

Evolution of Comedy in Africa

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Abstract

This paper is intended to examine the evolution of comedy in Africa which has progressively been transforming in recent years. Laughter has been widespread throughout the history of human societies, from daily private life to public spaces. Comedy is a deliberate act to make audiences laugh. It also mirrors the reality of a transforming African society and politics. As the African economy has grown continuously owing to the rising price of natural resources, the African comedy industry has expanded over the years, and African people have been increasingly spending money on attending comedy shows. First, this paper traces the character and progress of African comedy as an entertainment industry, focusing on comedy-specialized production companies (and agents) as well as individual comedians. Second, the paper examines the principal challenges for African comedy, such as its international networking activities and women's involvement in the African comedy industry, to grasp the current situation of African comedy and its future potential.

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1. Introduction

This paper is intended to reflect on the evolution and challenges of African comedy as an entertainment industry in progressively transforming African countries. Laughter eloquently mirrors the socio-political relations in every society, especially in Africa, where people often suffer under absurd and brutal rules and social divisions. Comedy is an intentional (professional) act to make audiences laugh. Performers who do comedy—that is, comedians—are professionals who are conscious of the reactions from audiences during their performances, in contrast to those who engage in non-professional personal diverting acts, such as joking and individually creating humor in private daily life. The characters and trends in comedy are also affected by the socio-political situation.

First, this paper traces the history and character of African comedy after providing a brief conceptual reflection. Then the paper examines the evolution of comedy or laughter in African countries, from the entertainment business to political satire, from various angles and positions. In recent years, comedy has been progressively growing as an emerging genre in the entertainment industry in African countries after the traditional entertainment genres of music and film. Comedy (laughter) mirrors the social and political situations in African countries. It is not only done publicly to expose politically powerful (ruling) actors but also practiced stealthily by and among the politically marginalized (ruled) actors (or ordinary people), which is known as *le politique par le bas* (a political thing from below; Bayart, 1981). Therefore, it is meaningful to reflect on African comedy to examine and foresee the cultural, economic, political, and social situations and perspectives in contemporary (drastically transforming) African societies and politics.

Therefore, this paper highlights the comedy entertainment industry to reflect on the meaning of laughter in daily life, which mirrors the current situation and transformation of African society and politics. This paper principally focuses on the professionalization (especially comedy-specialized productions) and international networking of African comedians and then on the recent emergence of female African comedians. These phenomena are noteworthy for reflecting on African comedy, which displays the social transformation taking place in African countries.

The author has previously tackled the study of political meaning and engagement in laughter-producing (including comedy) acts during politically relevant periods in African countries (Iwata, 2016, 2020). However, the range of this paper is

not limited to political aspects; it elaborates on broader socio-cultural aspects to describe more characteristic phenomena and their challenges in contemporary African society. This paper examines African comedy through significant case studies by focusing on its professionalization process, internationalization, and gender issues principally in French-speaking West African countries.¹

2. Making laughter and humor in society

Throughout the world, laughter mirrors the social and political realities at any given moment. Contemporary Africa is no exception. Although laughter has not attracted particular attention in African studies, it should not be a negligible component in decoding the social and political situations in Africa, especially in countries with less experience of democratization, where people have a history of being unable to express their (political) opinions freely.

Indeed, laughter is a quite complicated human act, which is psychologically and materially produced by, in, and through various backgrounds, locations, momentums, motives, reasons, and times. Therefore, it is always challenging to define laughter or laughter-related human acts in a unique and fixed fashion. We need to keep reflecting on the mechanism of making laughter. As the author has already reflected on the concept of laughter (Iwata, 2016; 2020), this paper does not repeat the basic conceptual reflections on laughter examined in the previous papers.

In terms of the laughter-emerging process, Morreall introduces three theories concerning superiority, relief, and incongruity. According to the superiority theory, people laugh because they have a feeling of superiority over other individuals or groups. According to relief theory, laughter happens at the moment of release from a very nervous situation. Lastly, incongruity theory postulates that the gap between what was expected before and what happens, in reality, produces laughter (Morreall 1987, 5-6).

Bakhtin reflects on laughter in the context of Carnival: "Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators" (Bakhtin 1984, 122). Carnival combines "the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid" (Bakhtin 1984, 123). In addition, "Carnival celebrates the shift itself, the very process of replaceability, and not the precise item that is replaced. Carnival is, so to speak, functional and not

1. The author might need to make sure that some wordings in this paper do not confuse readers in French-speaking African countries. In French-speaking countries, *le (la) comédien(ne)* means the actor(ess), *l'humoriste* means comedian, and *l'humour* means comedy.

substantive” (Bakhtin 1984, 125); “Carnivalistic laughter likewise is directed toward something higher—toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders. Laughter embraces both poles of change, it deals with the very process of change, with *crisis* itself” (Bakhtin 1984, 127).

Among the three theories introduced by Morreal, an inverted superiority most strongly occurs in the carnivalesque situation. People living in a weaker position in an ordinary time can feel ephemeral superiority in the carnivalesque situation by mocking the political leaders or social order and generating laughter. A fundamental regime change may create a carnivalesque situation nationwide.

African society is replete with comedy or humor, from the daily lives of people, to national politics, to the entertainment business. Comedy and humor are human acts intended to allow other people to laugh by and through action, idea, performance, or/and words. The difference is that comedy is a more professional act than humor, which is not necessarily performed professionally by targeting an audience.

For instance, Trevor Noah, a South African comedian, is known worldwide today as a political satirist. After he established his successful career as a top stand-up comedian in South Africa, he moved his professional activities to the United States, where he broadcasts a regular political satire TV program, *The Daily Show*. Now, he is one of the most famous African comedians in the world. Moreover, comedy as an entertainment business has been expanding on the African continent in recent years.

3. Overview of comedy in contemporary African societies and politics

3.1 Comedy in society and people’s lives

Laughter is abundant and omnipresent in the daily lives of African people and societies as well as in other regions, from private diversion and entertainment business to public (political) events. However, comedy—in other words, professional laughter-making performance as an entertainment activity—has not been sufficiently managed in a professionalized structure in African countries. Through the continuous economic growth during the 21st century, the entertainment industry, including comedy, has been progressively expanding in African countries.

As stated in the introduction, the author of this paper has reflected on the meaning and role of laughter in African politics generally deployed outside the political society, also known as a research approach of *le politique par le bas* (Iwata,

2016). However, these practices of laughter have not necessarily taken place in the style of professional performances. This paper focuses on the professional structuring process of African comedy.

The comedy industry has been expanding in recent years in many African countries. As it became more affordable for African people to attend and enjoy a comedy show, comedy entertainment also began attracting more young African people as a profession. As young entertainers became more involved in the comedy scene, we began to see the significant emergence of comedy-specialized production companies in African countries. Thus, the professionalization of comedy began to flower in many African countries.

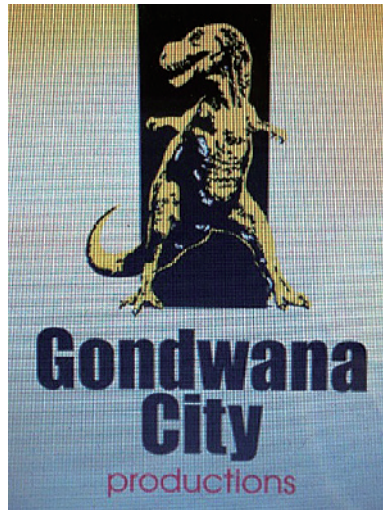
Besides eloquently mirroring the social and political realities, not only in African countries but throughout the world, laughter affects the trends in comedy. In terms of the correlation between the socio-political situation and trends in comedy or laughter, Côte d'Ivoire is one of the most exciting sites on the African continent. Since the political crisis and armed conflicts that occurred during the first decade in the 21st century, Côte d'Ivoire has been rapidly recovering its economy with accompanying political stability. In addition, Abidjan, the economic capital, is becoming a hub for international networking among comedians from French-speaking African countries. The author attended their biggest comedy festival, *Abidjan Capitale du Rire (Abidjan Capital of Laughter)* in December 2017.

3.2 New trends in African comedy: Development of comedy productions

In recent years, African comedy has been progressively professionalizing in some African countries. So far, comedians have managed their programs and schedules by themselves without belonging to any management organization (i.e., entertainment production companies/agents). However, while the comedy industry has been expanding, more comedy-specialized productions have progressively emerged in several African countries over the years. African comedians were used to performing in private locations, such as parties held at restaurants or hotels. As these performances in private spaces became more popular, more public comedy shows began to take place in large theaters and halls, gathering huge audiences. To discover and foster young talent, the entertainment production companies or godfather-like comedians were keen to establish comedy training schools.²

2. Interviews with Gerard Ouedraogo (His Excellency Gerard), March 4, 2018, Ouagadougou.

Figure 1: Gondwana City Production



Source: Gondwana City Productions website

As one of the most successful cases, Gondwana City Productions (GCP) was established in 2012 in Abidjan by internationally famous African comedian Mamane (Mohamed Mustapha, Niger) and French producer Catherine Guerin. GCP not only manages comedians' schedules but also produces many comedy festival events, such as *Abidjan Capitale du Rire* and *Afrique du Rire* (Africa of Laughter), as well as content, such as (seasonal) regular broadcasts of the program, *Parlement du Rire* (Parliament of Laughter) on the French satellite channel Canal+. Various

Figure 2: Mamane



Source: Author (photographed December 10, 2017, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire)

GCP events and content are based on the fictive country the Very Very Democratic Republic of Gondwana (*la République très très démocratique du Gondwana*), which is located “somewhere” on the African continent and is ruled by the founder-president. Finally, GCP launched its first film, *Bienvenue au Gondwana* (Welcome to Gondwana), in 2017 in Africa and Europe.

The comedy industry has since significantly flourished in African countries. As the namesake of a comedy festival, Abidjan has become the capital of comedy in Francophone Africa. Furthermore, such comedy events are internationalizing by inviting comedians from other African countries and taking place in various African countries. Thus, the comedy industry is progressively growing its domestic and international markets simultaneously.

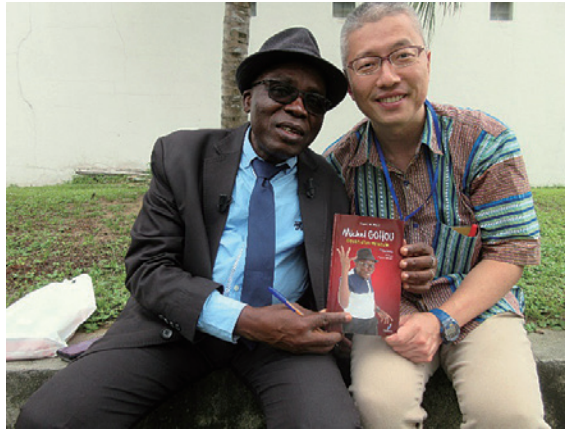
Apart from GCP, various African comedy-specialized production companies are undertaking activities in Côte d’Ivoire and other African countries. Gohou Production was established by Michel Gohou, one of the most famous comedians on the African continent (especially in French-speaking countries), in 2016. Gohou has produced a tremendous number of TV comedy-dramas, films, and stage events. Gohou Production is managed in a pan-African way, working with a project manager from the Central African Republic and a communications manager from Benin (Teubeu 2019, 123). Gohou hopes to foster young comedic talent of the next generations by establishing his comedy school. Gohou Production held an event celebrating Gohou’s 30th anniversary in the entertainment field in August 2019 in Abidjan. Gohou Production also planned an international tour to commemorate the anniversary. However, the biggest hassle for a comedy production company is always

Figure 3: Gohou Production



Source: Author (photographed October 3, 2019, Abobote, Côte d’Ivoire)

Figure 4: Michel Gohou



Source: Author (photographed October 3, 2019, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire)

raising money for carrying out their events and future investments.³ Gohou Production also manages a mobile money transfer (remittance) agency and real estate business to regularly earn money as a stable financial resource rather than depending on Gohou's performance activities (Teubeu 2019, 124).

Les Productions du Doromikan was established by Adama Dahico (Dolo Adama, hereafter Adama), an Ivorian comedian whose international fame rivals that of Gohou. Adama has staged a comedy festival, *Festival International du Rire d'Abidjan (International Festival of Laughter in Abidjan; FIRA)*, since 2003. In August 2019, he organized the 10th festival in Abidjan. Fifteen years after organizing his first comedy festival, he recognizes that Ivorian comedy has reached the phase of professionalization (Guinée en Marche, 2019).

Adama is one of the most politically motivated and engaging comedians in Côte d'Ivoire. He has been involved in Ivorian politics and has sometimes kept close proximity to politicians, especially former President Laurent Gbagbo, in the 2000s, which was a quite sensitive period in this country owing to the de facto civil war. The most remarkable event in terms of his political engagement was when he ran as a candidate in the presidential election in 2010.

Adama ran for president as an independent candidate. After the first round of voting took place in October 2010, he ended his race in 11th place among 14 candidates. During the second (final) round, in the competition between the first two candidates in the first round, incumbent President Gbagbo and former Prime

3. Interview with Clarence Hermann, Director of Gohou Production, October 3, 2019, Abobote, Côte d'Ivoire.

Minister Alassane Ouattara (Houphouet-Boigny administration), Adama publicly announced his support for President Gbagbo. This endorsement would bring him enormous difficulties when the Ouattara administration was established after his election. Although he is a comedian and actor, not a politician, his support for Gbagbo put him in difficulty after being labeled a pro-Gbagbo supporter or an opponent of the new regime.

After the inauguration of the new administration, Adama faced a strong headwind from the government as well as society, where there was a pro-Gbagbo stigma. He confessed later that he had been excluded from the public media, including the national broadcaster, RTI (Radio Television Ivoirienne), and was not able to organize his comedy festival in the following years (Droit Libre TV, 2011).

Following Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso is rapidly becoming an epicenter of African comedy through expanding its comedy market by attracting domestic and international talents. A famous Burkinabe comedian, His Excellency Gerard (*Son Excellence Gérard*, Gerard Ouedraogo), established his production company and launched a comedy school, *le Cercle des arts vivants* (The Living Art Circle), in Ouagadougou in July 2019. This was his long-time dream, which he told the author repeatedly during the fieldwork for this research. Thus, His Excellency Gerard fulfilled his dream.

Figure 5: *L'Atelier du Rire* organized by Le Cercle des arts vivants



Source: Facebook of Le Cercle des arts vivants (July 10, 2019)

Le Cercle des arts vivants established *l'Atelier du Rire* (*Atelier of Laughter*) in July 2019 in Ouagadougou. This is not only a permanent comedy theater but also a training school for young comedy talents (Bationo, 2019; Zoodomail, 2019). Comedy has been attracting increasing attention as an entertainment profession for young

Africans over the years. His Excellency Gerard established his Comedy Club in 2014 in Ouagadougou by having fostered young talents such as Philo (Philomène Nanema), Nifa (Mahamadi Sidibega), Sandokan (Romain Sawadogo), and Jaguar (Sylvain Yameogo) (Zoodomail, 2019).

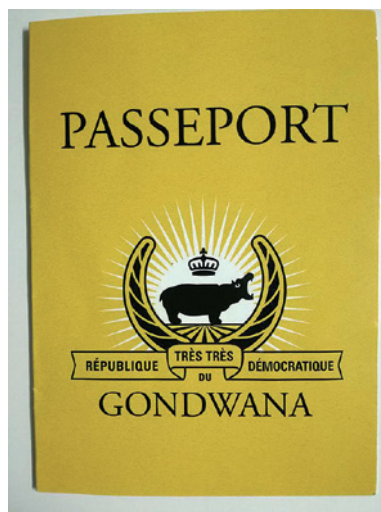
4. Progress and challenges in the African comedy industry

4.1 Professionalization and internationalization processes of African comedy

In general, the comedy industry is still at a nascent stage in many African countries. The comedy market remains quite small for African comedians to earn sufficient money to sustain themselves through professional comedy activities alone. This is the reason why the number of comedians is still small in each African country. Comedians are not necessarily independent entertainers from actors in many African countries.

In general, people in Africa have not yet recognized comedian as a decent profession; rather, they see it merely as a personal diversion. Therefore, it is inevitable for African comedians to perform abroad to earn income because, outside of Africa's largest economies, such as Nigeria and South Africa, comedy markets remain incredibly small. In addition, comedy production companies or event organizers also need to look beyond national borders for opportunities and talent. The

Figure 6: Passport of Gondwana Republic



Source: My passport delivered by the President of Gondwana City Productions

professionalization of comedy is the biggest challenge for the progressive growth of the African comedy industry. In African countries, it is very characteristic of the professionalization and internationalization of comedy to progress simultaneously. It is also the destiny of the African comedy industry under the current circumstances.

An international network of African comedians has been growing steadily in recent years, as more internationally organized comedy events have taken place in African countries. The Very Very Democratic Republic of Gondwana, led by Mamane and his GCP, is one of the most noteworthy cases. After Mamane's radio program became very famous, these fictive (African) state-caricaturing (political satire) programs spread to the theater, satellite TV programs, and, eventually, film.

This "Republic" broadcasts a regular seasonal comedy TV program called *Le Parlement du Rire* (*Parliament of Laughter*) on Canal+, the French satellite TV station, which has been broadly watched in French-speaking African countries. Since GCP was established in 2012 in Abidjan, the economic capital city of Côte d'Ivoire has been progressively becoming the international capital city of comedy in Francophone Africa. Mamane, the President of Gondwana (City Productions), is ambitiously establishing a bigger, comprehensive African network of comedy, such as *Union Africaine du Rire* (*The African Union of Laughter*).

Le Parlement du Rire is also expected to become a platform for scouting future comedy talent. This program calls for candidates who want to perform on TV. Candidates apply by submitting their comedy sketches to GCP (Facebook of GCP, August 9, 2019) to perform on stage, which is filmed by a special broadcasting team. It is a crucial strategy for GCP to keep growing the comedy industry and market.

The international networking activities of African comedians have been rapidly expanding in recent years. International comedy events have been taking place more frequently, inviting comedians from various African countries. This trend stimulates communication and exchanges among African comedians from various nationalities during the preparation and on stage. How does this trend affect and influence the activities and performance of African comedians? This is an interesting question for reflecting on the correlation between laughter and the social, economic, and political situations in Africa.

While the international networking of African comedians has been expanding, the internationalization of African comedy still faces many challenges, such as the colonial language barrier and professionalization of the comedy industry. Parallel

international networks of African comedians have been formed in English-speaking and French-speaking countries without any significant exchange between the two camps. This colonial language wall is still very strong and high, blocking full-scale exchange and collaboration among African comedians.

In English-speaking West African countries, such as Nigeria and Ghana, the comedy market is continuing to develop. The author interviewed a famous Ghanaian comedian to learn about the current situation and challenges in the Ghanaian comedy industry.

Figure 7: Khemikal



Source: Author (photographed December 3, 2018 [left], February 11, 2020 [right], Accra, Ghana)

Khemikal (Daniel Selase) started his career as a comedian in 2010 and has mainly performed stand-up comedy. As in other countries, entertainment event producers are keen to scout young talent in Ghana. In general, young comedians start to perform in small comedy halls or public spaces, where they are seen by event producers. They are also active on social media platforms to make themselves more visible beyond the stage. In Ghana, many comedy events have taken place in recent years, such as *Comedy Express*, *Hahaha Show*, *Laugh Kitchen*, *Laugh Line*, *DKB Live*, *Piyo Comedy*, and *Night of a Thousand Laughs*. However, the comedy market is still very small in Ghana for comedians to make a living from the entertainment business alone. It is a very difficult profession.

Ghanaian comedians manage themselves and sometimes spend a month preparing a sketch. Even some famous comedians cannot earn enough from their stage performances (50–200 cedis, approximately US\$10–40, even at a large venue), so

they need to perform at corporate events or wedding parties, unless they are concluding a contract for a TV advertisement. Therefore, Ghanaian comedians sincerely seek opportunities to perform abroad in order to build a prosperous career, because the domestic market is still very small. However, it is always a tremendous challenge for Ghanaian comedians to perform abroad. Augustin Dennis is known as the most successful Ghanaian comedian abroad. He has performed in Malaysia, Singapore, and the UK. As a globally performing comedian, he is a role model for other Ghanaian comedians.⁴

In international activities for African comedians, the colonial language barrier is still very strong, especially between English- and French-speaking countries. Although Abidjan has become the capital of African comedy, its influence is still limited to Francophone African countries. There is almost no collaboration between comedians from the neighboring Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. As Ghana is geographically enclosed by French-speaking countries in West Africa, Ghanaian comedians have no other choice but to bypass its direct neighbors and go to Nigeria to seek a bigger opportunity to perform abroad. Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya are the most attractive international comedy markets for Ghanaian comedians.

The author met Khemikal again for an interview to learn about his experience in Nigeria. It was his first performance abroad (Lagos, Nigeria, June 2019) in his comedy career. He had been invited to Nigeria to perform at the *One Man Comedy* show produced by Funny Bone, a Nigerian stand-up comedian. He was very nervous about this first performance abroad. He performed before an audience of 1,000 people. He had prepared a particular sketch for a stage outside of Ghana by highlighting rivalries between Nigeria and Ghana.

His first performance abroad left a great impression on him, especially regarding the progress of the comedy industry in Nigeria. His impression was that the comedy industry in Nigeria was much more developed than in Ghana in terms of the variety of comedians, the huge comedy market, and the sophisticated structure (e.g., specialized comedy writers, sponsors, marketing staff). He summarized the progress of the Nigerian comedy industry with three keywords: branding, delivery, and content.⁵ After performing in Nigeria, his challenge of internationalization as a comedian continued.

4.2. Gender issues in African comedy

In general, being a comedian is still a very challenging profession for African

4. Interview with Khemikal, December 3, 2018, East Legon, Ghana.

5. Interview with Khemikal, February 11, 2020, East Legon, Ghana.

women. The comedy industry has generally progressed into a male-dominated entertainment business field in Africa, similar to other regions of the world. However, we expect more spaces for African female comedians in the coming years because the comedy industry itself is still nascent on the African continent. It might be that the African comedy industry will change in a more flexible way. The visibility of female comedians has been increasing in the African comedy scene in recent years.

Most African female comedians begin their entertainment careers as theater actors; usually, women do not choose to perform comedy from the outset. However, the distinction between an actor and a comedian in the African entertainment scene is still vague. Often, women accidentally get an opportunity to start making particular efforts to make audiences laugh.

Compared to male comedians, female comedians in Africa are more likely to keep a distance from politics. They are likely to choose their material for comedy sketches from the daily lives of African women. This partially mirrors their vulnerable political status. On the one hand, their behavior is based on self-protection. They do not want to be involved in real political engagement or disputes occurring in their country.

On the other hand, politics-based comedy does draw laughter from audiences that share a specific political context or background. This makes comedians limited in their activities inside their own country. If a comedian is keen to deploy their comedy activities outside the country and internationalize their activities, such a politics-based comedy sketch is unlikely to be accepted by audiences outside the country. The materials and sketches on women's real daily lives are more practical to perform internationally in Africa and beyond.

The author interviewed Roukiata Ouedraogo, a Burkinabe female comedian who has lived and been performing in Paris for almost two decades, after attending her representative one-woman show, *Tombe le Masque* (Falling a Mask) at a theater in Paris.⁶

According to R. Ouedraogo, women are still in the minority in the comedy industry in Africa, like they are in Europe. However, the situation has been gradually changing due to an increase in the number of African female comedians in the African comedy scene.

Like other African female comedians, she has tried to keep a distance from politics in Africa, and she did not directly talk about politics in her comedy show. She usually highlights the universal and daily life of an African woman, especially

6. Interview with Roukiata Ouedraogo, November 9, 2016, Darius Milhaud Theater, Paris.

an African girl dreaming of becoming a star. However, she has begun to talk about and denounce terrorism and feminine genital mutilation (FGM, or *excision* in French) in recent years.⁷ Therefore, over the years, she has become a more socially involved African comedian.

R. Ouedraogo performs in Europe mainly and Africa occasionally, and she adopts a different style according to the region where she is performing. In African countries, she speaks frankly and loudly. In France and other European countries, she sophisticatedly modifies her style to make it less direct or more metaphorical. However, in all her performances, culture shock is the common component for her to generate laughter in Africa and in France. The cultural gap is one of the essential elements of her comedy performance.

The author also interviewed Philo (Philomaine Nanema), another famous (and becoming the most recognized) Burkinabe female comedian, in Ouagadougou.⁸ She began her career as a theater actress. However, His Excellency Gerard Ouedraogo (who would later become one of the godfathers of comedy in Burkina Faso) repeatedly recommended that she attempt comedy and invited her to perform on his comedy show. She eventually accepted his invitation in 2014 (Somé, 2016) and started performing comedy.

Figure 8: Philo



Source: Author (photographed February 18, 2017, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso)

7. Programme on *Le Journal Afrique sur TV5 MONDE*, January 22, 2018.

8. Interviews with Philo, February 18, 2017, March 5, 2018, Hotel Palm Beach, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and October 4, 2019, Palais de la Culture, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

As a comedian, Philo also tries to keep a distance from political issues. She loves to find material for her sketches from the daily lives of ordinary African women, especially romantic relationships between women and men. This is a universal and eternal theme of human life. She prefers to play a very aggressive woman enthusiastically looking to fall in love with her future husband. She sometimes imitates some personalities but without mentioning individual names, choosing instead to imitate a more general character with whom audiences can identify. Her comedy material based on non-political matters can be easily arranged when she performs abroad. However, she recently started to talk about FGM in her sketches, using humor to make audiences aware of this problematic custom.

After Philo became more famous in Burkina Faso, other young female comedians enthusiastically began to follow her. She does not belong to any production company because she prefers to performing freely to being controlled by commercial interests.

As previously mentioned, comedy is still a male-dominated industry in Africa. However, we can find signs of women's proactive involvement in African comedy. GCP is also a good example related to women in African comedy. GCP is led by two female producers—Catherine Guerin and Marie-Christele Adae—and Mamane, the founding president of GCP. They are striving to change the culture of African comedy to involve more African women in the industry. We need to examine gender issues in the African comedy industry not only from the acting side but also from the producing side.

5. Conclusion

This paper reflected on the character, progress, and challenges of African comedy today. As the author has studied laughter-related subjects to understand the transforming African society (politics) from a different angle (Iwata, 2016, 2020), laughter eloquently and accurately displays the social and political realities via a humoristic expression. Laughter is a significant barometer of social and political change. Comedy is an entertainment genre aimed at making people laugh. As comedians create laughter intentionally, their comedic activities mirror the social and political realities.

African comedy is an entertainment genre that has been progressively expanding in recent years as the African economy has continuously developed in the 21st century, owing to the high demand for, and rising price of, natural resources. Consequently, African people can now afford to spend more money on African

comedy and more young African talent is now keen to join the comedy entertainment industry. At the same time, comedy-specialized entertainment productions have been established one after another over the years in African countries. Nevertheless, comedy is still a smaller genre in the entertainment industry than other traditional genres, such as music and film, in African countries.

This paper first traced the progress of the comedy industry in African countries. Second, the paper examined some significant issues, such as internationalization and gender, in African comedy. The colonial language barrier is still powerful, blocking a full-scale international collaboration at the continental level. Although more female talent has entered into the comedy entertainment business in recent years, women are still marginalized in the comedy business.

This is an introductory and partial reflection on African comedy. We need to pursue more in-depth studies by conducting more case studies and interviews with African comedians and production companies about this essential and exciting subject to better understand the current transforming African society and politics.

The author prepared almost all parts of this paper by collecting information and interviewing comedians and producers before the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the world. Therefore, this paper does not examine how much the pandemic has affected (or damaged) the African comedy entertainment industry. Future research must uncover the impact of COVID-19 on African comedy. Undoubtedly, the landscape of the African comedy industry before and after the pandemic must be dramatically different.

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