

**HER
PORTMANTEAU**

BY **MFONISO
UDOFIA**



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

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*Dedicated to the mothers who do the hardest things
and the children who love them.*

HER PORTMANTEAU was developed and created as part of the I Am Soul–Playwright Residency Program at Dr. Barbara Ann Teer’s National Black Theatre (Jonathan McCrory, Director of Theatre Arts) in Harlem, New York City.

HER PORTMANTEAU was developed, in part, at SPACE on Ryder Farm (Emily Simoness, Executive Director).

HER PORTMANTEAU received a workshop production with the National Black Theatre in 2015. It was directed by Victor Maog, the scenic and lighting design was by Justin Townsend, the dialect and language coach was Beth McGuire, the translator and language specialist was Ebbe Bassesey Manczuk, the dramaturg was Anton Floyd, and the stage manager was Kristine Schlachter. The cast was as follows:

ABASIAMA UFOT Patrice Johnson Chevannes
INIABASI EKPEYONG Nana Mensah
ADIAHA UFOT Christine Osuala

HER PORTMANTEAU received its world premiere at New York Theatre Workshop (Jim Nicola, Artistic Director; Jeremy Blocker, Managing Director) in 2017, in association with The Playwrights Realm. It was directed by Ed Sylvanus Iskandar, the scenic design was by Jason Sherwood, the costume design was by Loren Shaw, the lighting and video design was by Jiyoun Chang, the sound design was by Jeremy S. Bloom, the dialect and text coach was Dawn-Elin Fraser, the dramaturg was Janice Paran, and the stage manager was Kara Kaufman. The cast was as follows:

ABASIAMA UFOT Jenny Jules
INIABASI EKPEYONG Adepero Oduye
ADIAHA UFOT Chinasa Ogbuagu

The playwright would like to especially thank Mr. Essien E. Idiong and Ebbe Bassesey Manczuk for their work on *Ibibio* translations.

CHARACTERS

ABASIAMA UFOT

60s. A splay-footed, gap-toothed woman. Thinner Ibibio accent.
Fluent in both Ibibio and English.

INIABASI EKPEYONG

36. A bow-legged, gap-toothed woman. Thicker Ibibio accent.
Fluent in both Ibibio and English.

ADIAHA UFOT

30. A splay-footed, gap-toothed woman.
An amalgamated accent [Central Massachusetts and Ibibio].
She is fluent in English, hears Ibibio but has a very limited
speaking capacity.

Note on Nigerian Names and Ibibio Words

Previous drafts from the original productions used a phonetic spelling of Nigerian names and Ibibio words for the clarity of non-Ibibio-speaking actors and critics (for example, “*Adiagha*” rather than the correct “*Adiaha*.”) This published edition uses the correct/traditional spelling of Nigerian names and other Ibibio words.

The sole exception is the anglicized “ng” in place of the velar nasal letter “ŋ” at the end of names. “*Ukponŋ Ekpeyonŋ*” would be the traditional spelling, but the pronunciation is comparable to “*Ukpong Ekpeyong*,” and native Ibibio speakers have recently begun more readily adopting the anglicized “ng” ending.

However, words in Ibibio (other than proper names) retain the ŋ, and have been so spelled in this acting edition.

Future credits should please reflect the correct spelling herein.

GENERAL NOTES

Punctuation & Rhythm

(“.”)

The play is written in the language of thought, there is no need to wait for the thought to come to you. The next thought is simply right there. That said, periods should not stop the flow. Move through the language with ease.

(“—”)

A dash is a hard shift in thought/flow. Do not smooth these over. Instead, collide into the dash, and turn quick into the next thought.

(“..”)

An ellipsis is a thought-breath. It is not overlong. Collect yourself during this slight break and then pick up again.

(“?”)

Questions are *never* rhetorical. Please do not ask questions as if the answer is known. Dare to upward inflect and be vulnerable.

(“[]”)

Nothing in brackets is ever said. These are just there to aid the actors’ emotional scaffolding within swallowed moments.

(SILENCE)

A silence is a filled sac of time where the characters nonverbally confront someone/thing. Silences are pregnant and almost uncomfortable in length. Talking restarts after a silence only when absolutely necessary.

(DOUBLESTACKING)

A double stacked word (i.e.: thatthat, finefine, etc.) denotes the Nigerian/Ibibio way of adding extra emphasis and color. The double-stacked word means exponentially more than a singular use of the word. Triple, quadruple, etc., stacking does occur.

Stage Directions

Read all stage directions carefully, including those inside parentheses. Stage directions are not merely suggestion. They are there to support the story. Implement the action of the stage directions to the best of your ability.

DIALECT NOTES

Blending

Adiaha speaks with a fluid blend of Massachusetts [Central Massachusetts/suburbs of Worcester] and Ibibio dialects. The standard Boston accent which is most associated with this area is not applicable to Adiaha.

When Adiaha speaks English, the sounds changes are those for Central, MA; however, she possesses the musicality of Ibibio. Because Ibibio is a tonal language, Adiaha will exhibit expanded tonal range and greater inflection variability. Also, Adiaha will not observe unstressed rules. Thus, the word “biased” may sound like “bi-assed” and “refrigerator” will have no unstressed syllables.

HER PORTMANTEAU

Scene 1

January 2014. Polar vortex. One of the coldest days of the year. JFK International Airport.

Iniabasi, 36, a woman with chin-length relaxed hair, wearing jeans, an extra-pretty top, a light windbreaker, and flats makes a call from a wall of public payphones. An old-fashioned red portmanteau rests by her feet. Visibly flustered, Iniabasi tries to keep terror at bay. She picks up the receiver, pulls out a calling card, and punches through a ridiculous amount of numbers.

She finally gets someone.

INIABASI. (To Uwem.) Uwem? Mmemyem itan̄ ik̄o ye Kufre.¹

...

(To Kufre.) Kufre?! Hey! My manymanymany question boy. Idem fo? Iyo-o, ini ifon̄o idaha emi afo adidi. Mma ud̄ok̄o. Ami ye afo, iya iba ke akamba uf̄ok̄. Ame toyo? Udubaha ik̄p̄on̄ uboyo udua kiet. Amekop? Aya atibe. Ayaf̄on̄!²

...

Ntie mbet anye. Akpekena anye aba mi ke n̄kanika kiet. Uwem aba mm̄o? OK, aba ik̄p̄on̄? ...Af̄on̄. Ame toyo *cellphone* ami n̄kun̄ofo? Ke ben ke idak *bed* nyin di. Kub̄o *cellphone*. Ayakit ndise *phone* ke *screen*. Tuk ndise *phone* ado ke *screen*. Ayakit umian̄ *numbers*, OK?

1 Uwem, I want to talk to Kufre.

2 Kufre?! Hey! My many many many question boy. How are you? No-o, it's not the right time for you to come now. I've told you. You and I will be in a biiiig house. Remember? You will not be alone past one week. Do you hear me? It will happen. It is going to be just fine!

Kọt numbers ado nno.³

Iniabasi searches for a pen in her purse.

...Bet...bet...bet.⁴

She cannot find one. She must repeat the numbers to imprint them on her brain.

(Repeating to herself.) 009-1-508-902-6784. 508-902-6784. *(To Kufre.)* Kufre, ame diṅṅo mkpọ eti eti. Sọsọṅo! Nyatre aditan iko ndion—*(Repeating to herself.)* 508-902-6784.⁵

...

Afọn. Nya ukoot. I'll call in an hour. Ana nka idaha emi. Toyo. Kubre mbre ye cellphone ado. Ben kenim ke idak *bed*. Ku dọkọ owo ndomo kiet nte aba. Nko Kufre, no using this cellphone please unless high emergency and don't pick the cell either, OK? I'll call you through Uwem. Unwāṅa? Afọn. OK. OK. Tim ba-o. Bye.⁶

Adiaha, a zaftig woman, swallowed by a monstrous winter-coat, hat, and scarf, enters. She has a 4x6 picture in her hand. She spots Iniabasi, compares images, and halts. Her body takes in the reality of her sister.

Iniabasi, again, makes yet another call, still using the calling card.

(Muttering.) 508-902-67...

She has forgotten the number.

No. Nononono...678...8...Oh!

Iniabasi starts riffling through her bag.

3 I'm waiting on her, she should have been here at 1 o'clock. Where is Uwem? OK, are you alone? ...Good. Remember the cellphone I left you? Go get it from under our bed for me. Open the cellphone. You will see the picture of a phone on the screen. Touch that picture of the phone on the screen. You will see many numbers, OK? Read those numbers to me.

4 ...Wait...wait...wait.

5 009-1-508-902-6784. 508-902-6784. *(To Kufre.)* Kufre you know a lot (so smart). Thank you! I am stopping talking to you now—*(Repeating to herself.)* 508-902-6784

6 OK. I will call you. I'll call in an hour. I have to go now. Remember. Do not play with that cellphone. Put it back under the bed. Don't tell anyone where it is. And Kufre, no using this cellphone unless high emergency and don't pick the cell either, OK? I'll call you through Uwem. Do you understand me? OK. OK. Be good-o. Bye.

(Unaware of Adiaha.) Iniabasi, / ntak abaha ntuum-o?!⁷

ADIAHA. (Bubbling forth.) Ini...?

Silence.

...Iniabasi?

INIABASI. (Almost inhaled.) ...Ih.⁸

Adiaha begins closing distance between herself and Iniabasi.

ADIAHA. ...Hi! ...Hi!... It's—

INIABASI. (Fear and excitement.) Mma-mi?!⁹

ADIAHA. No! I'm not—I'm...

Iniabasi freezes.

...Mom's late.

Adiaha pierces Iniabasi's vast and taut personal-space bubble.

Iniabasi flinches.

Adiaha freezes.

Her GPS got scrambled and then she ran into some traffic. So she asked me to help pick you up.

...

(Gesturing to herself.) It's me...I'm your—...I'm Adiaha.

Iniabasi looks around, desperately trying to understand.

(Gesturing to make sure that she is understood.) My ZipCar's parked right outside. We can—...I'm here to take you back with me...to my apartment in Inwood. ...I mean on the island...I don't know how to explain. ...My apartment in the city.

Slowly, Iniabasi picks up her bags and waits for Adiaha to either start talking again or start walking. Adiaha finally gets the hint.

It's fine. I promise.

...OK?

...Let's go.

Adiaha exits. Iniabasi follows behind, balancing close enough

7 Iniabasi, / why this-o?!?!)

8 ...Yes.

9 Mommy?!)

HER PORTMANTEAU

by Mfoniso Udofia

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HER PORTMANTEAU is Part Two of the Ufot Cycle, Udofia's sweeping, nine-part saga which chronicles the triumphs and losses of Abasiama Ufot, a Nigerian immigrant, and her family. As Nigerian traditions clash with the realities of American life, Abasiama and her daughters must confront complex familial legacies that span time, geography, language and culture.

"...extraordinary... moving... infuse[s] some tired, tempest-tossed old forms with new blood."
—**The New York Times**

"Udofia [is] a first-generation Nigerian-American playwright with a lot on her mind and a seriously compelling storytelling gift." —**Deadline.com**

"Can a family hold together across borders? This unspoken question menacingly hangs over [HER PORTMANTEAU]... Udofia offers no easy answers, but her firm grasp of family dynamics will give audiences much to consider... Distance is no longer a barrier to a family relationship, but the problems of jealousy, suspicion, and disappointment still remain. Udofia unpacks those issues with uncommon sensitivity and brimming imagination."
—**TheaterMania.com**

"...a masterpiece... HER PORTMANTEAU...[is] a play from the heart whose emotions will pull you in and stay with you long after the final curtain. ...a mature, moving [and] accomplished work."
—**TheaterScene.net**

Also by Mfoniso Udofia
SOJOURNERS

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