[Video: Kemi_Adeyemi_Video 1.MP4]

[00:05:57.28]

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: I guess am I still in the frame if I sit up?

Bitaniya Giday: Okay, hi, my name is Bitaniya Giday. I'm a junior studying Political Science and American Ethnic Studies. I'm currently in the GWSS Department in Padelford. The date is April 30th. The time is 12:08 pm. And I'm sitting here with…

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Should I say my name? Kemi Adeyemi.

[00:06:24.15]

Bitaniya Giday: Kemi, can you introduce yourself however you feel comfortable?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: And should I look at you or the camera?

Bitaniya Giday: Me.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Introduce myself. I'm Dr. Kemi Adeyemi . I'm Associate Professor of Gender, Women, Sexuality Studies at the University of Washington. I teach primarily Black and Queer and Feminist studies courses, Sexuality studies courses here in the department. And I write about dance and performance primarily. And I run the Black Embodiments studio which is

an arts writing incubator, public programming initiative and publishing platform dedicated to building discourse around contemporary art. Black art, I should say.

[00:07:07.21]

Bitaniya Giday: Thank you so much for that. And Kemi where were you born?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: I was born in Fountain Valley, California, Newport Beach basically, in 1985. And then I grew up in Minnesota, southeastern Minnesota.

[00:07:23.29]

Bitaniya Giday: And wait, when did you move from California to Minnesota?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: As a baby, my family's from Minnesota. Yeah.

[00:07:33.16]

Bitaniya Giday: And who gave you your name?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: My bio dad.

[00:07:37.27]

Bitaniya Giday: Does your name have any sort of like meaning?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: It means the crown suits me well.

[00:07:41.25]

Bitaniya Giday: Oh, in what language?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Yoruba.

[00:07:45.10]

Bitaniya Giday: So you talked about like moving to Minnesota. And we've also talked about you going to Macalester College. Can you describe the decisions that led you to major in Geography and describe the experiences within like that major that were really significant in shaping your scholarship?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Yeah, I mean, I had wanted, I went to college, I wanted to be a diplomat. And at Macalester, you kind of apply into a program, you know, and I didn't get into International Studies, but I got into Geography. I was very disappointed. Because, yeah, I just, you know I was just disappointed. But it turned out that Geography sort of gave me everything I needed in terms of setting my sort of intellectual scaffolding and had a politics, which International Studies did not necessarily and I learned in college you know what I mean to like, kill your darlings. Basically, I was like, "Oh, being a diplomat is kind of fucked up. But working for the government, not something I want to do." You know I learned all of those things in college in general but also in the Geography Department. But it really trained my

attention on thinking about land, and interactions between people and the land. And that lots of our political struggles are struggles around territory, whether that's physical, geographic territory, or just, you know, what kinds of ephemeral resources can we hoard, whether that's people, culture, ideas, you know what I mean? So I don't know, majoring in Geography organized my thinking in a way that like literally gave it structure in a way that I continued to kind of carry through. And I double majored in American Studies. So they and they were quite complimentary. Like, the way that American Studies was, at that time, not necessarily having, like it was having conversations around like nation formation but not necessarily like from the perspective, like a very grounded material perspective that Geography was doing so. And then Geography was having conversations around, you know, Geography that were like, politicized but somehow kind of without a politics, and I can't even quite put my finger on how that was being expressed. So then American Studies was giving me, you know, a kind of political framework to be thinking more critically about Geography as a discipline and its practices. Anyway, all of that you know gave me my structure for thinking about like what I wanted to do in graduate school. It like gave me a structure for thinking about race and racialization as something that happens through geographic attachments as well. And I wasn't getting that in American studies, I wasn't necessarily getting that in Geography, but I was getting it in the way that the two were in conversation with one another. Which I think is

what was appealing to the Performance Studies department that I go to for graduate school. Do you know what I mean? Because I was sort of not fitting into the American Studies programs I was applying to, I wasn't applying to Geography PhD programs, I was like, I've had my fill. So yeah, I think that sort of geographic training lended itself to the ways of thinking about the physical body and the ground and the land that were useful in Performance Studies. They were sort of like similar ways of approaching conversation, even though it was different disciplines.

[00:11:39.15]

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah. Can you actually talk more about, like, why you chose Performance Studies, and like, what it was about Geography that didn't make you want to like pursue it in like graduate school? And yeah like what you found in Performance Studies, that was like, a lot more helpful.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Yeah. I mean I think Geography, it was like a cultural thing. Like one time I went rock climbing, like indoor rock climbing. And like, with some friends, I've been twice, and I learned that it's not my sport. I was very bad at it and like I was like, "Oh shit I'm afraid of heights, not into this." But the thing that I hated about rock climbing, I was like, "Oh my god the people here, the vibes, the energy, " it was just like this style of whiteness that I was like this is not for me. And it's the exact same energy and culture in Geography Departments, no tea, no shade! You know,

Geography Departments are great Geography at UW is brilliant, you know what I mean? I love the information and the practice and the tools and the skills and I did not love the culture. So that's why I was like, I'm not going to do this in grad school. And I've been like very sort of lightly following, you know the growth of Black geographies. Sort of nationwide, worldwide so in some regards I'm kind of bummed that I missed out being a trained part of that kind of movement. But I'm glad that it's happening and I don't need to be there. And then your question was…

[00:13:14.08]

Bitaniya Giday: What it was about, like, what are the people that..?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Oh, why performance studies?

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah, performance studies.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: I basically, I didn't have the language for this when I was like applying. and like imagine in graduate school, I didn't, I couldn't quite put my finger on it and then when I landed in Performance Studies, I was like, "Oh." I basically the way I wanted to understand race the way I wanted to study race I didn't…I felt like there was like something I was missing, like one extra step, that I was not quite understanding when we talk about race. As a social construct, but also a lived experience, there was something that

I was like, I'm missing, like, one-half step, before we get to the consolidation of a racial category or a racialized experience. And like I just like, couldn't, you know, figure it out and something about Performance Studies and it's focus on the body, the materiality of the body, of phenomenology of the body, was giving me that extra half step that I, it just sort of, like unlocked a lot in my mind. Even when I was like, researching the program, like, and I was like reading, I was like, "Oh, this is exactly how I want to be thinking." So it was the only Performance Studies program I had ever heard of and the only one I applied to other I'd also just like, applied to, like, African American Studies Departments, American Studies Departments, you know, sort of relatively traditional or older disciplines basically. But I was like really excited about Performance Studies, I think I read, wrote like, an entirely different application, basically, like, you know, it just really was working. And it did work.

[00:15:00.25]

Bitaniya Giday: So once you got into, like, Northwestern's Performance Studies PhD program, can you talk about like some of the most significant memories you had during your time there? And did you feel like what you had applied for actually like manifested during the program?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Yes, absolutely like what I had wanted to do, which, you know, it's grad school I didn't quite know, but like, in terms of like, wanting a way of

thinking, absolutely gave me that like, in spades. And I had a really lovely cohort of people that I came in with we're still like very close. So I had a good social community but I also that cohort was also like a very good intellectual community. So I don't know in terms of like best memories, it was just like, developing a community of thinkers. That has been very long lasting and like very fruitful, that's like the strongest memory, I guess. I mean it's Northwestern graduate school, it was like a pretty brutal place to go through graduate school. In terms of the training, like you know, in some regards it was hazing, you know what I mean, it was like a really tough place to sort of cut your teeth but it also worked. That feels like a weird thing to say it worked, you know, so not only in terms of like learning how to be a thinker but like learning how to be how to do the business of the academy that was trained into us as well. So and then of course just in terms of like the thinking, you know, just get it the skill building and Performance Studies as a discipline and, you know, in terms of just like fleshing out my ideas, and the intellectual project, also was like, sort of, very successfully done. In part because of the fear around the hazing part, like you can't like fake your thinking you got to make it happen or they're going to let you know. So yeah, you know it was kind of like a rat race, but I made it to the end.

[00:17:11.11]

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah, and then could you talk about, also like, while you're sort of like in this rat race and like you're working on your thesis you're also situated in sort of Chicago, and how that was informing your experience at Northwestern, but also like, your scholarship at the time?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: I had already been in Chicago for two years. So I had like a life before grad school which was very important. And I didn't move closer to Evanston, I stayed in Logan Square. So my commute was like an hour and a half, which was good because it transitioned into being at school or being at work, and then I, you know, transitioned out so I had a pretty good spatial boundary that helped in a lot of other ways. I think my project was pretty much always kind of Chicago based or like based in a city, a real or imagined city. It had begun, I had my, the early version of my dissertation had been sort of broad and actually think my M.A my master's thesis sort of broadly about black hipsters. And why are people so mad about black hipsters? What about black hipsters makes people just go crazy, like what is happening? And doing a kind of analysis of the sartorial and affective performance of the hipster as deeply related to the neoliberal economy of a New York or Williamsburg, in particular, or Wicker Park. And so that's where I began and so I was thinking about the urban formation as central to like, how we relate to the hipster as a real person or as an idea. And then, you know, just over the course of like, just

being in the city living and having a life. And I was like, tired of thinking about hipsters. I just sort of transferred some of those ideas. What's the relationship between performance, race and the city to the specificity of the queer nightlife scenes that I was already sort of participating in and a part of in which were moving in the city along with gentrifying efforts in the city? Do you know what I mean? So there was like, already a close relationship between these parties, and gentrification, which I was interested in, and a relationship between these parties and gentrification and race, which I was already interested in, so, and it was like fun, and I didn't feel like work to sort of transition my project toward these sites. And so, yeah, that's like, being in the city 100% influenced the decisions I made around what sites I will study, you know, like what objects I'm going to pick to think with.

[00:20:05.22]

Bitaniya Giday: I have a follow up about the Black hipsters, but first, well actually, maybe let's go there. Like, what is a black hipster? Just like I would like to know.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Oh my god because you're younger than the hipsters.

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah, I don't, we don't really use hipster…

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: I'm grateful for you or like happy for you. The hipster in like the early 2000s. Like, let's say like, even between like 99' and like 2008, 2010 era was this sort of subculture that was bigger than a subculture. Like was, was sort of this subculture that was like very invested and kind of detached, disaffected like to cool for school energy matched with like a real a deep attachment to like nostalgic things or like ways of being that are not necessarily urban. So for example like wearing a flannel, you know, that's connected to the woods, or sort of pastoral idea of like a masculine, like, "I'm gonna chop some wood kind of thing," but like wearing it, you know, to the, you know, hip cocktail bar kind of thing. So there's like a lot of like juxtaposition and disjunction, was that the word, between the items that the hipsters surrounded themselves with, record players, like really niche, you know, devices and objects from the past, and then performing a kind of sort of like detached coolness. They became very like reviled in the era of sort of the Williamsburg style gentrification, because they were seen as a kind of like canary in the coal mine, like the first air quotes, like you know the first sort of wave of people that would come in and gentrify a neighborhood. Because, you know, hipsters were also service workers, cultural workers, artists, you know, people who don't have a lot of resources, who are then moving into place under resourced places for their low rents basically and so they were like, this became like this very visible culture of people, white people that were very easy to literally see on the street 'Oh, that's a hipster" and also easy to kind of see

in terms of the timeline of gentrification, so they became like, very, very hated. And then the narrative around the black hipster was like, why would you as a black person want to participate in this culture? You know, although, you know, so the, the my earlier, it was like, really unpacking like that question of like, what do you mean, why? Like literally we're talking about, anyway, it's more complicated then, then, you know, black people shouldn't be hipsters. So yeah it was like it was a relatively short period of time for thinking about glacial time. But it was like a monumental period in the early 2000s. And also I think like at this point the hipster affect, the hipster clothing is mainstream, like it is just Urban Outfitters, but that was not necessarily the case you know, at the time.

[00:23:18.09]

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah that's super interesting. Yeah, I think the other follow-up I was going to ask is like you sort of already mentioned like you bringing, you know, the things that you were doing as part of like, Black Queer like nightlife in Chicago, and then like, bringing it into your like PhD work in Performance Studies. I know you talked in your book a little bit about how people like viewed that as maybe like not real research. Can you like talk more about one like, yeah, what was the process of like, bringing it into your PhD? What was people's like reactions? And then secondly, did it like make you not want to participate in Queer nightlife? Like now that it was work?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Yeah. Well my department understood what I was doing. My advisor understood what I was doing. So I didn't face any drama like in terms of my schooling, like my advisor, Ramon Rivera-Servera wrote a book called *Performing Queer Latinadad*, lots of which is also staged in nightlife spaces so he understood the project and like how to conduct that project and why it's important and, you know, might, you know, I think that project, my project, could really only have been done in my department. And I say that though because there are other people, I shouldn't say that because there are other people who were doing nightlife projects in other disciplines like Sociology, Anthropology, some Dance studies but I didn't have to fight for the project, the legitimacy of the project at all, which was great. But I think like in the field, like talking to people about it, it would mostly just be people just being like, kind of like, pleasantly surprised, you know, like, you know I never there's never like any drama basically. The beginning parts of the book are talking about, like, it's not necessarily I think that people don't think nightlife research is real work. I think that they don't think it's hard work. You know what I mean like, or they might understand it as work but they might be like "Oh that's not, not really work," you know, kind of was like that kind of energy that I would encounter. Or it must, "It must just be so much fun like you just go and party," you know, a sort of like misunderstanding of the actual labor of not only producing nightlife but thinking about nightlife like studying

nightlife. So that those were sort of two concerns that really went into the preface in the intro of the book, like, what is the labor of producing nightlife? And what does it mean to take on the intellectual labor of like studying nightlife? And like, what can that tell us not only about the sites that we are embedded in but what we in the academy value? And how do what are the ways that we devalue certain kinds of research also tells us something about the ways that we devalue certain kinds of people and ideas and practices and cultures.

[00:26:33.03]

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah, I'm also really interested like the difference between going to a party as someone going to a party like and then versus going in as like an ethnographer or researcher, like, can you describe how you prepared to do that? Yeah, and what that was like?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: It was really hard. Also, it was really hard. So the research took ten years, you know, like, a very concentrated several years of being there, moving here, and then having to go back and like, do sort of, you know, pick up some loose ends kind of thing. All told 10 years of partying and I like to be in the streets but ten years later I would rather not, you know? So it was like very challenging to kind of keep it up. Or even just like you know it's like a Wednesday and you just feel like you want to stay home but there's like the party, and the party only happens like once a month, and if you

miss it, you're gonna miss it. And so you know a lot of work to be like to go and work basically even if you're gonna have fun [End Video]

[Video: Kemi_Adeyemi_Video 2.MP4]

[Start Video] there like, but it's still, you have to pay a certain kind of attention, you have to have a kind of energy level, cause like, if you're like sitting at the bar all bummed out you bum up you know everybody you know, so it's like a lot of affective, it was a lot of affective work to like be present. And it was a lot of emotional work because you know half of the time I'm going alone, cause, you know, I don't have a friend to drag along, or like, you know, you just kind of get sick of like asking people, "will you come with me, will you come with me, will you come" you know? And then being at the function alone is its own sort of emotional headspace that you kind of have to get into and be comfortable with. At this point, I can go alone, do you know what I mean? But like, you know, I'm like in grad school, I'm new to the whole thing and then I'm showing up, it was just like, it was a lot. And then the work of just like sort of like just asking people to participate, asking people for interviews, I'd have to like really build myself up and you know. Of course all of that got a lot easier over the years but it was like an immense amount of emotional labor to put myself in positions that I would never put myself in if I were just hanging out like I would never go talk to a stranger and pick their brain about something ever. Yeah, and so like, it was like those kinds of things that

were like about my personality, and having to like overcome it, overcome my personality to like get the work done. That was crazy.

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah, that seems wild and really draining.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: It was very, very hard.

[00:29:08.23]

Bitaniya Giday: Like, because of how often you were going like did you tap into like any, like, community like any Queer communities? Like what was that landscape like and like did you meet like lifelong friends? What was the community building aspect of it?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Well, so I was already part of like the larger like Chances Dances community that they, Chances Dances ran for like 10 years. And they folded in the first couple of years of my like official research. So I already, I mean like and like again before grad school started I already had a community. And, and I was already going to like different parties throughout the city. And then when Slo 'Mo started I already knew one of the organizers. And I think I had like just met one of the DJs, you know what I mean? But even those folks were kind of part of an extended community. So I was already tapped in basically the only party that I really didn't have any connection to was Energy, the third party that I

talked about in the book, which started I think I might have already been here in Seattle, so I think they started in like 2016 maybe. I didn't know anybody who organized it, anybody who went, that was like the freshest like I have to make brand new connections. But by that point I'd already been doing this kind of research for long enough that I felt way more comfortable with like, going to the parties, you know, just being there and me and they were like very friendly party too. so it was like, you walk in the door like, "Hi, how are you? Who are you?" you know? So it also, it was easier to like begin that field site. But yeah, somehow some way you know, I knew somebody or something I wasn't like unfamiliar in the spaces.

[00:31:08.02]

Bitaniya Giday: I'm also interested like how do you compare the like Queer nightlife scenes in Chicago to like Seattle?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Well, when I moved here, 2016, I basically didn't go out because I didn't want to run into any students. And so the only I went to like a couple parties and my experience was that the DJs are really bad. And I don't know what that is about. Like, I really don't understand what that's about. It boggles my mind. It boggled my mind then it boggles my mind now. So my experience is that it's really challenging for people to dance because the mixes are so poorly done. And if the mix isn't good, you literally can't

move, because then suddenly, like, the BPM is off you know, just like all the mechanics of DJing, I have never thought about that more than moving to Seattle. Like in the book, I talk about DJing because it's like, you know, they're the people who are like producing the music but not necessarily like at a super detailed mechanical level. And then moving here, I was like, oh my god, like, the mechanics, the skill of it and the lack thereof is so important. Yeah, so those were my experiences, really, but like I said, I don't really go out here, because I don't want to see you, unfortunately, but…

[00:32:36.05]

Bitaniya Giday: That's fair. Yeah I know you talked a little like about this already but yeah, in the book, you focus a lot on like, senses, and like feeling right versus feeling good. And like, I guess, like the phenomenological aspects. And I'm wondering the importance of like centering sort of those methodologies versus like, sort of, maybe other more Eurocentric forms of like knowledge making or like focusing on the qualitative no quantitative methodologies and things like that, like, what is sort of like the importance of paying attention to like feelings and senses versus these other like forms?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Well I think that started with reading in grad school and not enjoying reading about dancing or partying or nightlife stuff like the reading just didn't, it just felt very mechanical, the writing felt mechanical, the reading

experience felt dull and dry. And I think that, I , talking about feeling and sensation allows for more textured description of what's happening. Like, yeah, you know, this person is dancing but what does it look like? What does it feel like? You know, it sort of forces you to go to that next level. So I was coming at it from a perspective of like, what, what do I want to read? How do I want to read rather, or both I guess, and also then you know the focus on feeling and sensation, the body is just the focus of my department, my training, you know, Performance Studies, especially in that era, in the 2000s like was very much saying that the body is our primary unit of analysis. And so you have to be able to provide thick description of what is happening. And so that means tracking movement like that I can see with my eye but that movement is also producing a kind of sensorial connection between the person and their surroundings. And so how do we give an account of that until you just have kind of have to talk about feeling and sensation and Bettina Judd here talks about it as like vibe, like, we have all these words to talk about that feeling. I think actually Bettina calls it feelin and I had this conversation with this guy whose name I cannot remember off the top my head who talks about it as vibe anyway… It's the thing that like keeps people coming back. And it's the thing that is the hardest to describe and to give account of ourselves and to give an account of in terms of somebody else. So if that's the thing that's the hardest, like, what is it then that keeps us trying to find ways of feeling good or feeling right? So it just is like an essential component to

life. And it's certainly an essential component to the nightlife experience cause people leave if the vibes are off, if it doesn't feel good, I'm gonna leave you know what I mean? And you might be like, well, the music is bad, but the music being bad you know you walk into a dive bar and the music is bad, but you stay. So like what is it that will keep you there, it's like the feeling, the energy, the vibe, the whatever it may be. And so it's an it's an essential element of like being in the world.

[00:36:01.29]

Bitaniya Giday: Another thing that I'm wondering about is like you talked about the wave Black geographers that were sort of entering the field and your writing this book and I'm like seeing terms like racialized territorialization like where did those terms come from? Were these things that you were learning in like undergrad or was like something else happening? Or like was it part of your Performance like studies training to like build in a sort of a racial aspect that you were talking about like earlier?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Say more like what like, in terms of like actual, like, word choice? Or like what do you…

Bitaniya Giday: Not like actual word choice but the concept of like radicalized space, or was this already a thing in Geography were people adding on to it like what was happening as you were writing the book?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Yeah like, you know, like, oh my there, I'm trying to, like, think of like, give you like actual like names to see if it's useful. There you know I think in some regard some of my like literature's are like Urban Studies like Marxist geographers. People were talking about the production and the use of land through a framework of political economy. And then reading people who are talking about race as commodity or essential to like value, and also certain kinds of racialized bodies as actually being commodities. So having like a political economic framework for thinking about how race is produced as an idea that is mapped onto people, and then with consequence, you know, and then there are people like George Lipsitz who was like writing, what was that book? I think it's called, like how race takes place or something were then staging both those conversations at the same time like in what ways do certain kinds of spaces get marked racially. And then that racial marking is overlaid with certain kinds of markings of financial value of cultural capital value. So I think I've just been pulling from conversations that were already happening and locating it in Performance studies basically in a particular way.

[00:38:31.27]

Bitaniya Giday: Back to sort of like your life history, I guess. When did you like come to the University of Washington? Or like, what was the process of like,

applying for like, did you want to become a professor or not? And what was that process like for you?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Yeah I went to graduate school with the goal of becoming a professor. And so yeah as I was like wrapping up the dissertation you go on the job market, and you apply for whatever you think you can get. And I was on the market I think, I got this job, fall 2016 which meant that I was on the market, fall 2015. And I also had lightly gone on the market fall 2014 and I, both cycles I only applied to like four jobs I think. And when I got this job, that year, there had been a couple of like Black Queer studies positions that had opened up. Which I was grateful for because I didn't really want I'm trying to now I'm try to remember I think, like, one was like a Black Queer studies hire but it's like a joint hire in like African American Studies, Gender Studies, a couple of actually several of the jobs were that they were like, joint lines, but to do like Black Queer studies, or Black Feminist studies or you know something like that. And I wasn't even really looking at Gender Studies departments cause I just assumed I didn't have the training, you know, because I'm not like, formally trained, like in a Feminist Studies PhD, like we have, you know I was like well, they're so specialized and I just don't have, you know, a special, I'm like coming from this interdisciplinary department. Like, I'm not very legible. But my advisor told me to apply and it's been a perfect fit because I didn't want to be housed in a Black Studies department or an African American

Studies Department. American Studies departments are quite like history based I definitely don't have like that kind of formal training, I couldn't pull that off. And there were, there are a few, there are Performance Studies departments but I just I don't maybe they weren't having openings or something you know, I don't even recall ever having the opportunity to apply to Performance Studies. So it was like a, it was actually like, a blessing though to like be in this field in this department because I think methodologically it's very similar to Performance Studies like in terms of thinking interdisciplinarily this department in particular there are multiple people are trained in like ethnography, anthropology. So like, I, you know, we're matched in terms of like the tools that we use. So it has been like a perfect fit in more ways than one. Yeah. Was that your question?

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah, no those were my next three questions.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Oh okay I can keep talking. Yeah.

[00:41:34.10]

Bitaniya Giday: No that's perfect and yeah maybe if you wanna keep talking about like, why UW GWSS was a perfect fit. I also appreciate like the sort of explanation I guess of like why you didn't want to be housed in like a Black Studies versus GWSS cause I think that was something I was interested in.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Yeah. Yeah, I mean I didn't want to deal with misogyny. I've never met a Black Studies department that I felt comfortable in. And so I didn't want to have to learn how to be a professor and learn how to navigate that as well. Like I was like very blessed in Performance Studies which was like a prime what do they call it? Majority minority department. Very gay, very queer and then to come here also majority minority Feminists, you know, like, and like this department like having multiple professors it's like relatively intergenerational do you know what I mean? So like there was like a good sort of institutional history, you know guidance. Like I felt very, I feel very like shepherded you know what I mean in terms of my research and just how do you navigate an institution and you know just like all of that, very held. And even in Performance Studies even though it was like kind of a brutal program in so many ways, I felt very held. And like, they have my best interests at heart because you know they want me to win because if I win they look like they're winning, you know, what I mean? It's different you know, driving forces but same outcomes in kind of both environments. And I just didn't want to have to fight you know I don't want to have to fight for myself. I don't wanna have to fight for my project. I don't want to have to just, I just, I'm not going to do it. I'm not that invested like, do you, like I'm going to be over here you know what I mean? So and you know I don't think I picked wrong. I mean, I've been in this world for a while, and I think I'm not overstating things to be like I'm

not going to be in a misogynist Black Studies program. They can see this video and call me up and be like not us, fine!

[00:43:56.02]

Bitaniya Giday: Okay, and then and then I'm also wondering like as someone who's trained in like, Performance Studies, and like, like working on a project so deeply about like Black Queer women like what is your like perspective of what Feminism is?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: I have to be honest I had to kind of learn that being in this department, like, the histories of feminism, you know, that that could like maybe like shoot the shit about prior to being here. You know I'm not like completely uninformed but like I wasn't trained in like Feminist history. I've like read Feminist texts throughout my whole career, but I wasn't like trained to like situate them within a particularly Feminist genealogy, you know, and so that's the part that I've built up, you know, since cause when nothing teaches you more than when you have to teach somebody else you know what I have to like be like, fuck what is what are the nuances of second wave feminism? You know, I've got to tell somebody else you know so it's been a crash course. Wait, what was your question though?

[00:45:07.03]

Bitaniya Giday: Like what is feminism to you?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Oh, yeah. What is feminism to me? I mean, I think it's just in the sort of Bell Hooks tradition and movement to end oppression on the basis of sex, gender, sexuality, and identity you know across you know in an intersectional sort of manner. I liked that language of a movement to end dot dot dot. I think that's like my favorite way of thinking about it because when you use the word movement, movement to end, I think it is action. It's about activity and not just like I'm an intersectional Feminist here's my button which is the mode of Feminism or any kind of politics that is the least interesting and certainly the least effective to me. So yeah, I guess for me I don't know I guess I'm still sort of like, thinking about the ways that Feminism is articulated in my research, as like, always an embedded presence but not necessarily something that I have historically like pulled out as like a central named facet of my work, and being in this department has helped me recognize the work I do as Feminist and just sort of like, pull it out and call it that you know what I mean? And that's more of a story of like disciplinary training than anything it's literally just like the thing already existed in my work. How do I name it, name it, and claim it, basically? Yeah.

[00:47:00.03]

Bitaniya Giday: I'm also wondering how that shows up in like your educational pedagogy and like how you see yourself as like a professor in the GWSS department

but not so really like in the discipline of like Feminist studies like how does that show up in like how you teach?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Well I think my teaching training at Northwestern in Performance Studies was already invested in what I then learned to call Feminist pedagogy. You know what I mean? Like very student-centered, very, the personal is political, very, you it's okay to begin with your story and then, you know, make, you know, create connection to the thing that we're reading. We're gonna reorganize the classroom so we're in a circle. Like all of that stuff was part of my training. But again, it wasn't like named, okay now we are practicing the Feminist pedagogical tool of x. But I think Performance Studies came to that pedagogical framework in my department because of that investment on the body, like, you're the person sitting in the classroom really learning the thing, your body is important to this conversation, which means your thoughts is important to your feelings are important, like, you know, I think sort of Feminist practice and a Performance Studies practice, again, are doing the same, centering the same materials and bodies and ideas and just sort of calling them a little bit differently. There's certainly plenty of Performance Studies that is not Feminist but my department in particular was training me in something that I then learned to call on this department like a Feminist strategy for teaching. So yeah I mean I think like in the post pandemic world, teaching strategies for me have really been about like assignment structures and

like accessibility, like not accessibility in that again like that branded, my button I'm accessible teacher but like quite literally if my students can't read what is something I can give them to do that shows me that they're thinking, if my student can't write what can I give them to do? Because I know they're still thinking they just can't write what is something else some other outlet that I can offer them and that will be engaging for me to like, because I don't want to read your shitty writing. It doesn't make sense to me. It's not, you hate it, I hate it. What if we try this and I think that is encouraged in this department and I do think that that sort of eye toward experimentation so that all of us feel engaged is you know, very Feminist in terms of how Feminist organizing has also historically been across mediums. You know what I mean? Like, from the, you know, talking circle to the zine to the what you know, there's just been like a lot of experimentation with output and I think we are bringing that into our classrooms especially after the pandemic.

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah you seem like you're trailblazing also like in this department a little.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: I don't know about that.

[00:50:08.10]

Bitaniya Giday: But like what do you want like as a legacy of your work within like your sort of discipline [End Video]

[Video: Kemi_Adeyemi_Video 3.MP4]

[Start Video] at this university to be or maybe on a larger scale like academia in general like yeah like do you feel like you want to leave a certain kind of legacy behind?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: I don't really think about that because I don't just don't think that's necessarily how I am. So yeah I don't know if I have an answer for that.

[00:50:40.10]

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah. And then the last couple of questions, I just wanted to make space for you to talk about like the multiple projects that you're involved. Like you hold a lot of hats like with the Black Embodiments studio I think you also do like choreography for..

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: I'm a Dramaturge.

Bitaniya Giday: Dramaturge.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: For Will Rawles yeah.

[00:51:04.06]

Bitaniya Giday: Okay can I understand what a Dramaturge is, because I'm not a theater kid.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Yeah, actually like I use theater as the example like a Dramaturge on somebody like Hamilton, is the person who is working with the director or working with all the departments to make sure there is accuracy. So, lets make sure that the costume designers got their shit together, that 1776 looks different then 18… so some of it is mechanically what we are putting on stage is correct to the context and also specifically working with the director to help them communicate their ideas either amongst the performers or conceptually or in terms of the writing whatever. The Dramaturge is sort of like the intellectual helping hand, intellectual, historical, cultural, contextual helping hand. And so it's been historically been a position common to theater and drama, and dancers have started hiring Dramaturges, which I think makes a lot of sense. Yeah, and so that's basically what I was doing with Will Rawls in his new performance *[siccer]* which was only supposed to be like a year and a half long project and then the pandemic and structural problems with the Kitchen in New York, you know, it was five years before it actually went on stage. And so I would do everything from just like, help Will think through and refine the ideas behind the work. And, you know that was one element. One element was sort of especially early in the process, like, basically building a syllabus so that all of the dancers and production and Will and me could read together and have a shared idea of what the show is about for lack of a better word. And then also in rehearsals and stuff just being there and

watching, and, you know debriefing with Will, what was going on? And then he would figure, okay so tomorrow at rehearsal we're gonna do this and just sort of be that checkpoint basically. Yeah, it's, I had never done it before Will had never had a Dramaturge before so it was a lot of just sort of co-thinking really more than anything.

[00:53:28.22]

Bitaniya Giday: That's cool. You don't have to answer this but I've watched *[siccer]*, and I would love to like know in your perspective what it's about if you feel comfortable sharing.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: You saw it here at, On the Boards.

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Love that. Well, what did you think?

Bitaniya Giday: I think you should answer.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: But I want to hear what you think.

[00:53:50.23]

Bitaniya Giday: I actually don't know like I was, I walked away I think a little bit confused. For me it was more about the experience of like watching it, but I don't know if I can articulate a meaning.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Well, one thing I'll say is that the blacker the audience the funnier the show is. Cause it's actually a very funny show, but basically and, and that wasn't the case here. Which I warned everybody this is going to be a very different show you know its just going to be very different. *[siccer]* s-i-c-c-c-r, builds upon the phrase [sic] which is input into a sentence to denote something that is incorrect but your retaining the original spelling for whatever reason. But it notes an error, that's being retained for some reason. And so Will was thinking about [sic] as something that kind of frames and conditions Black performance, Black dance in particular, whether it's like on the stage or just sort of everyday life, you know, Black choreographies across, platforms or genres or whatever. So what are the ways that Black movement gets taken up and redeployed but also marked as an error is something that's wrong or bad or incorrect but still circulates widely? And so he wanted to sort of pose that question in dance like through the medium of dance and also thinking about image capture, you know, film camera and still camera as central to how movements are reproduced and recirculated beyond their original context. And then it gets

reproduced, recirculated beyond its original context and gets marked as an error and then we have Miley Cyrus twerking, you know, at the MTV awards kind of thing. So for him dance and capturing dance are central to this conversation about like, what is Black movement? And when do we value it in different ways? So the movement vocabularies in the performance are really drawing on stop motion film animation. And so the dancers whenever the camera whenever they're in view of the camera, they're moving in stop motion, because the camera is capturing them so they're only they're moving every second. And when they're beyond the view of the camera they have so called free movement, so then they're playing with coming in front of the camera and not to you know heighten this conversation about capture the capture of Black movement. So yeah I guess that would be my quick recap.

[00:56:44.19]

Bitaniya Giday: I guess my last question is, actually, my last two, the first is if you want to share like why you created Black Embodiments studio and yeah like just like why and what it's like to like to sort of like run that and what those experiences have been like?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: When I got here in 2016 I had been in Chicago for almost nine years and then moving here was a big culture shock and I wanted to create a space that would make living here livable. And I had all these university

resources and so that was one element of it and the other element of it was that I came here when like lots of cities arts writing was being steadily defunded and or people who had been doing art writing for free basically, it just, you know, you can't, it's unsustainable to like do that much work. So we have a robust arts community here but not a robust arts writing community and so I was and again we have at the University of Washington all these resources all of these graduate students in particular who are trained and like thinking and writing. What would happen if we just sort of organized, oriented their attention to the arts? So I started, it began primarily as just an art sorting incubator for graduate students. To also give them an outlet from the kinds of writing that we are trained in the Academy, which is very dry and boring, and writing about art makes people interested and their writing becomes better. So those were kind of the three reasons that I started BES and it just kind of slowly built out from there because it's like okay, now we've got all these people who can write about black art in Seattle, but there's nowhere to publish it, okay, we've got to put out our own journal. You know, let's just bring black artists to here to give talks, you know, just sort of like organically scaled up a little bit. And then, with the pandemic, we just went online and that allowed me to open the incubator up to anybody who wasn't a UW student. So we've had people from all over the world go through the incubator. I changed my public programming in the pandemic because I didn't want to do 45 minute zoom talks. So I basically changed it to being

more commission, direct commission, I'll commission an artist or I'll commission a writer they think together produce some work together. I'm continuing that more commission's based model of public programming because again I'm just sick of the talk format, it's just okay, you know, it's just not interesting. And so I've just been like experimenting with like, what happens if we just give artists money to do their work? And I'm doing a mail art project right now that I really love called *Current Resident* basically we're buying ad space and like grocery circulars that you get for free every day, every week in your mail and buying ad space in their commissioning an artist, they get the ad space, they can do whatever they want with it. And then it's just art. It's sent out to like we've got one coming or one went out in the fall to almost 25,000 people in the CD ones going out in the spring to the same zip code. I think it's 98112 or 98122 whatever like another you know 25,000. Our first run went to the entire Southend our glasses work went to something like 156,000 people. And so just like thinking like that for me feels way more interesting in terms of public programming. Let's just flood the area with free Black art. Yeah, and so also just like thinking about, like, you know, artists themselves are, they're sort of like limited options, you know, you get invited to give a talk, you get invited to the street, you know, you just the thing, the points of engagement are pretty standard. So what, you know, I've been having more informal conversations with artists being like, oh, that was like fun. Like, let me make some shit and just send it out, you know, like, it's kind

of low impact, apart from of course, they're making like they don't have to then go on, like this world tour of talks. They don't have to like go to a donor dinner, they don't have to do any of that, like, here's the money we're gonna send your work out. That's it. And so I've been enjoying that kind of dynamic. It feels just more energizing and entertaining than just doing the art world the same way as, as everybody else.

[01:01:43.03]

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah. Yeah. I think as like a resident in like Seattle, I think, and like being deeply part of the Southend and the CD I've noticed like that shift and like the product of that work and I appreciate it.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Did you get it in the mail?

Bitaniya Giday: I didn't get it in the mail..but Wa Na Wari got it in the mail, and I was in Wa Na Wari and I think I saw it.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Yeah

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah, thats really cool.

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: Yeah I just was like I kinda love the idea that it'll go out, and it's not even my zip code I'm like a couple blocks out of it so I'm not even receiving it

but I just love the idea that like somebody may or may not see it, you know, or they might pick it up and throw it away and not even know that there was something in there, you know? Just like, it was funny like the company that distributes the circular when I approached them, because I was trying to I was like, How do I just do this myself, like I didn't quite understand it took me forever to like learn about direct mail services. And then like my ad lady, who, you know, is fundamentally working with me on this. And she kept like, giving me like, all the stats on like, how many people read it? And like, these are the demographics that read it. And I was like, this is all well and good, but like you don't need to sell me on it because I'm not trying to sell anything. I'm just trying to put art in there. And it took us like a funny while for her to be like, oh, no, it's like, a public art project. And I was like, yes. And she was like, oh, you know, but you know, even there, we're so used to I was like, very concerned. I was like, Are we allowed to do this? And she was like, "Well I don't really see why not, you're paying for the page. As long as soon as I guess there's like not drugs or curse words. I don't see why not." Also just like rethinking like having this like funny encounter with like this company that's about just selling ad space and just being like we don't want to sell anything. We just want people to have an experience and it just fucks with I think not only the logic of the direct mail service, but also the logic of the art world where you make as few products as possible for the most money as possible. And here it's like no, it's just send out 25,000 copies of

this and people can keep it as long as the paper doesn't degrade. Like, um, yeah, I like that.

[01:03:55.11]

Bitaniya Giday: Yeah, I like that too. I think we are nearing the end so is there anything else you'd like to discuss that we haven't covered and is there anything you want to elaborate on before we end this interview?

Dr. Kemi Adeyemi: No.

Bitaniya Giday: Okay.

[End:Video: Kemi_Adeyemi_Video 3.MP4]

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