



Appendix

What Has Gender Got to Do with African Comedy and Stand-up Acts?

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Of all the paths to fame and equality in our less-than-fair culture, comedy seems to be among the more retrograde. Those hoary complaints that women aren't funny (yawn), that funny women aren't feminine enough (gag) and that men can't stand the implicit competition they feel from a woman with a sense of humor (I can't hear you) seem to me to be deaf, dumb and blind.

— Lisa Birnbach, *"The comedians who broke the glass ceiling – and laughed"*

Humour may be universal but its retelling and retailing by professional comedians is gendered. While statistics based on authoritative empirical research may be unavailable on the number of male vis-à-vis female comedians in Africa, anecdotal evidence and conventional wisdom easily ratify the notion that there are far more professional male comedians than female comedians. While there is no reasonable body of research that analyses why the African comedy business is gendered—even when women tend to be the butt of jokes¹—the reason for this representation is lopsided and not that difficult to comprehend.

Against the background of the drought of research on this subject, it is heartening to find Zoe Parker's robust essay, "Standing up for the nation: An investigation of stand-up comedy in South Africa post-1994 with specific reference to women's power and the body" (2002). Equally exciting, Shawn Levy's *In On the Joke: The Original Queens of Stand-up Comedy* (2022), profiles nine of stand-up comedy's pioneering women, "who overcame barriers and shattered glass ceilings to pave the way for many recognizable women in comedy today" (CBC Radio 2022). Prominent among the women is Jackie "Moms" Mabley, the Black ex-vaudevillian, and the subject of Whoopi Goldberg's celebrated HBO documentary, "Whoopi Goldberg Presents Moms Mabley" (2013).

¹ The new book edited by Ignatius Chukwuma, *Sexual Humour in Africa: Gender, Jokes, and Societal Change* (2022), easily establishes the disproportionate extent to which women are the butt of jokes in Africa's comedic routines often performed by men. It is pertinent as well to recall the widely reported "rape joke" controversy that the Nigerian stand-up comic, Basketmouth was embroiled in in 2014, and which Nwankwo (2022a) explores.

In her essay, Parker echoes the oft-cited literary critic Reginald Horace Blythe in adducing reasons why there are so few women stand-up comedians. The reasons presented include a) the old psychoanalytical assumption that women have no sense of humour, and that “humour is a masculine ‘trait’” (11); and b) the idea that women, in Blythe’s words, are the “unlaughing at which men laugh” and which Parker rightly interprets as positing “women not only as objects of the ‘male gaze’ but of the male laugh” (13). These are the stereotypical views of women’s engagement with comedy which Misty G. Anderson (2002) tackles from a literary perspective in *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* (2002). Anderson deconstructs the prejudicial theorizing on women and comedy by the English playwright and poet, William Congreve. Drawing from a letter titled “Concerning Humour in Comedy”, Anderson derisively quotes Congreve: “methinks something should be observed of the Humour of the Fair Sex...Perhaps Passions are too powerful in that Sex, to let Humour have its Course; or may be by reason of their Natural Coldness. Humour cannot exert itself to the extravagant Degree, which it often does in our Male Sex.” (22).² Further illuminating the discrimination against women’s engagement with comedy which Parker illustrates in the South African context in her aforementioned essay. Anderson then cynically paraphrases Congreve’s conjecture, noting that “The lack of humour in women comes from some essential difference between men and women” and that “women fall out of the register of humour, just as they tend to be disqualified as valid jokers in most comic theory” (22). Needless to add, there is no inherent (biological) difference between men and women that influences who becomes a comedian.

The studies by Levy, Anderson, and Parker referenced above generally shed light on the sexism that underpins women’s victimhood in the content and discourses on comedy, the numerical gap between African male and female comedians, as well as the bias in their professional trajectory. Specifically focusing on the South African experience, Parker further addresses the shortage of women stand-up comedians after 1994 while exploring the connection between this scarcity and “women’s power and the body” (8). The essay also “questions the dominant white male discourse that operates within stand-up comedy in South Africa whilst emphasizing the need for alternative discourses to be voiced” (Ibid.). Parker’s article further draws from the theoretical perspectives of the historian and philosopher, Michel Foucault, on resistance to make a case for “how women in stand-up comedy might challenge and subvert patriarchy” (Ibid.). She charges that, “if stand-up comedy is to realise its potential as an inclusive and democratic performance form, women comedians must begin to stand up, speak out and laugh in ‘good conscience’” (11).

Besides the focus on South Africa in Parker’s essay, Nigeria and Egypt are the other African countries that feature prominently in discourses on the African stand-up comedy and gender. This much is evident from two of the essays published in one of the most notable recent collections of essays on African stand-up comedy, *Stand-Up Comedy in Africa: Humour in Popular Languages and Media* edited by Izuu Nwankwo (2022b). The following three excerpts from the book offer insights in relation to the focus of this Appendix:

1. “Even with the advances made in both Egypt and Nigeria since the emergence of professional stand-up acts, women continue to be the subject of jokes but hardly the ones behind the microphone.” (Okadigwe and El Sawy, 2022: 109)
2. “Female comics in Nigeria and Egypt perform under repressive and unfavourable circumstances. For this purpose, [they] perform to audiences accustomed to male-centric jokes and structures that are less tolerant of female perspectives.” (Okadigwe and El Sawy, 2022: 112)
3. “The near absence of women on the African stand-up stage is evident in Egypt and Nigeria, where more than 97% of performers are male [more than 95% are male in Egypt, according to Okadigwe

² For more on this, see Congreve’s original letter at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A65151.0001.001/1:13.21?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>

and El Sawy, 2022: 110]. In both nations, the conditions of becoming and sustaining a career in joke-telling are easier for men” (Nwankwo 2022c: 25)

Although these percentages may not be empirically demonstrated, without question they point to the significant marginalization of women in the industry.³ It is partly for this reason that Lisa Birnbach, in the epigraph to this Appendix above, fires her excoriation of “our less-than-fair culture” in which “comedy seems to be among the more retrograde” (n.p.). It is for the same reason, too, that I raised issues pertaining to gender in interviews I had with leading African female comedians. But even then, it should be mentioned that some African female comedians acknowledge the support of their male colleagues in coping with professional challenges. For example, Nigeria’s pioneer female comedian, Mandy Uzonitsha, declares in her interview with the author of this article that:

When I came on board even the likes of Alibaba were trying to position and brand their names. I was all alone learning and making my mistakes and progress on stage. But the second female comedienne, Najita Dede, had Patrick Doyle to direct her. Also, Princess had Tee A; Lepacious Bose had Owen G; Ebinyo had Mc Shaggi. Also, I noticed that in Uganda, the first female comedienne Cotilda [Inapo] and Anne Kansime had Salvador [Patrick Idringi] and Pablo [Kenneth Kimuli Amooti] helping them. (2016, n.p)⁴

Notwithstanding such masculine mentoring which Inapo also acknowledged in an interview with the Ugandan *Monitor* (March 17, 2011 [updated on January 07, 2021]), the gravity of the gender imbalance and bias in the African stand-up comedy industry is further foregrounded by a news story on the twelfth edition of the popular Jive Cape Town Funny Festival at the Baxter Theatre in 2016. Captioned “Are women just not funny enough?” and written by Sarah Koopman (2016) for the *Mail & Guardian* of South Africa, the report emphasized that “the lack of representation of women in the 2016 instalment cannot be overlooked” (n.p.) even though the previous year’s edition had featured two female comics, Tumi Morake and Tracy Klass. But, without necessarily setting out to produce a book like Shawn Levy’s which has been hailed by *Publisher’s Weekly* as “[A] riveting cultural history of women’s stand-up comedy between WWII and the 1970s,” the generic question I put to each of the female stand-up comics with slight variations was: “From your personal experience, what has gender got to do with African comedy and stand-up acts? How does gender influence the cultural economy of stand-up comedy in Africa—the number of comediennes, professional fees, and the kind of repertoire available to female/male comedians?”⁵

The following are the relevant excerpts from their responses, with a concise profile added for better identification of the comediennes.

Tracy Klass (South Africa)

Tracy Klass has been described as the “premier South African funny lady [...] known for her ‘growing up disgracefully’ stance on life.”⁶ She has also been labeled “one of Cape Town’s female comedy stars”⁷ (Channel 24, 2016: n.p.). She is a White South African of Jewish origin who went to her local Jewish Day School for primary school, then attended the Ellerslie Girls School in Sea Point. She remembers being sent by her mother to speech

³The point being made here may appear self-evident in any patriarchal society, but there cannot be any overemphasizing it because the geographic difference is crucial as there is, in fact, no uniformity in patriarchy and masculinity across geographies, cultures, race, age, and demographics.

⁴Remarkably, in 2016, both notable Ugandan stand-up comedians—Pablo and Salvador—were nominated for the world’s funniest person competition launched by Laugh Factory to promote world peace through jokes and laughter. “Salvador and Pablo [were] among the 88 comics from 56 countries across the globe for the coveted title” (Manishimwe 2016, n.p.).

⁵The interviews were conducted via email. The female comedians selected here are pioneers in their own right.

⁶See “Wednesday Comedy Night at HQ.” Retrieved from <http://trendsoiree.weebly.com/entertainment/category/tracy-klass>

⁷See “We had a quick chat with one of Cape Town’s female comedy stars.” Retrieved from <https://www.news24.com/channel/we-had-a-quickie-with-one-of-cape-towns-female-comedy-stars-20160805>

and drama lessons as soon as she was able to read. “I continued this as an extracurricular activity until my mid-20s and passed the Trinity College of London Licentiate exams and also passed English II through UNISA [University of South Africa],” she told me in a personal interview from which the excerpt below is taken. She worked in advertising for eight years, went to live in London for two years and returned to South Africa in the early 1990s. Around March 1999 while in Cape Town she saw an article, “Do you think you are funny?” which, according to her, kicked off the comedy circuit in Cape Town and launched the CCC—Cape Comedy Collective —run by Mark Sampson and Sam Pearce. “I had just returned to Cape Town after an 18-year absence with three kids and was getting my shattered life back on track when I saw this article,” she told me, adding: “I had been told by friends that I was a funny person and I thought; well let me give this a go.” The rest is history, to use that hackneyed expression. In July 2011, Klass staged her debut full-length stand-up show, “Klass Struggle”, which she discusses in the excerpt below. A piece in the *Afternoon Express* states that Klass “co-starred in two full length shows with fellow comedienne Mel Jones – ‘Doing it for the Money’ and the sequel at Grand West’s Roxy Revue Bar, ‘Still Doing It’.”⁸ The piece concludes that, “[a]s one of the few female stand-ups in South Africa, Tracy takes an irreverent look at what women find funny—themselves” (Ibid.). Klass has performed in some of the most prestigious comedy venues, shows, and festivals in South Africa, especially in Cape Town.

More recently, along with other stand-up comics Kate Pinchuck, Kurt Schoonraad, Tracy Klass has starred as Bella Bam in the 2021 TV series mockumentary, *Tali’s Baby Diary*, a sequel to the first-ever Showmax Original, *Tali’s Wedding Diary*.⁹ During the pandemic lockdown in February 2021 Klass launched her home business, “A Taste of Klass: traditional Jewish food home cooked by a Jewish mother, for delivery or collection” (Coleman 2021, n.p.).¹⁰ That was after taking “voluntary retrenchment in 2020 from her position as marketing manager at Herzlia” (Ibid.). But notwithstanding her new business ventures, Coleman adds that “Klass is not letting the performance side of things slide though. She’s very excited to have shot what she calls ‘a little’ pilot called *Come Fress With Me?*” (Ibid).

The Excerpt

From your personal experience, what has gender got to do with African comedy and stand-up acts? How does gender influence the cultural economy of stand comedy in Africa, the number of female comedians, professional fees, and the kind of repertoire available to female/male comedians?

African comedy is very, very diverse. There are definitely cultural groups that do not appreciate women mouthing off about anything. We are supposed to be barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen, pouring beer and if we are going to entertain, be dressed in a pretty frock singing! On the other hand, more sophisticated audiences love hearing comedy from a female perspective. One of the best bits of advice I received was remember, 50% of the audience are women, and they want to hear what you have to say. Men who are comfortable with themselves and appreciate women, love hearing what makes us tick. A woman on the line-up adds [a] diversity of material. I don’t, however, have time for foul mouthed women or men. It is my pet peeve when a woman tries to be dirty and disgusting; there is no reason for it.

I think it is very difficult for woman to be a successful stand-up and run a family. A true example of this is Tumi Morake, married with three small kids. I think she is absolutely amazing and super organized. Mel Jones is a single mother. None of us could do this

⁸ Tracy Klass (afternoonexpress.co.za)

⁹ See article by SA People Contributor published online by *SA People News* at <https://www.sapeople.com/2020/11/17/watch-long-awaited-sequel-talis-baby-diary-begins-filming-in-cape-town/>

¹⁰ See <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-05-21-comedian-tracy-klass-jewish-home-cooking-just-the-way-bubbe-made-it/>

without an exceptional support system. We just cannot leave our kids for days on end the way men can. This has a very direct impact on the number of females on the entertainment circuit *per se*. Once you have a family you cannot just hit the road. I don't believe that there is a difference in the fees paid to men and woman. There is a budget for entertainment and you either fit into it or not. When we do ensemble shows, everyone is paid the same.

Insofar as stage time availability—yes, there chauvinism rears its ugly head on many an occasion. I have said it before, women have to prove they are funny; men have to prove they are not! Men can get away with so much more, a woman has to endear herself to the audience before she can be bitchy—you see this in dealing with drunk hecklers all the time. I have never heard an audience shout at a man, “show us your d**k?”, but female colleagues and I have been subjected to the “show us your t*ts”....

My performance is gender-based; all women relate to it. Kids relate to it 'cause they see their mother, and husbands realize that actually, my wife is not the only one that thinks, feels, sees things that way. Here is someone on stage articulating what women think and feel about issues: kids, clothing, aging, trying to keep current, *technology*—in every shape and form, *weight*, and of course, *first world problems in a Third world continent*.

Do you have any major pragmatic strategy you use to involve the audience at your stage shows to create interactional contexts for the production and consumption of humour? Why was your 2011 *Klass Struggle* a success?

The audience determines the strategy. Hosting a show is hard work: It is your job to find out the kind of audience; where the guests come from; whether they are foreigners; their occupation; and so on in order to feed the comics. Are they listening or do they want to be involved? Sometimes you get listening audiences, quiet laughers. You just see big smiles and sometimes shoulders shaking and then huge applause at the end. You have to just run with this because they are there to listen and don't want to be part of the show.

Also, you need to be careful with too much interaction with someone in the front because you end up excluding more than 80% of the room when you indulge in too much conversation. However, where there are diverse and interesting cultures and jobs in the room, you use that to feed your comedy. For example, if you are talking to a group of women and most of them are parents it is great to do your set on kids, schooling and lift schemes. Should the room be filled with mixed age ranges and interests you don't just talk about your kids, it just becomes boring, so you use the room to determine what their interests are so that you play off each other. As they say in comedy, the more you give the more you get. The audience feeds your energy, so you need to feed them the right level and interest.

Klass Struggle contextualized so many challenges that a single woman has to face. I laughed at the issues women face and those that mothers face. Yes, I know they are first world problems, but you still have to deal with them on a daily basis and they are tiresome and you are juggling so many balls—mother, marketing manager, comic, parent, sister. So, it was good to let everyone know that we are all in the same boat.

Anne Kansiime (Uganda)

One of the most interesting introductions to Anne Kansiime is by the Ugandan comedian herself. Asked to tell a *Solutions4Africa* reporter about herself, Kansiime said: “I'm an open book, not as rude and scary as the Kansiime in the clips. Anyone who watches my clips knows that I'm married. I'm a local woman from Uganda from Mparokitaka in Western Uganda [...] I have a degree in [...] Sociology although I wanted to do music, dance, and drama at the university, but my parents wouldn't have me do that. I don't really see myself

as a comedian but as an entertainer.”¹¹ Although Kansiime may not see herself as a “comedian,” the title is fitting as she is indeed a *comedian*, the art and career upon which her reputation as Africa’s Queen of Comedy rest. While at Makerere University she cut her teeth in acting with the theatre group, Theatre Factory. Interestingly, she did not formally launch a career performing and touring as a stand-up comedian until after graduation. The collapse of the Theatre Factory spurred Kansiime to join another creative group, Fun Factory, and later the *MiniBuzz* series. She soon ventured into recording skits and posting on her YouTube channel. As she reveals in “The making of Kansiime Anne Chapter 5,” her real break came via Kenya’s Citizen TV with “Don’t mess with Kansiime,” which was also broadcast on NTV in Uganda. She hit her peak between 2014 and 2016 when her skits not only garnered millions of views and subscribers online but earned her numerous high-profile continental and international awards. Among these awards were: the YouTube Silver Play Button; Comedy YouTube Sub-Saharan Africa Creator Award; Outstanding Female Comedian; African Entertainment Awards USA Best Comedian’s Award; Lagos International Festival 2013 (Best Actress) Winner; Social Media Awards (Favorite Celebrity) winner; and Honorary recognition by the SIIKETV Rising Star Academy Awards as the “Queen of Comedy”¹²

As Lynda Gichanda Spencer writes, “[i]t is evident that Kansiime’s presence on new and social media has led to various spin-offs for her brand of humor that articulates a particular African experience rooted in a local Ugandan context.”¹³ The “spinoffs” include a music album of children’s songs and singles,¹⁴ the Kansiime Anne series on YouTube, and the television series, *Don’t Mess With Kansiime* and *Girl From Mparo*. She has also appeared in advertising commercials, being named brand ambassador for corporations that include Old Mutual in Kenya. Besides her spectacular run with “Don’t Mess with Kansiime”, keeping up with a busy local and international stand-up comedy performance tour calendar while working with fellow comedienne and partner Cotilda Inapo as head of her creative writing and production team, Kansiime has remained committed to “always trying to keep [her] ninjas entertained without losing [her]self in the process” (Personal interview 2016, n.p.). She adds: “I’ve been blessed that Cotilda [Inapo] and my whole creative team share that same vision.”¹⁵ Remarkably, Kansiime has extended her blessing to charity as captured in *The Kansiime Foundation Documentary 2017*.¹⁶

The Excerpt

You are one of the pioneering stand-up comediennes in Uganda and one of Africa’s prominent comedians with an international profile. From your personal experience, what has gender got to do with African comedy and stand-up acts?

Gender is a course at many universities so it should tell you that it is taken seriously which is good. But when it comes to the ladies, the only problem we have is thinking being a lady is a problem. Yet, the way we should see it is simply as a great source of content for African comedy and stand-up acts as a whole.

¹¹ See [www.solutions4africa.com](http://www.solutions4africa.com/index.php/news-publisher/483-inspirational-african-women-anne-kansiime), “Inspirational African Women: Anne Kansiime.” Retrieved from <http://www.solutions4africa.com/index.php/news-publisher/483-inspirational-african-women-anne-kansiime>

¹² For more her awards see the *Wikipedia* page on her at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Kansiime

¹³ Unpublished research paper titled “Don’t mess with Kansiime”: The cultural economy of transgressive (female/feminist) humour in Uganda.”

¹⁴ The singles include five songs featured at <https://www.howwebiz.ug/AnneKansiime/album/379/anne-kansiime-singles>. In 2020 she released “Kansiime Kidz disco Collection 2020”—see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8B6CRp3Aa0>

¹⁵ Personal interview with Nduka Otono, November 2016. Cotilda left the team in 2018.

¹⁶ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Emow3fsdWU>

How does gender influence the cultural economy of stand-up comedy in Africa--the number of female comedians, professional fees, and the kind of repertoire available to female/male comedians?

I say simply work hard, and with God on your side, all the things you have mentioned will not be even considered when paying you because money has no gender.

In one of the essays submitted for consideration for this special issue of the journal on stand-up comedy in Africa, a scholar states your approach to the gender question thus: “She [Anne Kansiime] always portrays women in unconventional gender roles. Her female characters are not passive and submissive. Instead, she depicts strong women who refuse to show any deference to hegemonic structures.” Additionally, in an interview you declared that: “most of my clips speak for most shy women around the world who would actually want to say the things that I say but are unable to, so it doesn’t matter how African it is, people can relate.” Did you set out in a programmatic way to deal with issues of gender in Africa through comedy?

Not at all. I was simply sharing life as it is, and the gender issue kept showing up because it is part of life.

In your cultural pride of being “just a local comedian” who promotes the maxim “going back to our roots” you have called African people to “let’s be ourselves, let’s own our ‘Africanness’ because [...] if we all start being proud of who we are, the Kim Kardashians of the world will be out of business.”¹⁷ This statement makes one think you might be familiar with the work of Okot p’Bitek, the great Ugandan writer and author of *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* who lived in Nigeria for a while. Are there ways you see yourself as a “neo-oral performer” (influenced by the Acholi oral tradition or folklore and folklife), and the comic personas you create as Lawino’s granddaughters—as a scholar has interpreted your work? I am particularly thinking here of your skit: “Kansiime Anne in Acholi Love on minibuzz” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beoNTnWDCPQ>)

Eh, eh, eh...I am a risk-taker but I will not risk messing with a legend's work but don't lose hope...I have some Acholi experience being that I am married to a very handsome Ojok, and every once in a while, I joke about our life and that is as Acholi as possible.¹⁸

In his book, *Road Trip Rwanda: A Journey into the New Heart of Africa*, Will Ferguson notes that “Ugandan comedian Anne Kansiime opened a recent show in Kigali by saying, “You know, back home in Uganda I'm actually very beautiful—and surprisingly tall. Here, it is a different story’.” How culturally specific is stand-up comedy, and how do you adjust to performing for international audiences and performing at home?

Simply do what they say, “When in Rome...” Basically relate with their life and the rest gets easier.

¹⁷ See “Inspirational African Women: Anne Kansiime.” Retrieved from <http://www.solutions4africa.com/index.php/news-publisher/483-inspirational-african-women-anne-kansiime>

¹⁸ The marriage to Gerald Ojok broke up in 2017 and Kansiime got into another relationship with Kantu Skylanta, a musician with whom she has a son born in April 2021.

How do you combine your artistic enterprise with being a wife and a brand ambassador?

The same way every other woman does around the world. There is time for everything. Of course, sometimes, the funny Kansiime mixes with the brand ambassador and wife but only for good.

What are your best memories and greatest challenges as a comedian, especially regarding sustaining *Don't Mess with Kansiime* as a television show on Maisha Magic Channel 161, keeping up with a busy local and international performance calendar, and working with fellow comedian and partner, Cotilda Inapo, as head of your creative writing and production team?

Simple...always trying to keep my ninjas entertained without losing myself in the process. I have been blessed that Cotilda and my whole creative team share that same vision.

Is it difficult for women to work together contrary to [all too often] controversial thinking about women being women's worst enemies?

Enemies come in all shapes and sizes; some people even have insect enemies. So, whether or not women are each other's worst enemy, I choose not to think about it because I have been blessed to be able to work with many great women and I am not complaining.

Mandy Uzonitsha (Nigeria)

Mandy Uzonitsha is arguably Nigeria's pioneer professional female stand-up comedian, and she wastes no time in sharing her story. "I am proud of my journey being the first in a man's world, breaking that glass ceiling makes me feel like I'm on top of the world," she says, adding: "Opa Williams is one person associated with stand-up comedy in Nigeria with his brand, *Night of a Thousand Laughs*. This is a household name when it comes to comedy shows in Nigeria. So, you can imagine my joy when he included me in his first-ever *Night of a Thousand Laughs* tour around Africa."

Born to parents from Delta State, where Warri, the unofficial headquarters of Nigeria's stand-up comedy and comedians is located, Mandy holds a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree in Political Science from Nnamdi Azikiwe University. However, she did not need the degree to venture into her natural turf, comedy. Mandy recalls the very beginning when she first appeared on *The Charly Boy Show*, a 1990s television variety show series with music, social commentary and comedy segments, and produced by the maverick artist, Charles Oputa.¹⁹ Soon after premiering for the gag segment *Candid Camera*, and later as *Mama Nothing Spoil* on *The Charly Boy Show*, Mandy starred at the first *Girls Night Out* comedy show at the high-profile *Campagne Tropicana* then at *Ikeja*, Lagos. As Olaniyi Tabi, U.S.-based addiction therapist and entertainment consultant hyperbolically writes, "[t]hat night was a watershed in the history of entertainment promotions in Nigeria, many of the heavy weights now in the industry were discovered" (n.p.).²⁰ Since then, Mandy has performed across Africa with notable stand-up comics such as Kagiso Lediga and Ndumiso Lindi from South Africa; David Oscar, David Aglah, and *Funny Face*, from Ghana. She has also performed alongside Uganda's foremost comedians Pablo and Salvador; Carl Ncube from Zimbabwe; Cotilda from Uganda; and Kenya's Churchill and Eric Omondi.

¹⁹ The show has recently been advertised on YouTube on May 19, 2022, as returning to the screen "soon". See "The Charly Boy Show is Back." YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qjxAiIyQpk>. Also see "The Charly Boy Show returns with a bang," *Vanguard*, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/04/the-charly-boy-show-returns-with-a-bang/> April 27, 2021.

²⁰ See Olaniyi Tabi "About Super Mandy," *LinkedIn*, Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3u0nHgJ>

In recognition of her remarkable profile Mandy was awarded a prestigious City People Entertainment award on March 23, 2006. “It was important to me because, at that time, *City People* magazine was the A-Z in entertainment,” recalls Mandy.²¹ She has also been decorated with the Icons Award in 2021 by the Governor of her State, Delta State, Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa. About this award, Mandy said: “I really felt good about this award because I always felt that a prophet was never recognized at home.” Other acts of recognition for her outstanding work include being featured on CNN’s Inside Africa programme, “because of a joke I did on how they reported the news during the Hurricane Katrina.” Mandy has also performed at a State Dinner in Aso Villa, the office and residence of the President of Nigeria, at the invitation of Mrs. Patience Jonathan, then First Lady of Nigeria.

Mandy is, in her own words, “a proud single mum” whose “greatest joy and treasure” is her “18-year-old daughter, April Nwaokobia. She proudly notes that her daughter “wants to be a neurosurgeon but [...] loves to write and has three books on Webnovel online under her pen name, Apriljewel” (Ibid.). Reflecting on the negative experiences she has encountered as a female stand-up artist Mandy concludes: “I laugh off any insult to my gender. It did not stop me; I have a thick skin.”

The Excerpt

Did the rise of Nollywood and popular sports such as football affect the rise of comedy in Africa? Did these two developments—respect for actors and footballers—encourage you in any way to go professional?

Yes, Nollywood and our footballers set the stage for recognition of the act [professional comedy] internationally. But, for people like us, when we started, Nollywood was also budding, thus we grew together. We all had our difficulties, our setbacks, drawbacks, and reservations on how things will play out. But thank God, Nollywood is the third largest movie industry in the world.

As the first comedienne, I had close to nothing to sharpen my path. I was working blindly, making my mistakes and progress on stage. At that time, the only female that inspired me and was on the limelight was Mariam Babangida, our then First Lady; she had so much style and class that I just wanted to be like her.

What was your inspiration as a comedian, especially in an industry dominated by men?

What inspired me was the determination and motivation that I wanted to fill a gap. I wanted to motivate other women to come out and join me. I did not want to be both the first female stand-up comedian and the last. Believe me, I thought of quitting at a point; I was frustrated on many occasions but I was determined to keep going. My brother, I inspired myself!

What has gender got to do with African comedy and stand-up acts?

From my experience, comediennes in Africa are still not as widely known and appreciated like comediennes in other developed parts of the world. To me, only Ann Kansiime from Uganda has gotten to that level. In Africa, a woman’s place is usually seen to be in the kitchen so sometimes people find it difficult to see her as a doctor, a pilot, or someone that stands and cracks jokes.

A lot of my challenges stem from the fact that I’m a woman, and you see, my gender made it very difficult to get jobs. The few jobs around, such as emceeing big events, are given to the men. Much later, they found out that some events like anchoring cooking or

²¹ Personal communication with the author on WhatsApp, June 26, 2022.

hairstyle shows were tailored for a female comedienne. Thus, when I get those jobs, I use that platform to sell my brand.

Our culture is our draw-back. My mum will say a lady should be seen not heard. Most of the juicy jobs go to the male comedians. Way back, most parents will not allow their kids to play football till they found out that it's a big industry. Most kids in Africa now get soccer balls as birthday gift. Since most young men see that Ali Baba is wealthy, they rushed to join him, and today, the likes of Basketmouth and AY are millionaires. Lots of young, talented guys are joining the comedy industry in Nigeria and the rest of Africa. But since Mandy only has one small house in Lekki and Helen Paul has a school, our ladies are still finding it difficult to join us. But the case is different in Uganda where we have lots of female comedians.

When it comes to jokes, certain things a male comedian will say and people will roll on the ground and start laughing but take the same joke and let an African comedienne say it, she would have succeeded in killing her career. From my experience, this *divide* between comedians is only in the mind of the people that give us the jobs. No gender has the right to jokes. The first people to make us laugh in life are our mothers from all the faces and funny sounds they make when we cry as babies. Even some of the male comedians have also been instrumental to the growth of the comedienne.

Like I told you, when I came on board, even the likes of Ali Baba were trying to position and brand their names; I was all alone, learning and making my mistakes and progress on stage. But the second female comedienne, Najita Dede, had Patrick Doyle to direct her. Also, Princess had Tee A; Lepacious Bose had Owen G; Ebinyo had Mc Shaggi. Also, I noticed that in Uganda, the first female comedian, Cotilda and Ann Kansime, had Salvado and Pablo helping them.

Cotilda Inapo (Uganda)

Cotilda Inapo is a copywriter, broadcaster, events host, motivational speaker, and pioneer female stand-up comedian in Uganda. She was the only female member of Crackers Comedy group, Uganda's foremost comedy collective. According to Inapo, "Crackers Comedy Club was the official pioneer stand-up comedy platform in Uganda, holding weekly shows and airing as 'Mic Check' stand-up comedy show on NTV Uganda from 2009 to 2011."²²

Inapo studied Computer Science at Makerere University, Kampala, but has gone on to establish a reputation as a leading social entrepreneur with a rich resume that makes her one of the most resourceful and widely experienced female comedians on the African continent. Among the enterprises she has championed is Queens of Comedy which she founded in 2013. She describes it as "The first all-female comedy platform in Uganda" which "discovers and nurtures female comics" (Ibid.). She has also served as a member of the Board of Directors of Comedy Files and contributed to the now defunct Laftaz Comedy group that operated as a comedians' collective and lounge, with incredible daily stand-up comedy shows in Kampala, capital of Uganda. Interestingly, while pursuing her own enterprise dreams, she served for four years as the Creative Director for Anne Kansime's company, and "[l]ed a creative team of 5 talented individuals to develop content and drive Kansime's digital brand across a variety of online platforms: website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube" (Ibid.).

Besides her engagement as a social entrepreneur associated with some of Uganda's best-known comedy brands, Inapo had been a broadcaster at Galaxy FM, Uganda's leading local language and English language urban youth radio station, where she hosted a breakfast show. Thrilled by her successes and those of her compatriots in humourpreneurship in Uganda, Inapo declared in response to a question by Christine

²² See her LinkedIn page, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/cotilda-inapo-874468b/>

Wanjiru Wanjala in 2012: “Comedy is going places and we are right in the middle of it. Our stand-up is English, meaning it can cross borders. And as you have seen there are a lot of chances for comedians around Africa. I must say it’s comedy’s time. We are waiting with our suitcases packed.” But that wait is only figuratively speaking, and her language of comedy is not only English but also the local Luganda language, between both of which she code-switches effortlessly in performance.

More recently, she has been busy on the stand-up comedy circuit in Uganda, delivering rib-cracking routines such as she did at the Arise Woman Comedy Jam 2022 with the theme: “Cotilda - The Power Of A Woman.”²³ Understandably, then, asked whether she gets “intimidated by male comedians,” Inapo responded: “Actually I don’t because I think it’s good that I get to compete with them and they help me improve. The male comedians have in fact been my mentors” (*Monitor* 2011 [2021]).

The Excerpt

Could you please briefly trace the history of stand-up comedy in Uganda? In what ways (if any) did any pioneers you may recall influence your involvement in the industry?

Hmmm...I would say that stand-up comedy has been around for some time but in the beginning, it wasn't professionally done or labeled as stand-up someday until comedians like Pablo started performing regularly. One major landmark for stand-up comedy was the “Standup Uganda” competition that brought together raw stand-up comedy talent out of which the first professional stand-up comedy group “The Crackers” was formed and the rest is history.

You were the only female member of Crackers Comedy group and one of the pioneering female stand-up comedians in Uganda. From your personal experience, what has gender got to do with African comedy and stand-up acts? How does gender influence the cultural economy of stand comedy in Africa--the number of comedienne, professional fees, and the kind of repertoire available to female/male comedians?

In the beginning of course there was need to break ground for female comedians in Uganda and by that time we couldn't talk much about performance fees because none of us was that good but now we can clearly say that apart from the different perspectives we get on issues based on our gender, payment and the rest is based on how good one is.

What are your best memories and greatest challenges as a comedienne especially regarding sustaining the Queens of Comedy Show which you founded, working at Laftaz Comedy group, and working with fellow comedienne and partner, Anne Kansiiime?

Queens of Comedy even now remains an amazing concept and like all good things there are challenges but we choose not to dwell on them, rather they make great learning experiences. As for working with Anne Kansiiime, all I can say is that I am grateful to God for thus far He has brought us. She is extremely hardworking, talented, kind and beyond funny.

²³ See Akite Entertainment, “Cotilda - The Power Of A Woman: Arise Woman Comedy Jam 2022.” YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUm_S-2Q5bM, 18 May 2022.

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