

Transcript of AWPN film

JC Niala: So you consider yourself a theatregoer? Have you ever seen a play written by an African woman? Why do you think that is?

(montage of clips from plays)

In 2015, researchers at Warwick University began the African Women's Playwrights' Network, to connect African women playwrights with each other, and with the world.

0.58

Philisiwe Twijnstra: Hi my name is Philisiwe Twijnstra, I am a playwright, theatre director and actor from Durban, South Africa.

Tosin Kooshima Tume: My name is Tosin Kooshima Tume, I'm a Nigerian playwright and theatre creator.

Neo Kebinitswe: Hello this is me this is Neo Kebinitswe, I come all the way from Botswana, it's in southern Africa.

Sophia Mampuh Kwachuh: My name is Sophia Mampuh Kwachuh.

JC Niala: Now these playwrights are being published and their plays are being performed for audiences around the globe.

1.38

Adong Lucy Judith: Look back at the history of Africa, the writers who were renowned at the time of the African writers series - Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe - were all male. And that's why it's women - coz African Women Playwrights' Network is trying to close that gap and saying - yes, we have women storytellers or African women storytellers as well.

Clip from *Silent Voices*

Soldier shouts: Traitors! Traitors! These are the haters of their kind! They run away from their kind to join the enemy!

Adong Lucy Judith: I think for me the major ways in which the African Women Playwrights' Network has been helpful and supportive is one, building this network of African women theatremakers who I can get suggestions from, whenever I have challenges, or celebrate a triumph with, but at the same time also exposing me to plays that I wouldn't have had access to and writers or women writers that I wouldn't have had access to if I were not a member.

Clip from *Holy Maria*

Princess Alicious: ...and the adulterer shall surely be put to (screams)

Maria: I don't believe 'ahhh' was a part of the scripture

Princess Alicious: Forgive me first lady!

Adong Lucy Judith: It really does help a lot to encourage us, to push us, to make us continue with the journey, and do the work that needs to be done, the work that is very important to do. Because then otherwise we'll all just get lost in our little world and feel small and feel scared and feel like we're not making any difference and then we don't have women's voices out there. Our stories are then all told by men.

Clip from *Silent Voices*

Crowd shouts: 'What about us? What about us? What about us?'

3.54

Sara Sharaawi: My play was put on in Cape Town in a sort of lo-fi production and Amy who is part of African Women Playwrights' Network got in touch with me and said 'Sara could you send me your play, I'd like to consider it for this new anthology'. So I did and that's how it got published.

Clip from *Niquabi Ninja*

Niquabi Ninja: You should have made him masturbate.

Hana: But that's not what happened.

Niquabi Ninja: Who cares what actually happened? That was the scene, that was the moment when she should have grabbed that pencil and -

Hana: I want to tell the truth.

Niquabi Ninja: It's a fucking comic! No-one cares about the truth.

Sara Sharaawi: The Network has been really beneficial to me. Being from Egypt it's so hard to connect with people because it's such a closed place and when you come from places which have quite intense regimes, quite closed off governments, which make it hard for people to come in hard for people to move out, it's a joy to be able to know about what's going on in other parts of the continent and I think the Network's a big part of that for me. There's so much the African continent has to offer, and I feel it's important to know what's going on there, and I feel it's important to listen to women's voices, because we haven't for so long.

5.30

Koleka Putuma: A lot of times people kind of go 'where are the black women playwrights, theatre makers?' People like to do that just because the work is not visible as it should be all the time, and so I think what the Network does is to make visible what people want to make invisible.

Clip from *Mbuzeni*

Girls chant: On our parents' graves and ours we grieve in spit. Make the dead never wink at us in our coffins nor haunt us while we are breathing.

Koleka Putuma: African Women's Playwright Network is the first platform that has published one of the works that I've written which, as a South African young black woman playwright that's really rare. A lot of us don't get published – most of us don't get published at all.

Clip from *Mbuzeni*

Girls shout: Jehovah Jirah! The Lord who provides! The Lord who sees! Water walker! Wine Maker! Jehovah nice nice!

Koleka Putuma: I think the world needs to see theatre from Africa because the image of African narratives has been distorted for a very long time. And not been told by the people who are at the centre of that narrative. And so I think for the first time people who own those narratives can tell those narratives from their own voices.

7.16

Thembelihle Moyo: Theatre in Africa is brilliant and it is genuine.

Clip from *Who Said I Don't Want to Dance?*

Mala: Look at you! You are a beauty. You just need to gain a bit of flesh.

Gina (throws water): You go to the shops and parade your ass!

Mala: Surely by tomorrow morning you will be gone! And I will be sleeping in my brother's bed.

Thembelihle Moyo: The African Women Playwrights Network Facebook page is very useful to me. It's just part of my life, I make sure that every day I have to go there and see what is there, what other women in other places are doing, in other African countries are doing, to find out whether I can get opportunities because now and again they post opportunities that you can either apply or learn from them. Especially in Africa where there are no links at all, compared to other European countries where you found there are many networks that writers can meet and collaborate, but in Africa it's rare. For me if this network never existed, I don't think I would have achieved all that I have achieved so far. The African Women Playwrights Network just gave us a lifetime chance that we would never have come by. It's a fact that I wouldn't be here, I wouldn't have my play published. The African Women Playwrights Network connects you to the global world, it links you to theatre companies you never knew existed, it brings you closer to the real world of theatre-making, and it empowers you as an African woman.

9.11

Dr Yvette Hutchison: After four years of this project where we started really struggling to access writers to where we are now working with over 300 participants people are saying to me 'so how did you do this?'. And the answer is, a combination of working with online platforms, mobile app where we accessed women across the continent and asked them to join us, share their work, their ideas, their questions, their processes and things that were getting in the way of their work. Then we facilitated face to face encounter at a symposium in Cape Town at the Arts Admin Collective where people in embodied ways workshopped these questions that had come, that we processed as researchers, and together in a reciprocal way we worked through not only the questions but potential solutions, which for me as a researcher was really interesting because things that came out were not what I expected which suggested different ways of creating knowledge, a kind of co-creation of knowledge, and the women found trust and were able to collaborate in much more meaningful ways after the symposium.

One of the best outcomes has been the collection of new plays by women from seven African countries, this work is really exciting because it's innovative, it's asking difficult questions, but in quirky and funny ways that is provocative but also inclusive of really diverse audiences. And this has been exciting for researchers but also for educators who can now access this new material. We've had organisations coming to us saying 'how can we work with you?' so the Canadian Guild of Playwrights have brought forward money to mentor writing, theatres in South Africa are offering spaces to work with women to actually stage these plays and so we are seeing a momentum to this work with these kinds of organisations saying 'how can we roll out this network?'

11.07

Bridget Reilly Beauchamp: At Pulley and Buttonhole Theatre Company we wanted to do a season that we were calling 'Outside Us' which was focused on non-American playwrights and non-American stories. We knew that we wanted to do a piece from a country or a continent that we didn't hear much from, and the more I explored the idea of doing African stories the more I was really drawn to it, but there aren't a lot of resources out there to find African authors. I happened to find the African Women Playwrights Network Facebook page and I put out a request and had several really, really wonderful authors contact us, and just fell in love with Adong Judith's work and with Thembe Moyo's work and decided that we needed to do an evening of one Acts, so that we could showcase both women.

There's a need for the African Women Playwrights Network because it gives these incredibly talented women the exposure that they aren't getting through more traditional means and it allows those of us who are looking for them to find them.

12.05

Tosin Kooshima Tume: When I got the call for submissions of plays by the AWPN I sent in a play, they were asking for plays that specifically talk about African women, I sent in a play entitled Not That Woman and luckily for me the play got selected and was published.

Sophia Mempuh Kwachuh: African Women Playwrights Network is such a huge project that is so, so creative so encouraging and has enhanced my professional career a lot. I had one of my plays, *Bongangyi*, published.

Philisiwe Twijnstra: Through AWPN I was able to become a better writer, and what do I mean by that? I'm no longer alone, I am connected to many many, many creatives around the continent.

Neo Kebiditswe: When it comes to the African Women Playwrights' Network this has been such a lifechanging and even inspirational platform for me as a young woman, a young African woman, because we need more platforms and we need more opportunities where we can connect as artists, where we can connect as women and just share our stories, share our struggles, share our rewards, not just to boost our careers or to boost our portfolios but to also empower each other and empower the generation that is coming after us.

14.15

JC Niala: So, theatregoer, is it now time for you to see a play written by an African woman?