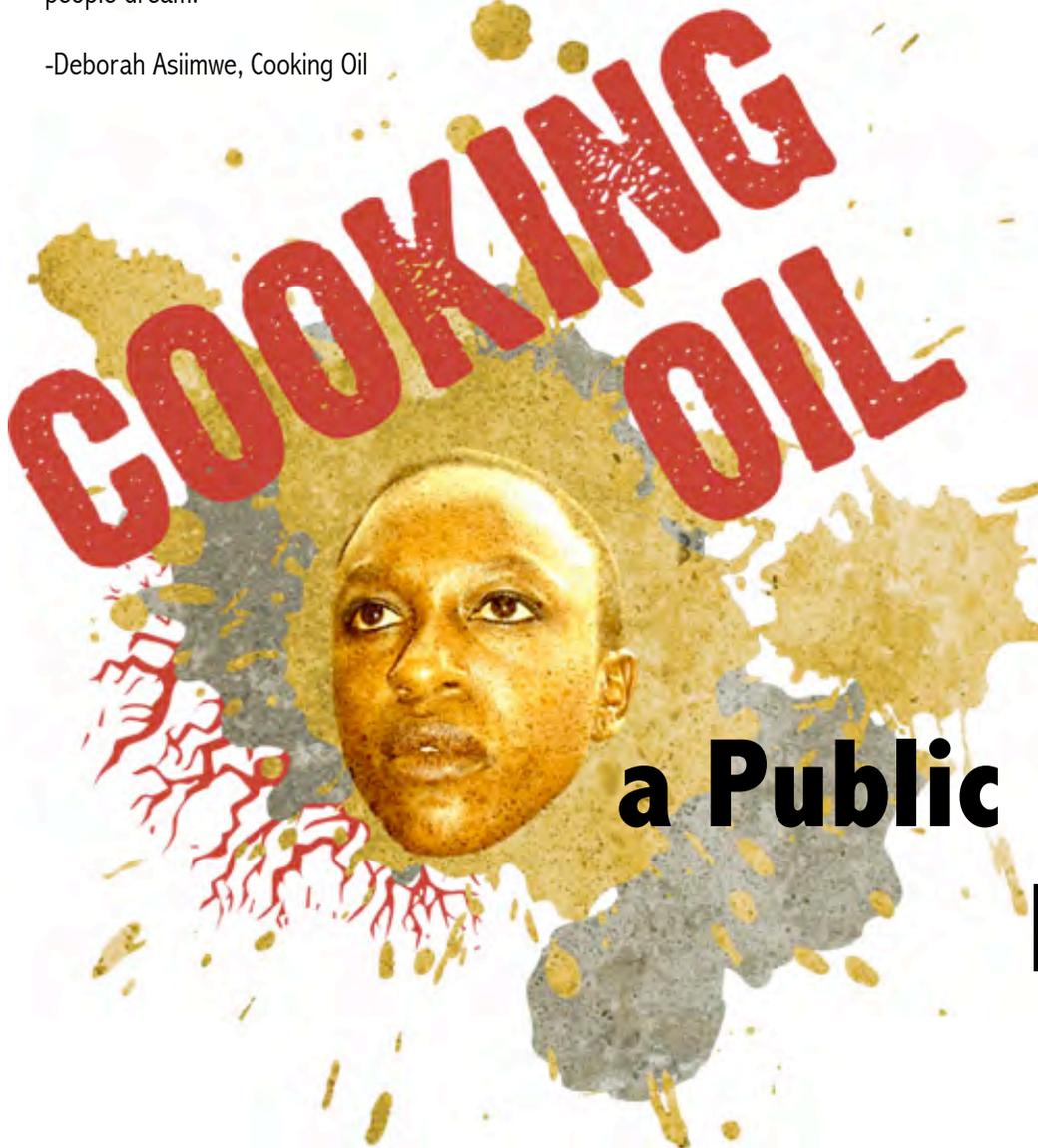


Who do you think you are? Because we are not studied like you, because we do not ride a motorbike like you, you think we don't dream? Ndeeba, even poor people dream.

-Deborah Asimwe, Cooking Oil

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a Public Dialogue Initiative

Cooking Oil is a new play by Uganda playwright Deborah Asimwe. The play explores the impact of foreign aid on the developing world, along with issues of women's empowerment and education. Asimwe's writing is deeply rooted in lived experiences and shared realities of silenced cultures.

Cooking Oil performed at the National Theatre of Uganda in October 2010, and again as part of the Centre by Centre Festival in Rwanda in August 2011. Our team is now looking forward to additional residencies throughout Central and East Africa, Europe, and North America. Along with performing internationally, we hope to expand public dialogue on the play's globally relevant topics with both donor and recipient communities.

The story follows a teenage girl, Maria, who faces an untimely death when she finds herself selling cooking oil in the territory of prominent politician Silver Bibala. In fact, the cooking oil does not belong to either of them; it is aid intended for a starving village. Maria sells it because she needs money to complete her education. Silver sells it because he needs enough money to campaign for office in the upcoming election. Asimwe bears stunning witness in this play to the landscape of dependence and instability perpetuated by many foreign aid systems.

www.cookingoilplay.com

COOKING OIL IN PROCESS

Cooking Oil was produced as an international collaboration between artists in Uganda and the US. The project's reality is ultimately the result of a long-standing partnership between California Institute of the Arts and the More Life Initiative in Rwanda and Uganda. Playwright Deborah Asimwe moved from Uganda to the US to study at CalArts, where she met director Emily Mendelsohn and the rest of the US-based team; multiple collaborations have ensued because of this peer relationship.

The performance at the National Theater of Uganda was co-produced by Miranda Wright and the Nyonyozi Cultural Troupe, with the support of the US Embassy in Kampala, the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the Durfee Foundation's Artist Resource for Completion grant program, and a group of over fifty individual supporters.

Performances in Kigali, Rwanda were held as part of the Centre by Centre Festival in August 2011, with performers from both Uganda and Rwanda. This extension of the project was supported by Project Troubador, Ishyo Art Center, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (Cultural Exchange Fund), and private individuals. Professional actors, designers, and technicians were hired and paid fair wages in both cities to complete the performance.

Through our production model, we are committed to fair compensation for artists, creating space for public dialogue both locally and globally, and building sustainable relationships between artists internationally.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Deborah Asimwe (playwright) Currently working as Specialist for Sundance Institute's East Africa initiative, Deborah Asimwe is a playwright and performer from Uganda. *Forgotten World*, *Cooking Oil*, *Appointment with gOD* and *Untitled* received readings and workshops in the United States of America. *Lagoma is Searching*, *You are that Man*, and *My Secret* were produced at the Uganda National Cultural Centre/National Theatre. Asimwe has participated in many artists' gatherings and conferences, including, the annual Arts in the One World Conference (CalArts, Valencia, California), a project of More Life Initiative: Genocide and Cultural Studies, a collaboration between CalArts and the Interdisciplinary Genocide Study Center in Kigali, Rwanda; *Eti! East Africa Speaks* at Dartmouth College (2008); the Women Playwrights International Conference in the Philippines (2003); and is the 2003 Sundance Theatre Lab international observer. Asimwe received her MFA in Writing for Performance from California Institute of the Arts. She is the Overall Winner for the 2010 BBC World Service African Performance playwriting competition.

Emily Mendelsohn (director) Emily Mendelsohn is a director from Los Angeles. While earning her MFA in directing from CalArts, she participated in *More Life: the Arts in One World Conference* and annual summer travel to Rwanda and Uganda, studying how art participates in peace building. In 2010-2011, she lived in Uganda on a Fulbright Fellowship and taught directing at Makerere University and worked as a member of the producing team for *Centre x Centre*, an international performance festival in Kigali, Rwanda that grew out of the *More Life* project. Her directing work includes (at CalArts:) *Beginner* by Erik Ehn, an adaptation of *Angel of History* by Carolyn Forché and Deborah Asimwe's *Untitled*; *Art Works Ink's Sky like Sky* (South Africa National Arts Festival). She teaches arts and civics at Vassar's Powerhouse Theatre program.

Kyabaggu John Bosco (EA Producer) John Bosco is a Ugandan Based Director/ Writer. An Honors graduate of Drama (Makerere University) he started out his professional career in 2002 Directing and acting with Makerere's People's Theatre, specializing in Pan African and Shakespearean Plays. His multi lingual and research abilities have seen him work as a writer, director, and taking up key administrative roles as Associate Editor for Uganda Theatre Network Gazette and Production Manager for the East Africa premier of Sonke C. Weiss's play, *Butterflies of Uganda*, 2008 in Uganda. In 2007, John Bosco was identified by The Eastern African Theatre Institute to represent Uganda's Youth Theatre Professionals at the 6th International Drama/ Theatre and Education Association (IDEA) Conference, Hong Kong. John Bosco Kyabaggu currently works as a consultant with British Council Uganda, Managing the Creative Lives Arts program – WAPI. He also doubles as Theatre Factory's Relations and Marketing Manager.

Shannon Scrofano (designer) Shannon Scrofano is a designer based on the west coast. Working to create original devised work with a focus on site, integrated media, civic engagement and dialogue strategies, her collaborations include live performance, installation and film projects throughout the US and internationally. Selected work has been seen at PICA : TBA, REDCAT, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Baryshnikov Arts Center, the Orchard Project, St. Ann's Warehouse, Evidence Room, Woolly Mammoth, Manual Archives, Miami Light Project, Highways, Montreal Fringe, Tribeca Film Festival, the Berlinale, the Academy Awards, and with *Project Por Amor*, *El Teatro Público* and the Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in Havana, Cuba. She has taught or lectured at universities including Georgetown University, Northwestern, Cal State, the Art Institute of Chicago, Fordham, Portland State, Pacific Northwest Film Center and at various festivals and conferences. She is a graduate of Northwestern University, and holds her MFA from California Institute of the Arts, where she currently teaches.

Miranda Wright (producer) Miranda is an independent producer for live performance, and the co-founder of The Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts, based in Los Angeles. She is the editor in chief of the *CSPA Quarterly*, a publication dedicated to exploring sustainability in all arts genres. Her most recent work as a producer includes *The Closest Farthest Away*, an international collaboration between artists in Los Angeles and Havana, Cuba, for which she produces all US-based events and performances. Miranda has an MFA from California Institute of the Arts.

OUR TIMELINE



MAY 2010

NEW YORK CITY

Public Reading

Cooking Oil is a conversation on the impact of foreign aid on the "developing" world initiated by East African artists. The ensemble of Rwandan and Ugandan performers is born out of relationships Deborah and I have cultivated over the past year - me from Kampala, her from NY - and offers a rare opportunity for collaboration across national and diasporic borders. Through its familial structure and embrace of the many forms in the bodies of the artists, the project sustains an open exchange across, at times, difficult histories.

-Emily Mendelsohn, Director



OCTOBER 2010

KAMPALA, UGANDA

World Premiere

Uganda National Theater

The collaboration between Nyonyozi Cultural Troupe and the American artists coming to Uganda is right on the dot. The timing is appropriate, the geographical setting is real, and this is the time Ugandans need this show. I greatly welcome and support the idea of this project because it's success will be received like drops of rain in the desert. It deserves to be successfully produced in Uganda and other countries which need socio-economic and political redemption. -Aggrey Barusya, Director of Nyonyozi Cultural Troupe (Uganda)



AUGUST 2011

KIGALI, RWANDA

Workshop Performance

Centre by Centre Festival

Even if the plan is not to completely get rid of aid in five or fifteen years, this is now in the people's mentality in Rwanda. It is a new twist in thinking. We are the only place in sub-Saharan Africa with an aid policy. And talking about the Arts sector- this is definitely what we are trying to do. Ishyo Art Center was built in response to having no freedom to create, and no freedom of aesthetic, and no freedom of forums. And we are proud to have built this space as a free space to interact with other artists and learn from one another.

- Carole Karemera, Centre by Centre Festival & Ishyo Art Center



AUGUST 2012

NAIROBI, KENYA

Community Presentation, following a final workshop in Kampala, Uganda

There is so much that we don't know about what is going on between the developing countries and the developed countries as far as foreign aid is concerned. It's interesting that 60% of the world's resources come from Africa, but at the same time sub-Saharan Africa gets over 50% of their income through foreign aid, so ... there's no balance.

- Deborah Asimwe, Playwright



2013

NEW YORK, LOS ANGELES, WASHINGTON DC, LONDON

United States & United Kingdom Tour

Governments are exploding with demand from their citizens for more real paths to democracy. Cooking Oil is a proposition, a storied provocation, to look at our selves, our neighbors, our most intimate personal, social and civic relationships for the impossibly complex narratives within them. It's a proposition to consider our conditions between - between nations, between citizens and leaders - in all their impossibilities and resistances.

-Shannon Scrofano, Designer & Community Dialogues

JOIN US / Become a Partner

Cooking Oil is currently seeking partnerships in the United States and United Kingdom, in order to share this important work with an international audience, and extend the conversation to include both donor communities and communities in the Western world who are dependent recipients of aid.

We're hoping to participate in the following activities with key partners in New York, Los Angeles, and London.

Academic Institutions

- Educational Opportunities for current students, including:
- Opportunities for international/cultural exchange
- Learning experiences in theater related to global social action
- Workshops in African performance (music and dance) led by East African artists
- Opportunities for students to work with and learn from our US-based team in the areas of direction, design, international producing, and public dialogue initiatives.
- Guest lectures on international collaboration, directing techniques, playwriting, and community/context-based design
- Summer travel practicum opportunities for 2-3 students to study the context of the play and learn about our collaborative process in East Africa

Presenting Organizations

- Community Engagement opportunities
- Compelling international programming

Activist Organizations / NGO's / Government Extensions

- Participation in public dialogue around issues of international relief aid & women's educational rights
- Providing direct support toward cultural democracy
- Supporting work that aligns with mission
- Enabling the development of international artists' networks and cross-continental relationships



For more information, please contact

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