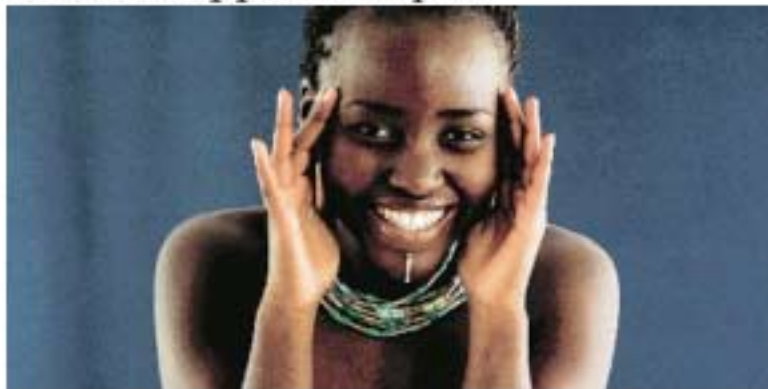


ZUKQA

The unstoppable Lupita



By DICK WELLS/STELLA Brand Thursday, May 14 2009 at 14:00

Many people go through life in a normal cycle complete with ups and downs not different from those of their next-door neighbours. But for others, the downs are deeper, and the ups steeper.

Kenyan filmmaker Lupita Nyong'o has managed to weave experiences from different people from diverse backgrounds but with a similar trait into a coherent 75-minute documentary that has won her recognition in many parts of the world.

But for the 25-year-old, there's much more to it than the recognition. "All I want is for the movie to have an impact on the individuals who get a chance to watch it," says Lupita.

The documentary, *As My Guest*, is about eight people with albinism (a lack of pigment in the skin and eyes) from different walks of life and the daily battles they fight in relation to their condition- and because of the fact that they look different.

While each person's story is unique, they all have one thing in common: they know what it is like to stand out uncomfortably from the crowd.

Piercing

The group of eight is made up of a farmer, a teacher, a university student, an aspiring politician, a doctor and businesspersons. The documentary is a journey of their lives exploring their hopes, dreams, ambitions and fears.

Lupita herself knows a thing or two about being the odd one out. She spots a pimple on her lower lip. She says she has been frowned upon a few times in her lifetime.

"Even when everything that can go wrong goes wrong, and no one gives you credit for the things you can do, one should always find strength from within and push on through," she says.

She never always had this outlook on life. Her perceptions were changed after interacting with 49-year-old Agnes Muthukiya, one of her on-screen characters in the documentary.

Says she, "despite the stigma directed at her from early childhood, and her poverty she had a focus around her. Her energy and the way she confronted life made me realize that the only way one can be happy in life is to accept who they are and love themselves unconditionally."

The documentary was inspired by her ignorance. "A close friend of mine has albinism and I grew up knowing nothing about the condition," Lupita explains.

On a trip home from Hampshire College, liberal arts school in Amherst, Massachusetts, in the US, she somehow got to know more about albinism from her friend (who also has a role in the documentary), about the condition and what she was going through. She looked for sponsors and a crew and set out to make the documentary that also doubled up as her undergraduate thesis.

"I thought it would be nice if I put all I had learned from her on camera, just so others would get the same information I did," she says.

Although she has worked on other projects, she says this is her greatest work yet. "It was my first documentary and I'm happy it turned out close to what I had in mind when coming up with the project," says Lupita, who is Medical Services minister Arnyang' Nyong'o's daughter.

Meatly

However Lupita has previously worked in other projects including *The Constant Gardener* in 2005, and *The Newsweek*, directed by Mira Nair, in 2006.

The film, just like the book, looks at the scarring conflict of African identity, won her the Best of Hampshire College Award at the Five College Film Festival in 2007.

In 2008, *As My Guest* won the Best Documentary and Best Film of 2008 at the Pioneer Valley Five College Film Festival and the Screeners Selection, at the Afriqalia Film Festival in Mexico that same year.

Meanwhile she is soon going back to the US for her Masters of Fine Art course on scholarship at Yale University in September and march on towards her future, which she believes, has a lot in store for her.

"I'll come back home and live out some of my dreams, which include having a family and children of her own," she tells ZUKQA.

Her future plans include instituting a performing arts institute in Kenya.

Meanwhile, the documentary will be officially launched on the 28th May at the Silver Bird Cinema (formerly Nu Metro Cinema) in Westgate.

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Additional reporting by Tin Kamau Bwala