African Theatre provides a focus for research, critical discussion, information and creativity in the vigorous field of African theatre and performance. Each annual issue concentrates on a major topic and through its resolutely pan-African coverage and accessible style, broadens the debates to all interested in drama and the many roles it plays in contemporary African life. The editors and editorial board bring together an impressive range of experience in African theatre.

This collection draws on academic papers, interviews and a playscript to reflect on the realities facing women working and making theatre in twenty-first century Africa. It ranges in focus from discussing the work of an Egyptian director, a Tunisian playwright, and Ethiopian actresses, to considering how women are using various forms of theatre, including oral poetry (Uganda), drumming (Rwanda), installations (Botswana) and physical theatre forms (South Africa) to raise awareness for gendered advocacy in rural and urban contexts, while linking local performance activism to the wider global context. The playscript in *AT 14* is *The Sentence* by Nigerian writer Sefi Atta.

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Cover: Siphumeze Khundayi in *Walk: South Africa*, Cape Town 2014, co-curated by Sara Matchett and Genna Gardini (Photograph © and by kind permission of Catherine Trollope)

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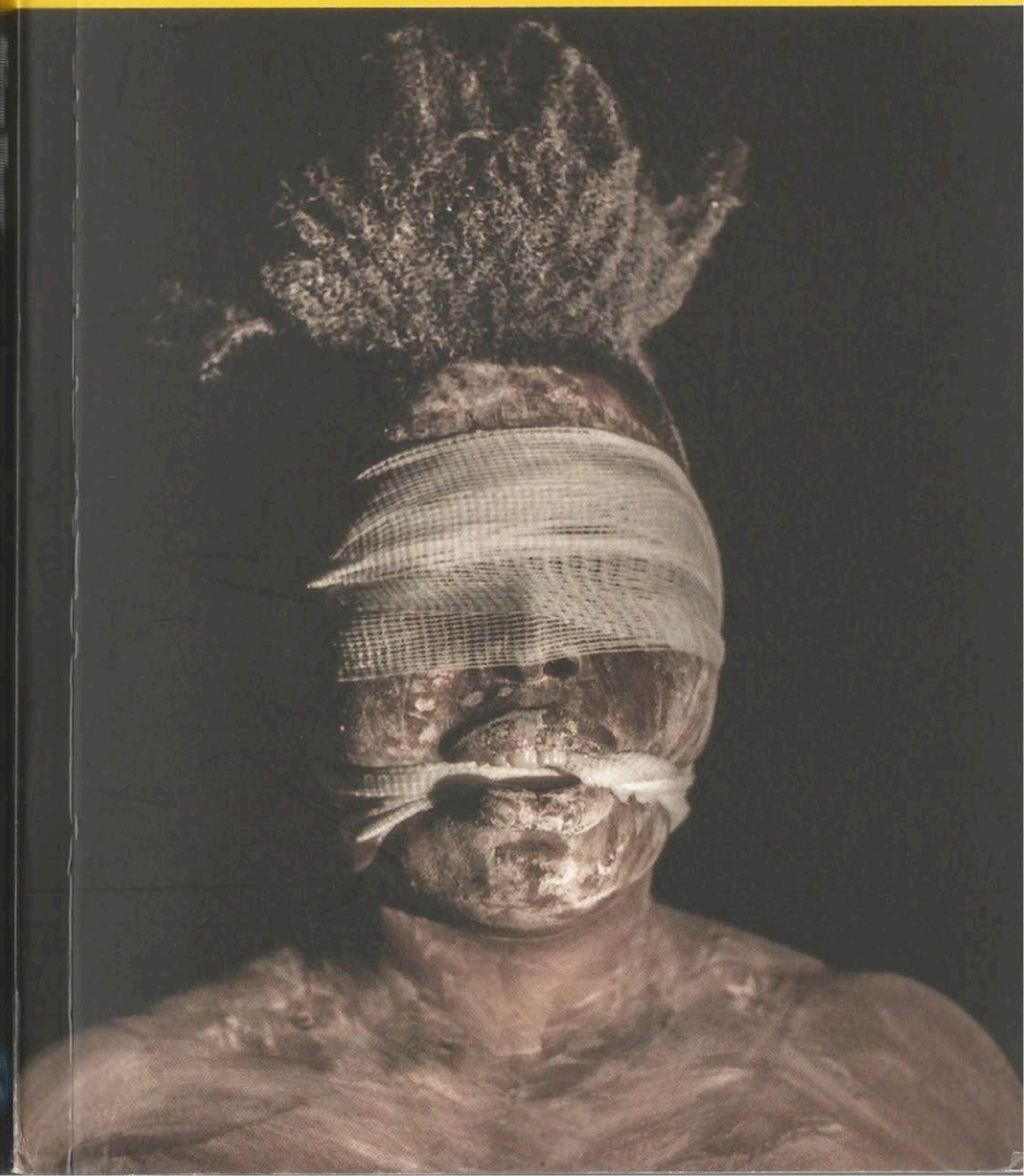
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African Theatre 14
Contemporary Women

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Editors' Foreword: Women on the Front Line

JANE PLASTOW, YVETTE HUTCHISON & CHRISTINE MATZKE

It is thirteen years since the *African Theatre* series published its previous volume discussing the role of women in the performance cultures of the continent, where it became, and remained, the best selling volume in the series. There is an undoubted hunger amongst scholars, not only of theatre, but more widely of African culture and of African women's studies, to know more about women's contributions to the dramatic arts, and it is a hunger which the editors think remains to be satisfied. We therefore decided to produce a volume looking specifically at women working in the twenty-first century, soliciting articles from as wide a range of perspectives – and countries – as we could find.

Women's contributions remain obscured in many discussions of African theatre. While thousands of women work in the industry, and some, for example Penina Mlama and Amandina Lihamba in Tanzania, and Zulu Sofola and Tess Onwueme of Nigeria, have won national fame, relatively few have achieved an international profile. This is partly because in many places theatre is performed in local languages, uses local theatrical idioms, and speaks to local concerns, so that someone like Elizabeth Melaku (discussed below in our article on Ethiopian actresses) who is a huge national star of stage and screen in Ethiopia, is utterly unknown to the non-Amharic speaking world. However, the issue of localism is not, of course, gender specific. So the question remains: why, while at least a small number of African men have become regular subjects of scholarship, is it still extremely hard to find out about the work of contemporary African women theatre artists?

On reading the articles in this volume it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that sexist inequalities, in a range of forms, have much to do with the matter. Actress, director and playwright Dalia Basiouny discusses the huge problems she experienced from a jealous, obstructive husband in developing her career; the essential context of the intergenerational women's theatre discussed by Kiguli and Plastow was that the Ugandan government and Buganda society at domestic and state levels discriminate against women's

NOTES

1 This article is derived from my Research Report, 'Working with Mophato: Interrogating and Shifting Representations of Black Women in Botswana', undertaken as part of a Master of Arts in Dramatic Arts by Coursework and Research Report at the University of the Witwatersrand. The full report is available on the Wits library website at http://www.wits.ac.za/library. The direct link to the online report is http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/12723.

2 The major part of the audience were students from Maru-a-Pula School, an independent secondary school, with other theatre goers, mostly academics.

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Binti Leo
Women in the arts in Tanzania

VICENSIA SHULE

Introduction

Looking at the story of independence of Tanzania, as elsewhere in Africa, performing arts, especially traditional dance groups led by women, were used extensively in the mid-twentieth century to deconstruct and openly challenge what Ruth Meena (2003: 148) describes as 'the colonial and patriarchal systems, which were based on ideologies of exclusion'. These dance groups, such as *lelemama*,[1] were significant during both the independence struggle and the post-independence deconstruction of stereotypes that perceive political power to be vested almost exclusively in men. Marjorie Mbilinyi (2010: 85) shows clearly that: 'It was TANU[2] women who forged alliances across ethnic and religious boundaries, who promoted Kiswahili as the medium of political discourse, who used local African cultural forms such as women's songs and dance groups to energise the nationalist struggle and make it their own'.

After independence, the 'energising political struggle' was transformed into women becoming the 'implementation tools' of the ruling party, TANU, later CCM.[3] This meant that performing arts, especially *ngoma* (traditional dances), featured prominently on national platforms when political leaders wanted to communicate social policies and political propaganda to the people. At community level such performances continued to entertain, educate, conscientize and communicate. Mbilinyi (*ibid.*: 84) further argues that: 'What is not understood is the degree to which this nationalist identity was constructed through the actions and thoughts of grassroot women politicians and activists, women who merged their struggles for individual dignity with that of a collective struggle for national autonomy and dignity as an African people'.

It is important to recognize these struggles by women on behalf of their sex, and for the nation, in order to situate and understand the role that Binti Leo (Today's Young Women) intends to play in contemporary Tanzania.

TANU women such as Bibi Titi Mohamed,[4] who participated in the political independence struggles through *lelemama* groups, had 'political' freedom and independence as their agenda (Geiger 2005: iv, 49). This was different from the women's movement in post-independence Tanzania prior to multi-party politics where most women had no space to advocate for their rights apart from supporting *Ujamaa*. (*Ujamaa* can be loosely translated as familyhood. It was the name given to the form of African socialism developed by Tanzania's founding president, Julius Nyerere, in the 1960s, which strongly influenced the country for some thirty years.) What is seldom openly spoken of is the lack of a women's agenda during the *Ujamaa* era. The assumption was that, because *Ujamaa* advocated equality, women would also benefit.

Ujamaa did not necessarily support a women's agenda: rather, women were the ones who supported *Ujamaa*. For example, most of the champions of *Ujamaa*, led by Julius Nyerere,[5] were men, and the first cabinet after independence was composed only of men. 'Political independence was the main objective for Bibi Titi and other women activists in the 1950s. Even though the patriotism and energy which they invested in TANU did not mature to give the power to control the state'[6] (Geiger 2005: 95). Reportedly, Bibi Titi realized that Nyerere did not honour the independence struggle's commitment to women. Ruth Meena wrote:

> When power was transferred to the nationalist government, the picture changed. Women's experience was no longer relevant to the post colonial struggles against neo-colonialism, imperialism and in management of the state apparatus. In a discussion with Bibi Titi, she ironically said 'I started smelling fish' when the first cabinet was founded. 'The highest post granted to us women was that of under secretary to the cabinet, which was equivalent to a junior ministerial position. When we asked Mwalimu, he said to us, 'where are those women with experience?' But quietly we wondered where [were] those men with experience to run the state?' (n.d.)

A good example of the long continuation of women's disempowerment was the banning of the National Women's Council (BAWATA) in 1996. BAWATA was officially registered on 16 May 1995, aimed at uniting women from all walks of life in Tanzania to achieve gender equality in a multi-party democracy. 'With the advent of political pluralism, it was felt that women might lose rights without an organ to voice their common concerns and problems' (Kapama 2009). The main argument given by the state for banning BAWATA was that the organization was not operating according to its objectives but instead had political ambitions. There were rumours that BAWATA was becoming a threat to the ruling party's (CCM) women's wing (UWT) in discussing and advocating for women's issues on the eve of the introduction of multiparty politics, and that it might even oust the CCM from power. In 2009 the High Court ruled against the ban and declared it null and void, and unconstitutional (Kapama 2009).

The exclusion of women's stories (her-stories) in favour of men's stories (his-stories) in the 'history' of Tanzania is one of the characteristics

of patriarchal dominant thinking, as Mbilinyi emphasizes (2010: 85). The establishment of gender policy and a special ministry to deal with gender issues have been regarded by the Tanzanian state as key achievements and a vital step in the transformation of women's images and emancipation. Affirmative action has come to be seen as one of the solutions to the cultural and structural oppression of women. Special parliamentary seats have been allocated for women, education bursaries offered to girls in secondary schools, and scholarships and reduced entry mark requirements made available for girls and women to enable them to enter higher education, initiatives intended to challenge patriarchy in Tanzania.

In the post-socialist era women continued to utilize performing arts to inspire patriotism, advocate for development and to recognize and acknowledge both the individual achievements of various leaders and the collective achievements of the entire nation. A good example is the artistic association, Binti Leo.

The story of Binti Leo

Binti Leo was established on 6 January 2005 by 30 Tanzanian women involved in performing arts. Many of them came from art groups such as Parapanda Theatre Arts, Mionzi Dance Group and The Lighters, others were freelancers. Many founding members came from the University of Dar es Salaam and the Bagamoyo College of Arts (now TaSUBa). They range from those with only primary education to university graduates. The policy for recruiting new members has been to invite all women interested and working in the arts to join.

According to Joyce Hagu, a former Binti Leo Public Relations Officer and a Senior Cultural Officer at the Ministry of Information, Culture, Sports and Youth, the formation of Binti Leo had a long back-story: 'In fact, we didn't start collaborating in the arts. At the beginning we supported each other in kitchen parties and in different social ceremonies. Then, we thought why shouldn't we form a performing arts association since we are all performing artists?'

The need for skills training, and the autonomy to organize their work and gain reasonable financial recompense, were also key to the establishment of Binti Leo.

According to a 2006 Binti Leo brochure, the association's key objectives include the following:

- To recognize Tanzanian women in performing arts;
- To educate and empower them with knowledge and skills;
- To help them identify the important role that performing arts have to play in societal development and entertainment;
- To help them recognize the employment opportunities within performing arts;

- To open their eyes to the potential for economic empowerment through performing arts;
- To help them identify and understand their own importance in society;
- To conduct research and to recognize women in performing arts;
- To empower them with knowledge and skills to develop their art;
- To maintain records and an information database on Tanzanian women in performing arts and their capabilities in the particular arts they are involved in;
- To lobby for better policies which involve community empowerment through performing arts.

In addition, according to Hanifa Sabuni, a practising performing artist and designer who is also one of Binti Leo's founding members: 'We wanted to show [that] as women we can do anything without men'. Irene Sanga, another member, formerly of Parapanda Theatre Arts and currently a radio and television advertising director, adds: 'In many artists' groups, people think that something can be done only when there is collaboration between women and men. But contrary to this thinking we asked ourselves: if as women, we can play instruments, sing, dance etc., and we can form a group, why should we depend on men? Why should we have men in the group while as women we can do everything?'

Agnes Lukanga, a theatre practitioner and currently the chairperson of both Binti Leo and the Tanzania Performing Artist's Federation, speaks of the challenge women artists face when working with men: 'You know women need to show their artistic capability. They do participate in many art productions, but in the groups their creativity is most of the time overshadowed by men. Therefore there was a need to acknowledge the work that women artists have done in the society as well as their position in the society they live in.'

At the time of its establishment, Binti Leo's formal structure was similar to that of many artistic associations in Tanzania: it had a 'patron', chairperson and deputy, secretary and deputy, treasurer and a public relations officer. Membership then cost 5,000 shillings (a little over US$2) with an annual fee of 10,000. In 2010 the rates changed to 10,000 for membership with an annual fee of 20,000 shillings.

There were a number of women-centred initiatives which led to the founding of Binti Leo. A very successful precursor was *Tuseme* ('Let's Speak Out'), a project which aimed at empowering secondary schoolgirls' through theatre. *Tuseme* was initiated by Amandina Lihamba[7] and Penina Mlama[8] in 1996, and was coordinated by the Department of Fine and Performing Arts at the University of Dar es Salaam before being mainstreamed into the Ministry of Education and subsequently becoming a school programme in 2005 (Ndomondo 2005). The *Tuseme* model of empowerment 'came as a result of concerns amongst educationalists, parents and other social groups in Tanzania who saw that the academic performance of girls in secondary schools was less than satisfactory' (Forum for African Women Educationalists 2004: 5). Since many girls dropped out of school because of poverty,

sexual harassment, unwanted pregnancy, early marriage or for other related reasons, it was clear that the situation needed intervention. The programme was mainly supported by the University of Dar es Salaam in collaboration with the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (Ndomondo 2005).

Tuseme aimed at increasing the enrolment rate, and retaining and improving the performance, of girls in secondary schools. As a theatre process, *Tuseme* envisions a society in which girls (like boys) excel in academic study and are self-confident and able to fight for their basic rights, both in their communities and in the country as whole. Since 2007 *Tuseme* has been implemented in primary schools in twelve districts in Tanzania in a collaboration between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT). Some of the women who would become Binti Leo members worked in selected schools as facilitators of *Tuseme* helping students to use various art forms to express their problems to their fellow students, teachers and school communities.

The founding members of Binti Leo were also inspired by the female artists who participated in the production of *Twende na Wakati* (*Let's Go With The Times*), a radio soap opera broadcast which ran for fifteen years from the early 1990s with more than 1,500 broadcasts. Aimed at increasing awareness of family planning, the project was coordinated by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the then Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam (RTD), now TBC Taifa. Members of Binti Leo acted, directed and were involved in plotting the soap's story.

Binti Leo as an organization and through its constituent individuals has facilitated various artistic initiatives in Tanzania. A major project was *Tuelimishane* (*Let's Educate Each Other*), concerning HIV and violence prevention, coordinated by Muhimbili University College of Health Sciences, Department of Psychiatry, from 2002 to 2007. The project used mixed methods of drama, peer education and evaluation as a lay intervention approach for young men's HIV and gender violence risk behaviours, including unprotected sex and violence to female partners. The essence of the mixed methods approach was to enable youth to get involved and be informed of the different ways that violence posed a risk of HIV infection (Mbwambo, Maman & Nyoni 2007: 1-2).

The multifaceted nature of the intervention, and especially the use of community drama, were adopted to communicate sensitive issues. The intervention used skits which were performed in selected places in Dar es Salaam, especially the Kinondoni district where many young people spend their free time. After the performances there were discussions with young people and information was offered on where they could get more support when sex-related violence occurred. Members of Binti Leo were involved in both drama training and the facilitation of youth intervention programmes in Dar es Salaam (*ibid.*: 18).

Binti Leo in action

On Saturday 22 April 2006 at Nkrumah Hall, at the University of Dar es Salaam, in the presence of the Director of Culture, Professor Herman Mwansoko representing Emmanuel John Nchimbi MP, the then Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Sports, Binti Leo launched its ambitious project: 'Recognizing Women in the Performing Arts in Tanzania'. This was an exciting and high profile event[9] that brought together prominent women in performing arts and arts stakeholders from within and outside Tanzania. As reported by regional art and culture journalist Ogova Ondego, 'the Association of Women in Performing Arts in Tanzania - better known by its Kiswahili name, Binti Leo – was launched with pomp and fanfare at the University of Dar es Salaam on April 22, 2006 though having come into being on January 6, 2006' (2006).

This marked the beginning of documenting the women in the performing arts in Tanzania, one of Binti Leo's objectives. The research was conducted in the five selected regions of Arusha, Dodoma, Kilimanjaro, Morogoro and Singida, aimed at investigating what women were involved in what performance activities. The research was supported by the Tanzania Cultural Trust Fund (*Our Reporter* 2006a). It was expected that the research findings would present the role of women in performing arts at a national level in Tanzania and perhaps reinvigorate appreciation of their contribution to national development, particularly in the fight against poverty. 'The project traces the role of women in the arts from the pre-independence era to the present' (Ondego 2006). The research report, which came out in 2007, brought fundamental changes to Binti Leo. It emphasized the need to unite all women in the arts, as opposed to the initial proposal to work only with women in the performing arts. All objectives were thereafter directed towards supporting all women in the arts in Tanzania.

The research findings showed that various respondents believed women in the arts should form one strong association. Quoting from the research report, one respondent from Singida region argued: 'We are doing arts. It doesn't matter if it is *ngoma* or craft, we all do arts. Actually if we don't have activities to perform we concentrate on hand crafts' (Sanga, Hagu & Shule 2007: 58). Another respondent in the report from Arusha argued: 'we'll be strong and have one voice if we have one association. If we divide ourselves, it becomes easy to be divided more' (*ibid.*: 8).

The research also awakened an enthusiasm in women to see arts as one of their sources of employment. 'Women are always perceived as mere housewives who have no role in productivity. But, through our performing group, we earn a little money. At least we are not sitting idle', argued a woman in Kilimanjaro region (*ibid.*: 28). In the report's recommendation the researchers proposed that 'there is no need to separate women in the

performing arts from the rest of other women in the arts. In most places [where research was conducted] they do not feel they are different. They work together in the same groups' (*ibid.*: 62).

Apart from research and facilitation of various projects, Binti Leo produced and performed several plays, both in and outside Tanzania. A notable achievement was the performance of *Nkhomanile*, directed by Amandina Lihamba in 2006. The play was inspired by the story of Nduna Nkhomanile, the only woman chief during German colonial rule in the then Tanganyika in the 1880s. *Nkhomanile*'s programme states:

> From 1905 to 1907 there was a fierce fight by the people of Eastern and Southern Tanganyika against the Germans. This was the first war in Africa that involved many ethnic groups. Strengthened with their belief of support from the ancestors and the *Maji* (water) the people fought to drive the Germans out. One of the leaders who used the *Maji* to mobilise people was Nduna Nkhomanile. She was such a thorn to the Germans that when they caught her, they hanged her together with other leaders in 1906. This production is based on Nkhomanile's story which is little known. (Binti Leo 2006)

During the centenary of the Maji Maji war in 2005, historians at the University of Dar es Salaam published evidence that it was Nduna Nkhomanile who convinced other chiefs to accept *maji* (water) and use it as a weapon against the Germans. This challenged the accepted historical view that a male seer in Kilwa, Kinjeketile, propagated the use of *maji* (water) as a spiritual weapon against the German war machine.

Nkhomanile shows how the people of the then Tanganyika opposed colonial rule and, when they could stand it no longer, they rebelled and confronted the colonialists in a war of liberation. The play thus supports the argument propounded by Marja-Liisa Swantz that:

> Several books have been written recounting the life stories of the pioneering men in the history of Tanzania. In these books women have been conspicuous by their absence. Yet today's women leaders have been preceded by generations of women who prepared the way for them, and whose lives form an important part of the nation's development. (1985: 153)

Nkhomanile was performed in several places in Tanzania including the Bagamoyo Arts Festival (BAF) and Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF). The play was also performed at the Women and Economic Recovery of Africa conference organized by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa in Cape Town in 2006. *Nkhomanile* was a Binti Leo initiative which coincided with both the launch of a major piece of research about women in the arts and the Maji Maji centenary celebrations (*Our Reporter* 2006b, 2006c). As Ondego commented, 'if anyone ever doubted that women could defend their communities, these Nkhomanile warriors have cleared them with their shields' (2006).

The success of the *Nkhomanile* production was due to many factors, as Agnes Lukanga, the chairperson of Binti Leo, explains:

> Every performance prepared by Binti Leo had its own position in the society. For *Nkhomanile*, the actors were all professionals and the director was Amandina Lihamba. We all know her capacity and experience in theatre. It was a big show with its own status. But I should say the outcomes were a collective effort and commitment from all who participated [and] there was money to do proper preparation. Time and resources used in that performance necessitated it to be of that higher standard.

Binti Leo has also contributed to the ongoing reforms of the creative industries in Tanzania. Such reforms include the establishment of four artists' federations, such as the Federation of Performing Artists, founded in 2010. Binti Leo members made an immense contribution to that process; one of the major achievements was that, in 'Binti Leo we managed to have the chairperson of the Tanzania Performing Arts Federation from our organization', as Hadija Chekanae, a performing artist and entrepreneur who is currently the association secretary, wrote.

The story of Binti Leo includes both individual and group successes. 'I've been very successful because many people have known me. I didn't know what TGNP[10] was [or] its transformative feminism ideology. Now I can moderate a debate, I can dare, I'm confident,' says Hanifa. 'I can support my family. I can send my children to school from just doing art works'. The increased membership is also a notable achievement. 'Currently there are about 60 members who respond when we call a meeting, even if not all attend: they send apologies. This is a major achievement' comments Hadija. However, it is a problem that few, perhaps fewer than ten members, pay their fees on a regular basis; and the association has not, as envisioned ten years ago, been able to establish chapters or branches in places other than Dar es Salaam.

The impact of neoliberalism

Starting with 30 members, at one time the organization grew to over 70 (Msungu 2006). However, there are currently fewer than ten active members. The major question is why? 'When we stay together, as women, we don't make progress', laments Susan Billa one of the founding members of Binti Leo. She had hoped that when Binti Leo was established it would bring positive change to the lives of women artists. But Binti Leo has not been able to engage many women, in recent years it has been unable to get funding and has failed to become self-supporting. This makes Binti Leo largely irrelevant to many women artists in Tanzania today.

Susan Billa further says: 'as far as I know, Binti Leo does not exist but five or six people can meet and organize themselves to perform certain assignments'. When probed, she added: 'the problem is, when there is an opportunity to perform, certain people only are selected to participate, these are the ones who are seen as Binti Leo'. It was noted that in many cases

when Binti Leo gets an opportunity to perform, only a few members are picked and not all members are consulted on this choice. Responding, Binti Leo chairperson Lukanga denied such accusations, arguing that: 'for active members they are still enthusiastic and support the organization to move forward. For those who expected the organization to support them, their spirit is low, perhaps dead completely'.

In the late 2000s some members broke out and established 'Ten Sisters', a group of ten women artists. This group is little known and it is difficult to find any traces of it. The idea behind Ten Sisters, as identified by one respondent, was 'to revamp unity among women in the arts in Tanzania, and get more space which some felt they could not get when they were in Binti Leo'. One of Binti Leo's objectives is to unite women artists, but it is evident that for at least some members Binti Leo has been a source of disunity. Some members, particularly those with only primary education, feel they do not have the same 'share' as those with higher educational achievements. Here it is difficult to work out the probably complex influence of inferiority and superiority complexes among members, which seems to be at least one of the causes of disunity.

It should be understood that Binti Leo's establishment was a result of two major opposing global policies: socialism and neoliberalism. Women artists believed that there was a need to work collaboratively if they wanted to make progress and survive, but they struggle to survive in the current neoliberal era where the philosophy of 'the survival of the fittest' rules: the powerful and influential are seen as those who 'take it all'. 'If you go to mixed art groups, a woman artist is not valued; she is not seen as [...] contributing anything. At most she'll be costumed almost naked, paid two or one thousand [Tanzanian shillings]',[11] complains Hanifa.

A crucial factor affecting the level of Binti Leo's recent activity is the major policy shift in donor priorities: broadly away from funding culture and towards paying for security. The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA in 2001 heralded bad times for culture-based funding applications. 'As unrealistic expectations of western donors failed to materialize, however, support for African NGOs began to decline. This process was accelerated by the events of September 11th 2001, which prompted donors to redirect aid money toward African states in an effort to reduce the terrorist threat' (Igoe & Kelsall 2005: 2). This change in funding priorities was of particular significance for Binti Leo. Since its establishment the organization had been donor dependent: the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) was the main funder of many cultural organizations in Tanzania and across the region in the two decades prior to 9/11. These included the Tanzania Theatre Centre (TzTC), the Eastern Africa Theatre Institute (EATI) and the Southern Africa Theatre Initiative (SATI). The funding shift was not signalled to client organizations, so Binti Leo, like many other organizations, continued to send in proposals for funding, but in vain. As a result organizations such as TzTC and EATI collapsed, and Binti Leo

began to be seen as increasingly irrelevant by Tanzanian women artists. Consequently interest and commitment waned. 'Sometimes if there is no activity, someone says why should I stay and pay [membership] fees? She decides to move on and do other activities', explained Hanifa.

Lack of funding evolved as one of the major challenges for Binti Leo. 'We cannot run our programmes without funds. Donors have changed their funding policies. They want us to align and follow what they want. On our side, it becomes difficult [...] we cannot run training without giving participants allowances [for] their meals and transport', explains Hadija. Binti Leo runs various training programmes dealing with arts and the empowerment of women. Examples include classes in *batik* making, women's economic empowerment, costume making, acting, directing and scriptwriting, among others. These activities are ongoing even though they currently reach only small groups of around five to ten women, and only in the Dar es Salaam area.

Although the Binti Leo leadership is keen to raise funds, they lack a fund-raising strategy. Agnes Lukanga says they have a three-year action plan but I could not access this, and most activities appear to be conducted on an ad hoc basis. Responding to the issue of sustainability, Deo Temba, the Head of Communications of the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (Mtandao), said: 'Most women's groups do not have enough resources so that they depend on TGNP resources [...] they need their own fund-raising mechanisms'. This implies that, although this major national women's organization is keen to support women in the arts, they do expect organizations like Binti Leo, after existing for a decade, to help support their own members.

Binti Leo is still marginal in Tanzania: it has failed to become a unifying national force for women artists. The major question is why? Leadership is one area of concern. Although it is claimed that they hold elections every three years, the leaders are mostly the same women who took office when the organization was established. If Binti Leo chooses to continue to operate as a membership organization, it needs more transparent leadership, with regular meetings and better involvement of members. Binti Leo could consider creating a less bureaucratic leadership structure, better fitted to take advantage of contemporary media, social media and funding opportunities.

A second issue is membership. Many Binti Leo members have 'abandoned' the organization for a variety of reasons, including poor leadership, lack of communication, and members' own busy schedules. Binti Leo needs to recruit more members from a wide range of performance backgrounds and to network much more effectively. It might be better to transform itself into a network linking up with women artists and their organizations, instead of the current approach which expects members to join as individuals. It also needs to re-establish itself effectively in Dar es Salaam before it seeks to become a nationwide organization.

Thirdly, Binti Leo might like to reconsider its objectives. In my view the objectives highlighted at the time of Binti Leo's establishment are still relevant: women artists still need a space to air their views and to raise a common voice to speak about their concerns. But Binti Leo needs to invite members and stakeholders to share ideas and agree how best to run the organization in a changed funding environment.

A final issue is financial sustainability. Since its establishment Binti Leo has not been able to identify any internal sources of funding apart from membership fees. It is unrealistic to expect anyone to pay fees to an organization they think is not useful or relevant. Binti Leo could consider operating as a business enterprise rather than an NGO. This approach might well be practical as most active members already have entrepreneurial skills and spend most of their time running their small arts-based businesses. Binti Leo needs to reconsider the possibly outdated idea that a woman-centered organization 'should' work as a charity.

Despite the challenges, some active Binti Leo members are optimistic (although many are not) and believe that they can survive and do better in the future. 'We are planning to produce short films which can be used to facilitate training in the villages. It is cheaper than sending the whole group to perform there', says Hadija.

Conclusion

Binti Leo has existed for a decade, and clearly shown its potential for bringing together women in the arts. The focus of its work is currently on training members in entrepreneurial and investment skills. The aim is to make most members self-sustaining. Members who are active meet up to three times a week to update each other about ongoing projects in various organizations in the creative sector. Most members have undertaken alternative activities to sustain themselves, such as catering, running small shops, and selling art works during conferences and festivals. Binti Leo is still alive, which is arguably an achievement in itself. It now needs to find new ways to achieve the admirable objective it set itself of serving all women artists in Tanzania.

NOTES

1 *Lelemama* is one of the women-only traditional dances. During the Tanganyika independence struggle women organized themselves in *lelemama* groups which became epicentres for women and entire communities organizing and communicating news about independence.
2 Tanganyika African National Union.
3 TANU joined the Afro Shiraz Party (ASP) in 1977 and Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM, literally the Revolution Party) was born.
4 Bibi Titi Mohamed (1926-2000) was one of the first women to join the independence

movement in Tanzania (then Tanganyika). She was instrumental in uniting women through *lelemama* dance groups to fight for independence.
5 The first president of Tanganyika and later president of Tanzania (1962-1985).
6 English translation by the author from the original Kiswahili.
7 Amandina Lihamba is a professor of theatre, a playwright and a director. She has published widely in the area of arts, education, gender and culture.
8 Penina Mlama is a professor of theatre, a playwright and the author of *Culture and Development: Popular theatre approach to Africa* (1991).
9 I was among the organizers.
10 Tanzania Gender Networking Programme.
11 One US$ is equivalent to 1,850 Tanzanian shillings.

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Odile Gakire Katese

Making art & reinventing culture with women

Interview by ARIANE ZAYTZEFF

Rwandan artist Odile Gakire Katese was born and raised in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and 'returned' to Rwanda in 1996. There she studied at the National University of Rwanda and worked as an actress with Koulsy Lamko, a Chadian writer and director. She went to France and trained in theatre with Jacques Lecoq and at Le Samovar, then came back to Rwanda in 2003 where she worked as assistant artistic director at the University Centre of Arts and Drama (UCAD) until 2011, under the direction of Aimable Twahirwa, and then of Jean-Marie Kayishema. In 2012 she created her company, Rwanda Professional Dreamers, with whom she works in the performing arts, particularly in music, theatre and writing. Her current project, *Mumataha*,[1] involves the creation of two music albums and a theatre piece based on letters from a former project, *The Book of Life*, in which survivors and perpetrators wrote to people whom they lost or killed during the genocide.

Her artistic work was her point of entry into Rwandan culture, which she had to learn when she arrived from the DRC. Looking back at her trajectory and evolution over the past ten years, it becomes apparent how her position as an artist, who was also a returnee and a woman, has led her to approach Rwandan culture and arts with critical care and curiosity. This has resulted in a corpus of artistic work that speaks to the realities of contemporary Rwanda. Her body of work from 2003 until today[2] includes three plays: *Iryo Nabonye* (*What I Saw* (2004) as co-writer/co-director), *Des Espoirs* (*Hopes* (2005) as writer), and *Ngwino Ubeho* (*Come and Be Alive* (2009) as writer/director). It also includes the writing workshops of *The Book of Life* (2009, as facilitator); the albums and concerts of *Mumataha* (2012, 2014, as producer); and the drumming troupe Ingoma Nshya which she created in 2004 and has promoted ever since. As the assistant director of UCAD she organized a series of international workshops, called 'Arts Azimuts', in theatre, music and dance from 2003 to 2007. In 2008 she turned the annual workshops into the first international festival of performing arts in Rwanda. Through these workshops and the festival she gave young Rwandan artists