilege of travelling, learning, laughing, navigating unfamiliar cities, missing trains, catching trains, carrying luggage, taking countless photographs, and sharing extraordinary experiences with eighteen remarkable women academics from our beloved Open University of Tanzania.

Beyond the meetings, presentations, and benchmarking visits, one of the greatest gifts of the tour was the opportunity to know my colleagues beyond their titles, offices, faculties, and official responsibilities. I came to appreciate the diversity of personalities, strengths, humour, resilience, experiences, and aspirations that exist within our community of women academics. Somewhere between train stations, breakfast tables, museums, shopping malls,

and endless walks, **we became more than colleagues; we became sisters.**

I was especially touched by the generosity, kindness, and thoughtfulness that unfolded throughout the journey. The **Secret Friend initiative added a unique and memorable dimension to the experience.** To my Secret Friend, Dr Juliana, thank you for the power bank, even though it quietly exceeded our indicative €50 gift budget! More importantly, thank you for becoming my deputy planner, navigator, and occasional rescuer whenever train schedules, directions, or logistics became more complicated than expected.

To my other Secret Friend, Dr Bilhuda, thank you for the beautiful black handbag. It has already earned a special place in my wardrobe and added a little extra elegance to the side of my life beyond academia. I sincerely hope you enjoy the perfume; it holds a special place in my heart.

Dr Bilhuda and Dr Mbiki, thank you for being my gym companions in Belgium and Amsterdam. Between **stretching, lifting weights, setting daily intentions, and encouraging** one another, we created some of my favourite memories of the entire trip. On the days when the hotel gym was unavailable, the endless walking through European streets and lifting increasingly heavier suitcases became our unofficial fitness programme. Perhaps we should patent it!

Dr Isanzu, I will always remember your courage in escorting me to take photographs at The Hague. You appeared exactly when I needed help most, and I remain grateful.

To my lovely mate, Zakia, thank you for your calm spirit and wonderful company throughout the journey. Dr Zamzam, one moment you sounded like a **strict stepmother and the next like a mother-in-law** trying her very best to make a good **first**

impression! Thank you for hotspotting me countless times. Between your internet, Dr Ruth's internet, and Dr Juliana's internet, some of us managed to survive Europe.

Dr Doreen, Dr Harrieth Mtae, and Dr Hella, long live the relentless search for mtindi, fresh fruits, vegetables, and healthy food options! You reminded us that **wellness never takes a holiday.**

Dr Bahati, I will always treasure our conversations from Brussels to Dar es Salaam. They were **thoughtful, timely, and deeply enriching.** However, on behalf of humanity, we are still patiently waiting for the thousands of photographs stored in that very sophisticated phone of yours. We trust they will eventually see the light of day!

Professionally, the tour reinforced **important lessons about academic growth, leadership, internationalisation, and the advancement of women in academia.** We were reminded that **successful academic careers are built on supportive policies, visionary leadership, adequate resources, continuous learning, collaboration, visibility, mentorship, and the courage to pursue opportunities beyond our comfort zones.** Our visits to KU Leuven, Bielefeld University, the Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania in France, and UNESCO Headquarters were worth every challenge, including missed trains and the unforgettable night in what we affectionately named the "hip-hop hotel." **Those engagements broadened our understanding of what is possible, not only for women academics but also for our University.** The sightseeing experiences in Brussels, Amsterdam, Cologne, Luxembourg, Paris, and beyond added **colour, inspiration, and unforgettable memories to an already rich academic programme.**

Personally, the journey reminded me that adaptability is one of life's greatest strengths.

Travelling across several countries by train, bus, and metro, and staying in various accommodation arrangements, reinforced the importance of travelling light, remaining flexible, and maintaining a positive attitude when plans change unexpectedly. **Sometimes the most memorable moments are the ones we never planned.**

I extend my sincere gratitude to the leadership of the Open University of Tanzania for **making this opportunity possible, to every institution that welcomed us so warmly, and to each of my fellow travellers for making the experience enjoyable, meaningful, and unforgettable.**

Dr Janeth Kigobe, you are truly one in a million. Your **professionalism, kindness, patience, attention to detail, and unwavering commitment to excellence are extraordinary.** You think carefully, act thoughtfully, and carry enormous responsibility with remarkable grace. Sometimes I genuinely wonder whether you are simply human, or perhaps an angel travelling incognito. And yes, should the opportunity ever arise, I promise to behave if I become the rejected daughter-in-law!

Although the tour has ended, the friendships, lessons, laughter, and possibilities it created are only beginning. I hope we keep the kuchomekea culture alive. I hope we continue walking together. I hope some of you eventually join me in the gym and discover the joy of lifting weights. Perhaps one day we will all even enjoy sushi together; although, to be completely honest, those pork ribs were performing at an exceptionally high level!

Before I forget, to all our leaders, thank you sincerely for your guidance, support, patience, and commitment throughout this unforgettable journey. We could not have done it without you.

As I look back on those ten unforgettable days, I realise that the greatest souvenir I brought home was not tucked inside my suitcase. It was the friendships we built, the laughter we shared, the kindness we extended to one another, and the **sisterhood** that quietly grew stronger with every train ride, every conversation, every challenge, and every new destination. We left Tanzania as colleagues, united by our profession. We returned not only with new knowledge and international networks, but with **deeper friendships and a renewed appreciation of what women can achieve when they learn, support, and grow together.**

So, until the next adventure, let us keep walking, keep laughing, keep kuchomekea, and keep opening doors for one another.





ADVANCING WOMEN IN ACADEMIA: REFLECTIONS FROM A EUROPEAN BENCHMARKING TOUR

By **Dr. Winfrida S. Malingumu**



From 21 May to 1 June 2026, I had the privilege of participating in the Women in Academia European Academic Benchmarking Tour, which took us to Germany, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. The programme brought together women academics from the Open University of Tanzania and created opportunities to engage with leading institutions, including Bielefeld University, KU Leuven, the Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania in France, and UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. The tour sought to strengthen international academic exposure, promote women's leadership in higher education, foster research collaboration, and provide insights into global best practices in university governance, research, and gender equality.

One of the most valuable lessons from the tour was the realisation that women's advancement in academia does not happen by chance. It requires deliberate institutional commitment through mentorship,

leadership development, gender-responsive policies, and accountability mechanisms. At the institutions we visited, women scholars shared their experiences navigating academic careers and highlighted the importance of creating environments that encourage and support women in advancing to senior academic and leadership positions.

Our discussions also revealed that gender disparities in senior academic leadership remain a global challenge. Although women are well represented at entry and mid-career levels, their numbers decline significantly in senior academic and decision-making positions. It was particularly enlightening to learn that this pattern exists not only in African institutions but also in countries such as Belgium and Germany. This reinforced the importance of sustained interventions that support women's career progression throughout every stage of the academic pathway.

Another important lesson was the critical role of international exposure in academic growth. Research exchanges, conferences, visiting scholar programmes, collaborative research projects, and international partnerships all contribute to greater academic visibility, stronger research output,

and enhanced leadership opportunities. The benchmarking tour itself demonstrated how international engagement expands professional networks and creates opportunities that extend far beyond a single visit.

The institutions we visited also emphasised that research excellence depends on collaboration and sustained investment in research funding. Successful researchers continually seek grant opportunities, develop competitive proposals, participate in interdisciplinary research, and cultivate strong national and international partnerships. These discussions reminded me that persistence, collaboration, and continuous learning are essential ingredients for long-term academic success.

Equally inspiring were the conversations with women leaders who reflected on their own professional journeys. Their experiences highlighted that leadership opportunities are best utilised by individuals who have invested in developing the necessary competencies, confidence, credibility, and professional networks. Their stories reinforced the importance of staying visible, embracing lifelong learning, and preparing for leadership well before



opportunities arise.

Beyond the formal academic engagements, the journey offered one of its most valuable lessons through an unexpected travel experience. While travelling from Germany towards Luxembourg, our group encountered complications with connecting trains, leaving several members unable to board one of the scheduled services. Rather than continuing without them, we decided to remain together and continue our journey the following day. Although the delay disrupted our plans, it revealed something far more important than punctuality. It demonstrated the **values of solidarity, patience, resilience, inclusiveness, and collective responsibility.** No one was willing to leave a colleague behind, and that simple decision reflected the true spirit of sisterhood that characterised the entire tour.

That experience reminded me that **academic leadership extends beyond research achievements and professional titles.** It is equally reflected in compassion, teamwork, empathy, and a willingness to support others through both professional and personal challenges. The friendships and trust that developed throughout the journey became just as valuable as the academic knowledge we gained.

As I reflect on this remarkable experience, I recognise its direct relevance to my own professional responsibilities in academic leadership, research management, quality assurance, programme development, and institutional transformation. The knowledge and perspectives gained during the tour have strengthened my commitment to promoting a vibrant research culture, advancing academic quality, **encouraging women's leadership,** and expanding international collaboration within higher education.

Looking ahead, I intend to build upon the partnerships established during the tour by pursuing collaborative research, joint publications, international grant opportunities, and continued engagement with colleagues and institutions we visited. Equally important, I hope to share the lessons learned with fellow academics so that the benefits of this experience extend beyond the participants themselves.

The Women in Academia European Academic Benchmarking Tour was far more than an international study visit. It was a **journey of professional growth, shared learning, meaningful collaboration, and personal reflection.** It broadened my understanding of higher education, strengthened my professional aspirations, and reaffirmed my belief that **when institutions invest in women, encourage collaboration, and create opportunities for international engagement, they not only empower individuals but also strengthen the future of higher education itself.**





FROM SAFARI BOOTS TO EUROPEAN STREETS: A JOURNEY FILLED WITH LAUGHTER AND LEARNING

By **Zakia M. Ituja**



After surviving an unforgettable adventure through Tanzania's national parks in 2025, we jokingly thought, "Why not Europe next?" Before we knew it, the dream had become reality. Nineteen determined women academicians from the Open University of Tanzania gathered at the airport after months of planning, excitement, and anticipation. On 21 May 2026, we boarded a Turkish Airlines flight to Brussels, ready to begin a new chapter of adventure, learning, and sisterhood.

We arrived in Belgium in the evening, checked into the Thon Hotel, enjoyed dinner, shared stories, and probably spent more time planning the following day than sleeping. By the next morning, we had fully transformed into tourists. We explored Brussels through a city tour, took photographs from every possible angle, admired the city's remarkable architecture, and, of course, squeezed in a little shopping.

Our next stop was Amsterdam, with a quick

visit to The Hague. That was where reality hit: **machines everywhere!** Buying something sometimes felt like sitting for a technology examination. Ahaaa! Fortunately, we quickly learned to adapt. One of the highlights of our stay was a canal cruise through Amsterdam. As we glided along the historic waterways, we admired beautiful scenery while learning fascinating stories about the city's history and architecture. I was particularly surprised to discover that, in the past, house taxes were linked to the width and number of windows. **Who would have imagined that windows could influence the value of a house?** We also came across a bridge covered with love locks. It looked incredibly romantic... until I imagined carrying the key around forever!

Germany welcomed us with history, long walks, beautiful scenery, and even more group photographs. At Bielefeld University, we shifted from sightseeing to serious academic engagement, discussing gender equality and the challenges facing women

in academia. It was a timely reminder that we were not simply tourists with cameras; we were women scholars eager to learn, exchange ideas, and build international partnerships.

Then came what many of us now remember as our greatest adventure. On our way to Leuven, we missed a train... and then another one. Suddenly, our carefully planned itinerary changed completely. Instead of spending the night in Leuven as expected, we found ourselves staying in a hostel near a railway station. It certainly was not part of the original plan, but looking back, it became one of the **funniest and most unforgettable experiences** of the entire journey. Sometimes the best memories are created when nothing goes according to plan.

The following day, we finally arrived in Leuven, where we participated in enriching academic discussions at KU Leuven before continuing to Luxembourg. For many of us,



Luxembourg became the biggest surprise of the trip. The clean streets, peaceful atmosphere, efficient transport system, and, best of all, free public transport made the city incredibly enjoyable. Honestly, I almost didn't want to leave... ahaaaa! Well, maybe I am only half joking!

Paris was the perfect grand finale. Standing before the Eiffel Tower was a dream come true, while the lively streets reminded us that **every great city has its own unique rhythm**. We were even amused to find familiar "machinga-style" businesses that made us feel surprisingly at home despite being thousands of kilometres away. The city was vibrant, colourful, and full of unforgettable energy.

Eventually, we returned to Brussels for one final evening together. It was a **night filled with reflection, laughter, and endless stories**. We laughed about the trains we had missed, the heavy luggage we had dragged through countless stations, and the curious looks we received from people wondering how nineteen determined Tanzanian women could travel with so many suitcases! Those moments, once stressful, had already become some of our favourite memories.

On the final day, we boarded our flight back to Dar es Salaam feeling tired but fulfilled. We returned home with more than photographs and souvenirs. We came back with **new friendships, valuable academic experiences, stronger professional networks, and countless stories** that will continue to make us laugh for years to come.

Looking back, I realise this journey was about far more than visiting five European countries. It was about **learning, adapting, supporting one another, and discovering** that the best adventures are often the ones we never planned. My heartfelt appreciation goes to all the leaders who invested their

time, energy, and dedication to making this journey possible. You truly are the best. A special thank you to the brilliant person who introduced the Secret Friend idea, ubarikiwe! To my wonderful Secret Friends, my roommates, and every member of this incredible team, thank you for making this journey one I will never forget.

Here's to the next adventure!





BEYOND BORDERS, BEYOND DISCIPLINES: REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN IN ACADEMIA EUROPEAN TOUR

By **Dr. Zamzam I. Nyandara**



My participation in the Women in Academia European Tour 2026 was one of the most enriching and transformative experiences of my academic journey. From 21 May to 1 June 2026, I joined eighteen fellow women academicians from the Open University of Tanzania on a remarkable journey through Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France. While the tour provided valuable opportunities for academic learning, cultural exposure, professional networking, and personal growth, its greatest impact extended far beyond the destinations we visited.

One of the most meaningful aspects of the tour was the opportunity to connect with colleagues from the Open University of Tanzania, whom I rarely have the chance to interact with, even though we work within the same institution. Away from our offices, lecture rooms, and daily responsibilities, we discovered one another in a different way. Through shared conversations, long train journeys, meals, and moments of

laughter, I gained a **deeper appreciation of their expertise, aspirations, experiences, and contributions**. More importantly, we built genuine friendships that I believe will strengthen future collaboration across faculties and disciplines.

Our academic engagements at Bielefeld University, KU Leuven, UNESCO Headquarters, and the Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania in France **broadened my understanding of research culture, academic leadership, international partnerships, gender equality, and inclusive higher education**. Listening to scholars share their experiences and learning about the systems that support academic excellence encouraged me to reflect on my own professional journey. The **experience challenged me to think more globally** while remaining firmly grounded in the realities and opportunities of our own context.

Beyond the academic programme, the tour exposed us to diverse cultures, histories, and ways of life. Every destination offered something unique, reminding us that **learning also happens outside lecture halls and conference rooms**. One of my most memorable experiences was the warm welcome we received at the Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania in France. The **hospitality, kindness, and genuine sense of belonging** reminded me that, **no matter how far we travel, home is often found in the people who warmly receive us**. It was a moment that filled me with pride in being Tanzanian.

Like any journey across several countries, ours came with unexpected challenges. Train delays, missed connections, and the constant task of managing luggage occasionally tested our patience. Yet those moments revealed one of our group's greatest strengths, our **willingness to support one another**. As the journey progressed, luggage was no longer "mine"

or "yours"; it became "ours." Whenever someone struggled, others stepped in without hesitation. That simple act of **sharing responsibility became one of the most powerful lessons of the entire experience and reflected the true meaning of teamwork and sisterhood**.

Above all, the exchange strengthened the bonds among women academics. It demonstrated that **collaboration, empathy, encouragement, and mutual support** are not only essential for overcoming challenges but also for **building lasting professional relationships**. The journey reminded me that when women create spaces to learn together, share experiences, and celebrate one another's successes, they build communities capable of inspiring meaningful change.

As I reflect on this unforgettable experience, I return home with far more than photographs and souvenirs. I carry new knowledge, renewed motivation, stronger professional networks, cherished friendships, and memories that will remain with me for years to come. The Women in Academia European Tour was not simply an academic visit; **it was a journey that reinforced the importance of collaboration, lifelong learning, and the extraordinary impact of women supporting women**. Together, we travelled across borders, but more importantly, we strengthened connections that will continue to shape our academic journeys long after the tour ends.



Sisterhood is a powerful bond built on loyalty, unconditional love, and shared experiences, whether with a biological relative or a chosen friend.



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