

CHAPTER 12

YOUNG WOMEN IN THEATRE AND FILM PRODUCTION: THE CASE OF UGANDAN “ARTREPRENEUR” KEMIYONDO COUTINHO

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INTRODUCTION

Kemiyondo Coutinho is a young Ugandan *Artrepreneur* who writes, acts, directs, produces, curates and organises events to disrupt prevailing narratives about Africa. Styling herself as an *Artrepreneur* engaged in multiple arts projects, Kemiyondo challenges society’s belief that one can only be good at one thing and, even worse, that one should choose one thing to be good at. Kemiyondo believes that in taking on multiple roles, she is showing society that to be an active citizen “one must use ALL their superpowers and ALL their talents to achieve a sole purpose” (Coutinho 2018).

Kemiyondo’s passion and interest in acting started at primary school in Swaziland, starring in a play and relishing the attention. Later, completing her International Baccalaureate Diploma at Waterford Kamhalaba United World College, also in Swaziland, Kemiyondo was gripped by the need to tell a story about African women. After failing to find a suitable story, Kemiyondo created her own one-woman play *Jabulile*, fulfilling her passion for “the missing narrative, the silenced narrative, the narrative we choose to ignore” (Coutinho 2018). *Jabulile* was to launch Kemiyondo as an *Artrepreneur*.

This chapter will demonstrate how Kemiyondo uses her agency to create artistic platforms addressing social issues confronting African women, empowering young artists and challenging perspectives on the arts in Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Young people are increasingly creating their own spaces outside traditional engagement in politics and civic life, uncovering new ways in which they can influence their communities. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp have emboldened them to unleash their potential for social transformation in new ways. For example, social networks played a major role in the involvement of young people in the Arab Spring of 2011. The extraordinary activities of African youth are also being brought to the fore in the media more often than ever. In the May 2013 edition of *New African* magazine, Belinda Otas showcased fifty trailblazers for “breaking new ground and making Africa proud and propelling it into a future of great hope.” Most of the trailblazers were between

the ages of 15 and 35. Forbes magazine also publishes an annual list of the extraordinary achievements of young Africans in different sphere of life.

Kemiyondo belongs to a generation of young people who are creating new spaces for themselves. Her work is contextualised against the background of the status of women and of the arts in Uganda. Her projects have been well received both in her country Uganda and in the USA, where she is now based.

Uganda, like many countries in Africa and around the world, is a patriarchal society with a stark inequality between the genders and where the domineering power of men keeps women subjugated and subservient. ¹⁵In a blog post on <https://womanstats.wordpress.com/2012/09/23/gender-roles-in-uganda> an American researcher, identifying herself as CJ, recounted her experiences of gender roles after spending four months living in the slums of rural Uganda as follows:

One of the biggest issues for me in Uganda was the gender roles. Men expect their women to be docile and subservient. Men expect to get a woman on the merits of having money or professing love within moments of meeting her. In familial relationships, men would generally get to make the decisions. I met men who were proud of the fact that they had cheated on their wives. I met many more men who brashly told me that they would cheat on their wife if I was willing to have sex. I often saw men drinking away their money while women were trying to feed and clothe their kids with what little money they could earn alone. I heard first hand from destitute women how men were unwilling to use condoms or negotiate sexual activity with their wives – even though the men already had several uncared-for children.

CJ also noted a disturbing attitude held by many women:

What was surprising to me, and what I have not heard often discussed in informal spheres, was that the women were perpetuating this oppressive culture. We usually talk of issues like this in terms of what the men do, but we do not always mention how the women are continuing their oppression.

To buttress this claim, CJ gave an example of how school-age girls would exchange unprotected sex with older men for small amounts of money. She saw pregnant teenage girls dropping out of school while the men simply disappeared. The problem, she continued, “is greatly exaggerated by the fact that the girls feel as if they have no self-worth.” She concludes by highlighting the roles that mothers play to perpetuate this oppression:

The girls know no other way of life, because this is what their mothers teach them. The children learn from watching their mothers that the women are to be subservient to the men. The children learn from their mothers' actions that boys are to be treated preferentially. The women push their girls into making money any way they can and belittle them. The mothers in this society, and perhaps many others, are teaching their girls to feel as if they have no worth and to be subservient to men.

According to Coutinho (2018) women are not valued in Uganda. She is angry that in the wake of the recent murders of 26 women, the authorities failed to act. Coutinho also sees a recently passed law that effectively banned miniskirts, in response to the harassment of women, as victim-blaming and counter to government claims to address gender inequality and to empower women (Isanga 2015).

While Kabayambi (2016) acknowledges progress in Uganda to close the gender gap in the enrolment of girls in education and in the participation of women in business, genderised disparities and discrimination remain dire and unacceptable. She identifies four obstacles to achieving gender parity in Uganda:

poor or non-existent maternal health services causing high maternal morbidity and mortality; poor quality education with a high dropout rate of especially girls in primary schools; cultural impediments to land, asset and property ownership and security for women and cultural attitudes and practices which have led to rampant gender-based violence.

Despite these obstacles, Uganda still came 58 out of 145 countries in a 2015 UN Gender Gap Report which assessed a combination of economic, education, health and political indicators.

A look at the Ugandan arts scene is relevant in contextualising Kemiyondo's work. The history of the arts in Uganda can be traced from precolonial times, through the missionary and colonial eras to post independence politics (Wilde 2006). Ntangaare (2001:143-193) describes the four main constituents of theatre in Uganda as "traditional/community theatre, commercial theatre, education theatre and development theatre." Despite this, she identifies institutions such as The Uganda National Cultural Centre and The International Theatre Institute largely as business enterprises. This follows the killing, during Idi Amin's draconian rule, of Byron Kawadwa, Wycliffe Kiyingi and Robert Serumaga, three prominent dramatists who operated under censorship to produce political theatre. The oppression and exile of artists thereafter reduced theatre to be conservative and commercial.

Kaiza (2013) recounts how an experienced theatre hand with memories of quality, professionalism theatre in the 1960s and early 1970s told him what the National Theatre descended to:

They had plays without order, without plans. Then later, how they paid the actors depended on who became the most popular that day on the stage. The most popular actors got the most money, and popularity depended on how you were received on stage. So each actor tried to be more popular. Even if you were coming on stage for five minutes, you tried to use that time to become popular, so you walked in a funny way, you changed your voice to sound funny. The five minutes became 15 minutes and they had to take you off stage. If you refused to pay heed to the director telling you to get off stage, other actors would come to pull you away. You refused and fights ensued.

Audiences were reported to be unruly, sometimes slapping actors, spitting and holding up plays for several hours. Actors were not paid and lived in danger. Ultimately, because of this degeneration, a directive was issued that theatres should produce scripted plays delivered to a schedule. This demand caused a general move away from local or traditional drama towards western plays. The space to tell the African narrative was removed, derailing any attempt at decolonisation of theatre. Furthermore, only expatriates with significant financial means could afford to stage plays. An exception was the Kampala Dramatic Arts Society.

Ugandan theatre was given a breath of life in 2005 with the production of *Dance and Drama in Uganda: The Pearl of Africa* –a collaboration between folklore exponent Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare and New Zealander Susan Battye, both researchers, playwrights and teachers. Theatre practitioners also became freer after two decades of civil war but the freedom, according to Wilde (2006), was limited by the ongoing demands of commercialisation and privatization which made the production of quality new plays prohibitive.

A break came in 2012 with Judith Adong's *Silent Voices*. Kaiza (2013) in an online journal describes it "as a courageous dramatization of the war in northern Uganda" as the play "caused fears of a backlash, brought back the kind of quality and professionalism we had ceased to think possible in the country." Kemiyo is one of the actresses featured in the play. The rebirth of quality theatre and professionalism was however short lived as government clamped down in late 2012 on the staging of another play *The River and The Mountain*. Kaiza (2013) describes it as "a brilliant

play, brilliantly directed by Angella Emurwon, the staging of which gave air to some of the brightest, young acting talent in this country.”

Coutinho (2018), describes the arts scene in Uganda in 2012, when she made her debut, as redundant “people went to the same events, listened to the same artists and no-one was putting the newcomers on a stage or giving them a chance to say something. In some ways the art scene emulated our government. Everyone was afraid to try something new.”

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Kemiyondo’s projects can be analysed and discussed within the theoretical framework of feminism. Contemporary postcolonial concepts such as otherness, hybridity and disruption, with roots in the works of Said (1991), Bhabha (1992) and Spivak (1995), are used as part of a discursive strategy while reference is also made to Sen’s (1999) female empowerment and Adichie’s (2014) and Gordon’s (2017) postmodern feminism.

Feminism as a global ideology is concerned with confronting the oppression and inequality between men and women in patriarchal societies. It advocates for the equal rights of females in a world where male dominance permeates social, political, cultural, family, religious and economic institutions. Feminist theorists interrogate the invisibility of women in all spheres of life and fight for the emancipation and empowerment of females. According to Crossman (2018), feminist theory shines a light on social problems, trends and issues that are otherwise overlooked or misidentified from a historically dominant male perspective. Crossman (2018) identifies the key areas of focus as discrimination and exclusion on the basis of sex and gender, objectification, structural and economic inequality, power and oppression, and gender roles and stereotypes.

In the 1960s, postcolonialism emerged as a critical reaction to Eurocentric approaches to evaluating texts and is associated with the rise of advocacy groups on race, gender, ethnicity and democracy (Mongia 1996:5). Since then, postcolonial theory “has been transforming and transmuting in accordance with the intellectual climate of the day” (Kalua 2014:66). In this chapter, a contemporary view of postcolonial theory is adopted to locate feminism in postcolonial discourse. According to Young (2003:7):

postcolonial theory involves issues that are the preoccupations of other disciplines and activities, particularly to do with the position of women, of development, of

ecology, of social justice, of socialism in the broadest sense. Above all, postcolonialism seeks to intervene, to force its alternative knowledge into the power structures of the west as well as the non-west. It seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave, to produce a more just and equitable relation between the different people of the world.

Both feminism and postcolonialism are disruptive and present a challenge to the existing order. In *Orientalism*, Said (1991) criticises the Western representation of the East and particularly Muslims as marginal, peripheral and inferior, thereby casting Orientals as 'Others'. The concept of Otherness within postcolonial discourse is linked to the construction of binary identities in which one opposite is vested with power and controls the other. In feminist discourse, the power relation casts female as the 'Other', defined and differentiated with reference to the male. This concept will be used to analyse and discuss Kemiyondo's projects in order to highlight the marginalization of women and how they have been defined as 'Other' in patriarchal societies.

Unlike Said, Homi Bhabha (1992, 1994) perceives the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised as "inherently unstable" rather than fixed in terms of binary opposites. This perception leads to the notion of hybridity (Bertens 2008:167). Bhabha recognises the movement and interaction between colonisers and the colonised in both directions. He acknowledges the fluidity (the possibilities of continuous and repeated changes that allow for free movement) between the two cultures, creating a "colonial hybrid." Bhabha argues that the cultural interaction of coloniser and colonised leads to hybridity - a fusion of cultural forms which blurs the binary opposites identified by Said. This concept of hybridity, as the fusion of forms made possible by fluidity of interaction, is utilised as an analytical strategy to examine Kemiyondo's ability to transcend boundaries by fusing arts forms together and in examining her as an artist with a hybrid identity.

Spivak is acknowledged as the first postcolonial theorist with a fully feminist agenda (Bertens 2008:169). She insists on the inclusion of feminist perspectives in postcolonial discourse thus facilitating the interconnectedness between postcolonialism and feminism by paying attention to the difference between male and female representations. She questions why Western feminism operates from white, middle class and heterosexual perspectives and pays consistent attention to those she has called the subaltern. A description she ascribes to the lower layers of people in colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial societies. These are the groups of people in society with the least power of all. Spivak focuses on the female subaltern, describing them as doubly marginalised,

in patriarchal societies under colonial / neocolonial control, with no history and no voice (Spivak 1995b:28). Spivak's attention to the female subaltern, according to Bertens (2008:170) is borne out of her desire to save them from misrepresentation rather than to speak for them. One of the major themes in Kemiyondo's projects is the desire to tell the story of the female subaltern in Uganda and Africa by challenging the way in which they have been misrepresented by Western narratives.

Sen's (1999) female empowerment is also useful in discussing Kemiyondo's feminist agency to transcend boundaries by empowering herself and other artists. Gordon's (2017) definition of postmodern feminism can be adopted to describe Kemiyondo in the spirit of Adichie's (2014) invitation that *We must all be feminist* in terms of interrogating subtle nuances of discrimination and oppression in language and attitude and in debunking the idea of feminism as a purely female endeavour by advocating for the involvement of men.

METHODOLOGY

A single case study design is used, within the qualitative methodological approach. According to Stewart (2014:144), a case study is an exploratory form of inquiry, providing an in-depth picture of the unit of study, which can be a person, group, organisation or social situation. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it is used for the in-depth study of a phenomenon. The purpose according to Mills and Birks (2014:9) is to examine phenomena that impact on the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural and social context.

The population for this study is mainly Kemiyondo Coutinho and selected artists who have worked closely with her. The participants were purposively selected and interviewed. Purposive sampling, according to Patton (2015), leads to the selection of information-rich cases from which a great deal can be garnered about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. The main person interviewed is Kemiyondo Coutinho herself, followed by artists involved in her projects.

In terms of the data collection method and procedure, an online ethnography methodology was employed. Online ethnography, according to Skågeby (2011:410) "envelopes document collection, online observation and online interviews". Since watching a live performance of Kemiyondo's first play *Jabulile* in 2006 I have followed her career, mainly online, through her undergraduate years and Master's programmes. I

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listened to programmes broadcast on radio and television about her work, consulted magazine articles and watched a YouTube documentary and commentary on her work.

My interest in KemiYondo's work led to being asked to contribute to the book *Youth in Africa: Agents of Change*. I immediately contacted KemiYondo asking for her permission to write about her work and armed with that consent, I emailed details to her so that she could be fully informed about the book project. I also sought her assistance in gaining access to some of the artists who worked with her, requesting their consent to discuss the influence of her work. I applied to the ethical clearance committee of my institution to interview her and the selected artists. There were two sets of interview questions, one for KemiYondo and the other for the artists.

The data sources are:

- 1) KemiYondo's arts projects
- 2) The interview response from KemiYondo
- 3) Interview responses from selected artists as supportive evidence

These multiple sources enrich the analysis with different perspectives.

The in-depth written interview was conducted electronically. The interview questions were compiled and sent via email to those who consented to take part in the study. Email is being used because the participants are in different parts of the world including Uganda and across the USA. Selected content from KemiYondo's projects are analysed.

KEMIYONDO'S CREATIVE ARTS INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS

KemiYondo's projects can be explored within the broad concepts of agency and empowerment, through the lenses of feminism and contemporary postcolonial discourse.

FIRST PLAYS

Jabulile (2006) tells the story of the inequality and patriarchal oppression faced by female market vendors in Swaziland. Creating, writing and acting in *Jabulile* crystallised KemiYondo's commitment to feminism and women issues in Africa. She describes this as follows:

In interviewing Swazi women for a one-woman show I was writing, I was able to correlate their issues with gender equality. This began my vicious and intense exploration of gender and the way it was affecting those around me. It became clear that hot topics like poverty, HIV/AIDS, sexual harassment could all be linked to being a woman.

In *Jabulile*, Kemiyoondo deconstructs the stereotypical single narrative about African women and gives voice to the plight of voiceless female subaltern in patriarchal societies. The play was first performed internationally at the 2010 National Arts Festival in South Africa and subsequently in Uganda, Canada and the USA.

Kemiyoondo's second play, *Kawuna...you're it!* (2012) in her own words, "interweaves three stories surrounding HIV and the stigma it presents: an orphan left behind because of HIV, an ex-rebel soldier who contracted HIV as a result of war, and an elite woman who contracts HIV within her 'monogamous' marriage." The play explores how three Ugandan women support one another and once again gives voice to the voiceless women who never normally feature in theatre. In this play, Kemiyoondo disrupts the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS by demonstrating that HIV/AIDS affects all of us by the examples of an orphan left behind, a woman in "monogamous" marriage who contracted HIV through the promiscuity of her husband and how circumstances such as war is capable of exposing someone to HIV as with the ex-rebel soldier. More importantly, the play highlights the type of positive support needed to break the stigma around HIV/AIDS. *Kawuna...you're it!* premiered at a Gender Studies Symposium at Lewis and Clark College in Oregon, featured at the Sky Festival in San Francisco, and was selected for a New York Global Spotlight Reading and a Gates Foundation HIV/AIDS commemoration day.

FIRST FILM: KYENVU

Kemiyoondo's film debut with *Kyenvu* (2017) was inspired by the passing of Ugandan 2014 Anti-Pornography bill commonly referred to as the "miniskirt bill." The bill blames pornography and not men's attitude for the sexual abuse of women and children. According to Walker (2018) the bill emboldened men to sexually harass women for their choice of clothing. The film provided a means for people to engage in conversations about the issue and to take the first steps towards change.

The film depicts the taunts that a young independent woman experiences daily in using public transport in a patriarchal society that entitles men to sexually harass, abuse

and rape women whose appearance is perceived to be revealing and provocative. Kemiyoondo infuses the difficult subject of violence against women with humour, love, joy and colour by setting the story around the day to day activity of getting to the bus stop, boarding the bus and disembarking from the bus at designated stops around Kampala. In doing this, she disrupts the single narrative of the West about Uganda and by extension about Africa and African issues.

Kemiyoondo founded a company called *Kemistry Klass* to produce *Kyenvu* and other films challenging standard narratives about Africa, and in particular to encourage female film directors. Kemiyoondo feels that *Kyenvu* tells “the story in the film but also secondly, the story OF the film.” She comments:

We need to watch ourselves to make change. Even as a director/actor, I watch myself on the playback and make adjustments from what I am seeing. It is harder from within the scene because I am in the scene. This is like life. We are living and very rarely do we get to watch ourselves. It is important to me that people saw the role they were playing in the violence against women. That harmful sexist joke doesn't seem so funny when you realise how it contributes to the culture that perpetuates these cases. The choice not to correct your male friends when they say something out of line doesn't seem so passive anymore. It was important to tell a story that allows for the reflection of us as a society and how much we value or rather don't value the female body.

Kemiyoondo had been inspired by another film, *Ayanda*, and how South Africa had been portrayed. She wanted Uganda to be shown in the same authentic light with all its complexity – the beauty, the bad, the good, the ugly – and so wrote the story that had long been in her heart. Lacking funds, she reached out to the Ugandan arts community. She asked people who were familiar with her work to be Executive Producers and approached three production houses for support. Then, with no screen or directorial experience, she decided to direct and act in the film. In her own words: “I decided it! I hope that more women and specifically African Women decide they are qualified to do the thing that is on their heart. I am willing to bet that if it is on your heart, something within you already knows how to do it.”

Kemiyoondo's determination to follow her vision and trust the process of making *Kyenvu* brought her to prominence in the movie industry. The film used real life experiences to call attention to harassment based on stereotyped perceptions of female appearance. *Kyenvu* also, deliberately, used a 100 per cent Ugandan cast, crew and

soundtrack in order to disrupt the narrative that Ugandans need to import talent to produce industry-standard work. *Kyenvu* made its world premiere at the Oscar-Qualifying Pan African Film Festival, winning the Grand Jury Prize for Best Short Film. *Kyenvu* has since won Best African Talent Award at the Zanzibar International Film, Best International Short Film Award at the Johannesburg Short Film Festival and Harness Social Impact Award at the NBCUniversal Short Film Festival. In addition, it has been the official selection at Black Star Film Festival, Bronzelens and San Francisco Black Film Festival. It has been screened at the Cannes Film Festival, in several cities in the USA and submitted for an Academy Award.

Kemiyondo's projects demonstrate her quintessential passion and the unique agency she has to challenge oppression and inequality, shape new perspectives and empower women. Jejeebhoy (2000) defines empowerment as women gaining control of their own lives vis-à-vis family, community, society and markets. Kabeer (2001:6) describes empowerment as "thinking outside the system", challenging the status quo and "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices", previously denied. Both definitions capture Kemiyondo's creative imperatives. At core lies Kemiyondo's personal agency which, according to Mayr (2011), is the capacity to operate freely in a predetermined world. Kemiyondo's agency is her extraordinary ability to identify, pursue and achieve her own goals. In so doing, she breaks through the norms that have defined and constrained agency for African women. Kemiyondo's metacognitive self-awareness underpins her capacity, at a deep level, to understand and empathise with those who suffer injustice as is the case in *Jabulile*, *Kawuna...you're it!* and *Kyenvu*.

As a feminist, Kemiyondo uses her woman agency (Sen, 1999) to facilitate social transformation, specifically her artistic presence, to reduce exploitation and inequality within patriarchies. *Jabulile*, *Kawuna...you're it!* and *Kyenvu* are driven by her fierce and courageous refusal to accept the depiction of women as "Others" (Said, 1991) or "subalterns" (Spivak, 1995). According to Umutesi (2018) Kemiyondo is always looking out for the underdog.

As a postmodern feminist, Kemiyondo's work portrays how subtle social assumptions about women, and how they should be regarded, are created by social discourse and language. According to Gordon (2017) postmodern feminism is concerned with the relativity of social understanding, emphasising deconstruction, critical questioning and the examination of language and meaning. Kemiyondo's postmodern feminist ideals are demonstrated in the love story in *Kyenvu*. She believes that a man

cannot just say he likes a woman without knowing the woman so when the man trying to woo the independent woman said to her “I like you” the independent woman replied by saying “You don’t know me so you can’t like me.” When eventually the man followed her well enough to know that she likes yellow she let her guard down and accepted his date invitation because he has made an effort to know her rather than basing his likeness on her looks or how beautiful she is.

The discomfort felt by the audience in the scene after the rape also highlights KemiYondo’s postmodernist perspective on feminism. She questions the action or non-action of other men who stand by and do nothing against the perpetuation of violence against women. In an interview with Aramide Tinubu of *SHADOW AND ACT*, KemiYondo states:

I told this story because for me, it’s less about acts, and it’s more around the people surrounding the protagonist. I wanted to investigate the allies – the good guys. I wanted to see what happens when you are seeing these things happen at the hands of your fellow man. An ally does not ask, “What were you wearing?” I’m sorry, that is not an ally.

Her feminist perspective matches Adichie’s (2014) call for everyone to become feminist in order to achieve the desired equality between men and women because being an ally according to KemiYondo means “getting uncomfortable. If you want to see change, we’ve got to get uncomfortable – all of us.” Both Adichie and KemiYondo also advocate for the exposure of unconscious subtle nuances of discrimination against women. They both believe that feminism should not be women’s issue alone but that men should also speak out against sexual violence and discriminatory practices that subjugate women as Others in patriarchal society. In the interview with Tinubu KemiYondo asserts:

Feminism is not just for women. This fight is not just about women. Men need to speak up. In fact, I think that’s who really needs to speak up and they also have to start listening to women and be there for them.

Martin (2018), having worked with KemiYondo, attests to her feminist boldness: “She was creating deeply profound feminist work before the hashtag #thefutureisfemale even existed. She was creating unapologetic work concerning gender dynamics and gender politics before the #metoo movement hit its recent second wind.”

KemiYondo’s work has disrupted long-held cultural perspectives about African women as subjugated, dominated, silenced, voiceless, powerless and therefore inferior

and othered in comparison to men. Contrary to Butler's (1988) argument that we are constrained and restricted by social taboos concerning gendered spaces, Kemiyoondo has shown that this notion can be disrupted and that expectations and taboos, in Uganda and elsewhere, can be broken. Her work has also led to consciousness raising about feminist identity. According to Kawe (2018), the producer and co-curator of Kampala International Theatre Festival and Kemiyoondo's mentor, she is unapologetically feminist.

THE NUVO ARTS FESTIVAL

The *NuVo Arts Festival, New Voices* (2013), was conceived, curated and directed by Kemiyoondo in Uganda. The week-long festival promoted HIV/AIDS awareness under the theme HIV/AIDS: NO STATISTICS ALLOWED. It was created to foster the arts and to give Ugandans an opportunity to be inspired by their own arts and artists. Kemiyoondo used the festival to draw attention to how arts can become a powerful catalyst for change in addition to its entertainment and educational roles. She targeted young Kampala professionals / students and older high school students as audience and brought a San Francisco based African photographer, two Kenyan poets/storytellers, a Black American who had never been to Africa and an American theatre arts practitioner and some more talented artists from all over Africa. Martin (2018), who participated in the festival, describes it as an example of how Kemiyoondo carves out space and uses artistic expression as a catalyst for social dialogue and change. In addition, she states that Kemiyoondo did not wait for someone else to create the space, she created and produced the festival out of thin air - all within a few months and while pursuing a masters' degree. Martin sums up what Kemiyoondo did in the one-week festival in the following words:

She was making *Kampala* an epicenter for art, entertainment, music, theatre, fellowship, learning, education, and growth - a place that most Americans sadly would not even be able to point out on a map of Africa - she was making that place THEE place. She was giving Africa an opportunity to be vulnerable, sexy, fun, artsy, talented, poetic, open, free.

The festival demonstrates Kemiyoondo's multitalented ability to fill missing gaps and to promote arts for change by creating the change she wants to see. She also disrupts society's expectations that one can only be good at one thing by taking up multiple roles at the festival and equally performing with equal ability in the different roles.

THE A KA DOPE COMPANY

The *A Ka Dope* company (2016) was created to give a platform for little known Ugandan artists. Kemiyoondo describes it as "a collection of events that aim to disrupt the current entertainment scene in Uganda with new, fresh and unconventional acts." The monthly events feature actors, musicians, painters and poets. She describes it as "the melting pot of creativity, which brings artists from across genres and disciplines, allowing them to share an audience and platform." *A Ka Dope*, she says, is about changing and reinventing the way we participate in art.

It is in this project that Kemiyoondo's multi-dimensional agency comes most into play. She collaborated with and mentored many Ugandan budding artists, promoting fluidity between arts forms and creating hybrid performances for example by fusing singers from different genres to produce NEW ART, in which artists are pushed beyond their boundaries. The disruption even extended to the narrative that certain music genres cannot be mixed, by putting six artists with completely different sounds together. Kemiyoondo uses *A ka Dope* events to disrupts the music industry which has been dominated for a long time in Uganda by established old musicians branded as superstars by creating alternative music and style. In founding and spearheading *A ka Dope* Kemiyoondo says she "wanted to see new art and to develop a new audience to appreciate that which they did not already know." She states that she learnt two things in doing this in Kampala, first that new art, new faces and new voices were waiting to emerge but had no platform and second that audiences can be trained and cultivated to have a curiosity for the unknown.

Reflecting further, she says:

So with A Ka Dope we have built an audience that now attends an event where they don't have to know an artist but they come to discover artists. There is a trust in the brand for quality and thus audiences come knowing that they will discover a new gem they didn't know about. A new risky but ground-breaking way to consume art in Uganda.

A ka Dope takes place every first Friday of the month and trends as #1 twitter topic in Uganda on the day of event. In addition, from an audience of 120 at the first show the audience has grown to 550. It has attracted over 150 artists from versatile and diverse genres in Uganda and has been showcased at the largest Ugandan music arts festival, Nyege Nyege. It featured as part of BBC's "Across Women's Lives." It affords Ugandans the opportunity of watching high quality entertainment in the form of music, poetry, songs and rap.

Kemiyondo's multiple identities allow her to experiment and achieve success by thinking out of the box. As a cosmopolitan who by nature is a hybrid of many cultures and therefore a walking culture clash, she is able to bring multi-dimensional perspective to her work. For example, she is heavily influenced by music as demonstrated in *A Ka Dope* events and *Kyenvu* and by visual arts as seen in the images she uses in her plays. She admits that she coaches singers like actors and believes in the fusion of knowledge to create something new rather than compartmentalize what we know.

Many Ugandan artists spoke glowingly about *A Ka Dope*. Kawe (2018) describes it as a perfect example of Kemiyondo's art and entrepreneurship skills, creating a fun space for Ugandan music lovers. *A Ka Dope* according to Kawe has become a household name among music lovers in Kampala, young and old. New employment and mentorship opportunities have also been created. Juliet Yiga, a director for Anchorage Media gained experience on *A Ka Dope* and *Kyenvu*; rapper, producer and singer Lagun Owor was mentored for *A Ka Dope* while Afsa Umutesi became a co-producer for *A Ka Dope*. Oyenbot (2018) also attests to Kemiyondo's use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter in promoting her work.

One of Kemiyondo's challenges has to do with her identity as a person. Born in Uganda and relocating with her parents at an early age to Swaziland, now Eswatini, and studying for her undergraduate and Master's degrees in the USA, Kemiyondo is a potpourri of cultures and does not belong solidly to anywhere, making her identify as "the other." She was the only black student in her college to graduate from theatre arts. She endured institutionalised racism in her undergraduate years. This according to her "lit a fire in her to provide stories that combat what she experienced." As a former student of Waterford Kamhlaba United World College of Southern Africa, Kemiyondo often finds her worldview more expansive than those around her at rehearsals. This means that she is never really integrated and immersed in any of the cultures she is part of. So for example she is African and black in the United States of America but is made to feel non Ugandan in Uganda because of her accent, lighter skin colour and her postmodern feminist ideas.

However, finance has been her main challenge. For example, she says *A Ka Dope* has struggled because it is hard to get finance without people changing the vision. Lack of finance also limits her desire to shoot a new film each year in Uganda. Although this would create jobs it remains difficult to find finance or secure funding support from government.

Other challenges include getting Ugandan audiences to pay for art. This is because paying for art is a relatively new development and audiences are still reluctant to pay prices high enough to support artists. The artists she works with are also still relatively unconvinced that art can be a job and not just a passion. Some find it difficult to defer to Kemiyoondo and bypass her to ask a male member of the cast for clarification, even though she is the employer: she remains just a woman. Her limited experience in the film industry also makes her vulnerable and unsure when promoting her work in the film industry.

In terms of criticism, her work is too radical for African culture and not radical enough for new wave feminism. *A ka Dope's* audience has also stagnated and needs to continue growing. In Uganda, she is regarded as privileged and the success of her work is attributed to her class position rather than on merit. This latter criticism is unfair and discriminatory as her work has attained global and continental recognition.

Kemiyoondo has won several awards and featured on international television and radio. Her awards include: Young Achievers Award, 2012, Arts & Culture; KCACTF Playwright, 2012; Dorothy Berkson Award, Gender Studies, 2012; Best Lead Actress, Broadwayworld.com, 2015; Gypsy Rose Lee award for best actress, 2015; Leo Africa Institute Fellowship, 2016. Kemiyoondo was also profiled on CNN's African Voices (2017) and BBC's Across Women's Voices (2017). She was named as one of Forbes' Under 30 Achievers in June 2018.

Kemiyoondo's work is globally relevant because it enhances the current conversation to empower as many women as possible to speak out against sexual abuse by coming out to tell about their own abuse. In addition, she is changing the Western monolithic narrative of Africa as a continent of war, poverty and disease and of people who are inherently inferior. In its place she is creating truthful stories of Africa that reflect a balanced perspective of the complexities of Africa in a multi-dimensional way. As an artist of global repute, she serves as a role model for young African artists. She provides them with the courage to dare without seeking permission from anyone and without limiting themselves. Kemiyoondo is also showcasing Ugandan talents globally especially with *Kyenvu*.

Within Ugandan society, her works have opened up conversations on difficult subjects concerning violence against women with the long term goal of changing society's perspective about women and of achieving equality between men and women. On the art scene, she has empowered young artists rather than the institution by creating a platform for them to share audiences and by pushing them through training, workshops

and rehearsal on how to excel in their work as well as how to collaborate with other artists to create something new. Her works push the limits and the boundaries in order to create the change she wants.

CONCLUSIONS

Kemiyondo is a storyteller focussing on women and the arts, Uganda, the African continent and Africa in the diaspora. Kemiyondo is a strong-willed young woman who breaks boundaries and creates new spaces where needed. Her story of social transformation and hope, strengthens belief in our human capacity to innovate and challenge taboos. Kemiyondo's artistic endeavours transcend stereotypical perspectives on women and art. She believes that art, in all its diverse forms, can inspire individuals and collective power to change the world. Most importantly, as Martin (2018) succinctly puts it, Kemiyondo wants to shed a more truthful light on Africa: on how Africans see themselves and on how the world sees Africa.

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