

**THE REPRESENTATION OF DIS-EASE IN CONTEMPORARY EAST AFRICAN
POETRY**

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DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of the degree in any other University.

Signed: 

Date: 17th October 2022

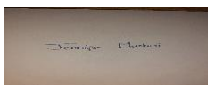
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DEDICATION

To my late Dad: Joseph Morang'a Nyarwati, your belief in my educational journey has been my guide. You made sure that education was our way of changing the life narrative. A teacher cum soldier, your strict nature ensured my report card was a reward of hard work. I owe this to your wonderful upbringing.

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To my siblings: Ben Nyarwa, Nicholas Osoro, Erick Ochwoto and Hilda Morang'a.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of dis-ease and how it is represented in poetry after the emergence of COVID-19. It is based on how contemporary East African Poets use poetry as a medium to express the presence of disease and how the selected poets artistically convey its effect in society.

This study focuses on three anthologies of poetry: *Soaring above the Pandemic: Poetic Echoes from East Africa*, *Millennial Voices East African Poetry*, and *Musings during a time of Pandemic*.

The objectives of the study are: to investigate the concept of dis-ease in selected East African poems on COVID-19 and to interrogate language strategies that the poets use in the selected poems to represent dis-ease in Contemporary East African poems on Coronavirus.

The study is guided by two theories which include: the theory of stylistics and sociological literary theory. The theory of stylistics pays close attention to both form and content of the poetry which is useful in the analysis of the selected poems, whilst sociological literary theory demonstrates how literature and society influence each other. The study is divided into four chapters: chapter one forms the background to the study, chapter two focuses on dis-ease in *Soaring above the Pandemic: Echoes from East Africa*. In chapter three, it examines the representation of Coronavirus in *Millennial Voices East African Poetry* and *Musings during a time of Pandemic*. The last chapter is dedicated to conclusion. In concluding this study, it is apparent that contemporary East African poems on COVID-19 represent dis-ease at a point of divergence and convergence in regards to the impact of Coronavirus to human beings and society. The interaction with the disease heightened mixed reactions: anxiety, fear and discomfort as well as hope in the midst of the pandemic.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

Explorations of fatal infectious diseases have a long literary history. Pandemic fiction challenges readers to consider human behaviour and vulnerability, as well as people's reactions to the dread of infection. One of the human behaviours that results from a pandemic is bad governance which leads to an increase in greed, corruption, irrationality, and selfishness, which raises ethical difficulties. Dehumanizing characteristics of epidemics can lead to political chaos and social collapse on a larger scale. Literature allows humanity to ponder on morality, justice, and atonement, as well as reassess societal institutions.

Literature always reflects key real-world events. This is especially true in the case of pandemic diseases, which leave behind some of the most terrifying and traumatic experiences in human history. Mukadder Erkan in *Lost in the Pandemotopia or? Witnessing through Literature*, the writer outlines writers that have written on pandemics (2). He notes novels like Homer's *Iliad*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe. Edgar Allan Poe on *The Masque of the Red Death*. Many writers in the past have written on pandemics which proves how literature is important in representing diseases that result in human suffering.

Illness, death, and dread caused by epidemics and pandemics have played a significant role in human history for ages. In addition to historical records of these occurrences, there are fictional literatures at individuals' disposal that depict narratives of human misery, sadness, and anguish as a result of the overwhelming force of social alteration brought about by contagious diseases. Plagues and epidemics are depicted in several ancient texts. Homer's epic *The Iliad* (eighth century

BCE), for example, begins with a plague sweeping the Greek army camp at Troy, and while the biblical book of Exodus portrays Egypt's ten plagues.

Poets use language creatively when they compose poems by selecting appropriate words and phrases to convey their message. This is because poetry is a highly condensed form of writing that is filled with emotions and ideas from human experiences. Poetry, unlike prose works such as a novel, novella, or essay, has very little space to write about whatever the writer desires. The language, and particularly the choice of words, has the power to inspire ourselves, our leaders, and the general public to act benevolently toward the salvation of humanity. The core of the compositions is that they have the potential to ignite a new spirit in the new normal established by the pandemic.

Globally, many poets have written on the subject of COVID-19 Pandemic. This research is interested in exploring how poets represent Coronavirus disease in selected poems from East Africa. COVID-19 being an emerging issue that affected the whole world, it is prudent to examine the artistic representation of these poems. We focus on three anthologies of poems: *Soaring above the Pandemic: Poetic Echoes from East Africa*, *Millennial Voices East African Poetry*, *Musings during a time of Pandemic*. The anthologies have numerous poems on various subjects but the focus is specifically on Coronavirus disease and how it causes dis-ease. The selected poems in this study have been written by East African Poets from the year 2020 to 2021 when the infections of Coronavirus disease were worse.

This study is interested in exploring how East African poets have artistically presented COVID-19 as a disease that causes dis-ease in society. I define disease as a state of the human organism that actually or potentially disadvantages a person for survival, reproduction, or full enjoyment of

life (typical of age) for reasons other than social context or brief and reversible environmental change. Disease according to Campbell Edward and John Scadding, is “the sum of the abnormal phenomena displayed by a group of living organisms in association with a specified common characteristic or set of characteristics by which they differ from the norm for their species in such a way as to place them at a biological disadvantage” (756). When the term "disease" was first employed, it meant "loss of ease or comfort," as opposed to how it is now used to refer to sickness or problems with body function. Today, disease can still be used to signify "uncomfortable," but it is frequently followed by a hyphen, as in "dis-ease."

In this study, I refer to dis-ease (with a hyphen) to refer to how poetry works to not only express worry but also and ease during the COVID-19 pandemic. Culver and Gert adopted the term "malady" and joined this to the concept of "suffering evil": "A person has a malady if and only if he has a condition other than his rational beliefs and desires such that he is suffering or at increased risk of suffering and evil without direct sustaining cause"; "evil" is defined as death, pain, disability, and loss of freedom or opportunity (92). Poets' words have the power to touch the sick and mend the broken hearts of thousands of bereaved families all over the world. Studying poetry on COVID-19 pandemic is one way of giving a platform for sick and affected people to contemplate and be inspired and additionally, to instill a sense of devotion and altruism among people in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and probably future pandemics.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Disease is a challenge to human life. In recent years, awareness of illnesses has resulted in public uproar. The outbreak of Coronavirus as a global health problem created a new type of pandemic literature that solely reflected on COVID-19. Many poems, short stories and other critical works

have been written on this new type of disease. This study is, therefore, an attempt to critically examine the representation of dis-ease in East African poetry. There is a need to examine how selected East African poets in the selected three anthologies of poems represent the concept of dis-ease, specifically in poems written around the year 2020 and 2021. I evaluate contemporary poets from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania and how they use their poems as a medium to express the presence of COVID-19 and its effects on society.

1.2. Objectives

This study sets out to:

1. Investigate the concept of dis-ease in selected East African poems on COVID-19.
2. Interrogate language strategies that the poets use in the selected poems to represent dis-ease in contemporary East African poems on COVID-19.

1.3. Hypotheses

1. Contemporary East African poems portray dis-ease as a representation of the issues that people faced during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Contemporary East Africa poets employ the use of language strategies representing the concept of dis-ease in poetry on Coronavirus.

1.4. Justification.

Poetry is universal, and it has been and continues to be cherished by people from all over the world. Poetry appears in all communities in many forms, regardless of race, religion, philosophy, geography, culture, gender, or age. This is because poetry deals with human experiences, emotions, and sentiments. It embodies our anxieties, hopes, and dreams. Looking at COVID-19 disease as

represented in poetry is important since poetry is known to paint issues that individuals and society experience. Poets write about the experience of others and of the society at large. Through the poetic voice of the persona, one is able to comprehend the personal, societal and national experiences.

This study is thus justified as a result of the crisis that humanity has faced due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The works on pandemics should be studied for it is a way for contributing to bettering and saving humanity. If it cannot be spoken about, then what should be spoken? During the initial stages of COVID-19, fear and anxieties could be felt almost everywhere. There is fear of contracting the virus. Survival was dependent on one's immune system. It was a new norm and people were scared.

The words of poets have the power to touch the sick and heal the grieving hearts of thousands of bereaved families around the globe. Poetry creates a space for reflection and inspiration among the infected and the affected. The poetic expressions have the potential to ignite a spirit of commitment and selflessness in the medical team who are leading us on the battlefield against the pandemic. The language, and particularly the choice of words, has the capacity to spark off passions in us, in our leaders, in the general public, to act benevolently towards saving humanity. Of essence is that the compositions have the might to set alight a new spirit in the new normal created by the pandemic.

Studying poetry on COVID-19 becomes a way of writers passing information about the pandemic. Through literature, it becomes an innovative way of addressing the disease and thus highlighting the importance of information about the virus to humans. This study is therefore justified because

it is through such works that the COVID-19 pandemic is created and thus becomes an informative tool in speaking about the experiences of the pandemic.

This study is also justified because of the three poetry anthologies: *Soaring above the Pandemic Poetic Echoes from East Africa* (2020) edited by Bryson Omwalo, Peter Amuka, Egara Kabaji and Barack Wandera. *Millennial Voices East African Poetry* (2020) edited by Barack Wandera, Adalo Moga, Bryson Omwalo and Kitche Magak and *Musings During A time of a Pandemic* edited by Christopher Okemwa are yet to be given rigorous critical analysis and this is one attempt of giving an academic response in East African poems written during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5. Scope and Limitations

I have confined myself to poetry, especially poems that deal with Coronavirus disease. There are creative works on COVID-19 in East Africa, one of such literature is an anthology of short stories known as *Covid Stories from East Africa and Beyond* edited by Mary Kinyanjui. This study is limited to examining how the poems represent the concept of disease and dis-ease. Poetry is expressive in nature, poets write their feelings to reflect the happenings in society. The poems in this study specifically explore thematic and stylistic issues in poems about COVID-19 pandemic.

The study focuses on three anthologies of poetry namely: *Soaring above the Pandemic Poetic Echoes from East Africa*, *Millennial Voices East African Poetry*, and *Musings during A time of a Pandemic*. The three anthologies have many poems that deal with other issues in our society. *Soaring above the Pandemic* anthology has a collection of a hundred and thirty nine poems in totality, *Millennial Voices* has a hundred and thirty poems. The poems by poets from East Africa are featured in the two anthologies of poetry. The two anthologies have many poems that capture other issues in society like bad governance, motherhood, love, poverty, environment, destruction,

feminism, exploitation and marriage. They also present stylistic devices that the poets have used to convey the message.

Musings during a time of a Pandemic has over a thousand poems specifically on Coronavirus disease composed by different poets globally. Since one cannot make a case for all the poems, I have limited myself to seventeen poems in the anthology. The study seeks to examine how the poems represent Coronavirus disease in the East African region. This study is also limited to poems published between 2020 and 2021 since that is the time when there were high rates of Coronavirus disease infection and the period that containment measures were enforced.

1.6. Definitions of Terms

Pandemic- Porta defines pandemic as an epidemic over a wide geographical area and affects a large population (3). The World Health Organization declares a disease to be a pandemic when it affects nations all over the world. Coronavirus disease was declared a pandemic by WHO in 2020.

Disease- Observers use the term disease to describe a process that occurs when one or more external factors interact with a living organism to cause physical and/or mental changes within the organism that the observers believe disadvantage the organism in comparison to its previous state. In this study, disease is a term that I use to refer to the Coronavirus that affected humanity as a whole.

Dis-ease- Metaphorical form of disease to denote societal ills caused by human beings that result in lack of ease and suffering. This study employs the term to refer to the suffering that people went through due to COVID-19. The “ease” after the hyphen puts focus on how poetry is a search for calm in times of suffering.

1.7. Literature Review

This review dwells on various categories of literature, I offer a critical review of scholarly works relevant to this study in order to identify the existing gap. This review looks at creative works, scholarly articles and critical reviews that will help in shaping this study. It aims at identifying a gap that exists within the subject of Coronavirus disease.

Mary Kinyanjui in *Covid Stories from East Africa and Beyond Lived Experiences and Forward-Looking Reflections* highlights the challenges, and resilience of Africans on COVID-19. The anthology looks at ways in which writers have confronted, adapted and how they sought to tackle the Coronavirus disease. The anthology provides insight into how Africans in numerous circumstances respond quickly to crises, adjust to new realities, interact with the most vulnerable, engage systems, and begin to shift towards a better world. It is divided into twenty-nine chapters that discuss lived experiences with Coronavirus in East Africa and beyond. The anthology tells stories via varied social, political, and cultural lenses. Regardless of their circumstances, Coronavirus affected each of them and their families. The anthology highlights problems, new opportunities, and, ultimately, the deep resilience of communities across the continent. Though *Covid Stories from East Africa and Beyond Lived Experiences and Forward-Looking Reflections* focuses on short stories, my focus is on East African poems.

Margaret Atwood in her *MaddAddam* trilogy reveals the effects of a man-made pandemic on humanity and the environment and she represents the world after a pandemic. The pandemic in her work is revealed to be a result of the corruption of humanity. Beginning a laboratory, the virus expands throughout the world. Atwood mentions that the pandemic knows no border and each person is responsible for the causes. The virus is distributed by a stimulant named BlyssPluss, an

ironic name of the pill that means happiness. People seek pleasure and happiness unconscious of the situation in the world and this unconsciousness brings them to their ultimate end. Atwood emphasizes the presence of hope and seriousness to the reader as she employs an open-ended plot.

Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* is another literary work that fictionalized a factual disease. In her novel, she depicts the Spanish flu pandemic. Its effect on humanity, especially how it resulted in millions of deaths. Katherine shows accurately the struggles of the diseased mind.

Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* highlights the use of state power and control and responses of people. According to Defoe, when the plague first appeared in 1664, local officials in some sections of London purposefully minimized the number of plague deaths by assigning them to other fabricated diseases: The work shows how plagues influence state authorities to take extreme measures to control the disease. This is evident in the COVID-19 poems in this study that some poems capture how they represent the police in controlling and affecting the rules that the government put in place. Defoe goes into great detail regarding the "orders conceived and promulgated by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London concerning the Plague epidemic" (29). Some refer to the appointment of officials responsible for examining, observing, searching for, and nursing the affected (29–30), while others prescribe what to do with "infected houses and persons sick of the plague," such as: the master of the infected house should inform the appointed examiner of the disease; the sick should be "sequestered"; and "their bedding and apparel and chamber hangings must be well aired" (31). The happenings in Defoe's novel are a reflection of what societies experienced during the initial stages of COVID-19. From social distancing to isolation and to wearing masks to contact tracing. These measures were a prevention mechanism to prevent or reduce the chances of infections.

Claire Chambers in *De-colonial Writing*, examines women who have written stories on COVID-19 and its tumultuous effects. She examines these women through the lenses of racism, social injustice and lack of civil rights which argues have spread like Coronavirus. She argues that women have faced contagious injustices for many years and insinuates this with COVID-19. Chambers equates these human sufferings to Coronavirus disease which from its contagious nature has spread among people that oppress women in society. Unlike Claire who strictly examines the black American women writers and the social injustices, my focus is on East African poetry on COVID-19 disease where I look at female and male poets.

Yeliz Beber in *Taking over the Body and State: David Hare's Covid-play Beat the Devil*, examines a short play based on David Hare's contraction of the COVID-19 virus. Yeliz examines how the playwright experienced the Coronavirus in light of the British government's failure in dealing with the pandemic effectively, especially by not taking necessary precautions. Yeliz opines that David's play is a swift response to the social and political climate regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in England (3). In terms of content on disease, Yeliz's article is relevant in this study. The point of departure is that I look at experiences of poets in relation to COVID-19 disease and the ills that society faces as a result of poor governance as it shall be seen in some poems.

Tugba Aygan in *A Pandemic of One's Own: Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 in Selivay Saral's A Case per Day*, is a response to COVID-19 by seven women in which Tugba identifies the challenges caused by the pandemic and the burden that the women face in the current situation of the pandemic. Tugba exemplifies how the work by the women in the collected short stories unleash the problems and anxieties of the COVID-19 and thus making their voices heard. Tugba's study

is important in terms of content and issues that COVID-19 disease causes. Her study aims at looking at gender studies and thus bases her research on effects of COVID-19 on women.

Sabyn Javeri in *Silenced: Female Representations in South Asian Pandemic literature* examines the writings of Bhagwan Das's *The Plague Witch* (1902), Shahab's *Plague in Jammu* and Rajinder Singh's *Quarantine* (1939) in which they are 20th century Urdu classics that paint the trauma and horrors of a deadly plague as it spreads through south Asian subcontinent taking with it the majority of people to their graves. Sabyn notes in her work that the lead women characters in the three works lead silenced lives. Her argument in her essay is that the subalternate representation of South Asian female characters as portrayed in the past pandemics need to be reassessed as central to the stories and not how they have been represented in the narrative.

Ruderman Judith in *DH Lawrence's Dis-ease: Examining the Symptoms of Illness as a metaphor* foregrounds the importance of literary genres as informative on the subject of disease. The essay borrows from Susan Sontag's famous essay "Illness as Metaphor". The paper outlines how diseases have been accorded "special status of being emblematic and endemic to its era" (72). Ruderman emphasizes how Lawrence used his ailment as a metaphor for the early twentieth century and his real-life example of an encounter with tuberculosis. Lawrence's use of illnesses as a metaphor of modern society makes this study relevant due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a representation of the current situation affecting people. This is what I refer to as dis-easiness due to diseases that are caused as a result of various ills by human beings. This thus makes the idea of disease to be metaphorical in sense.

Mesut Gunec in his paper *Pandemic and Theatre throughout the ages* explains the effect of pandemics on theatre and plays within historical periods and how theatre became a communicative

tool for sharing concerns and fears among societies. Gunec also explains how epidemics were a global problem from Athenian society to the Elizabethan era and today just as COVID-19 is affecting humanity presently. Mesut examines the effect of the pandemic in *Oedipus Rex*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Ten Plagues*, *Beat the Devil*, and *Coronation of Poppea*. The playwrights used theatre to communicate on pandemics and theatre became the best vaccine because they were closed down when such plagues occurred and thus reduced transmission of the pandemics. Mesut's study is beneficial in my study due to the fact that it addresses the effect of pandemics on artists. However, my study goes further to explore the representation of various issues that have risen as a result of COVID-19 disease.

Rose Komu looks at the HIV/AIDS Pandemic in her thesis titled "Treatment of HIV/AIDS in Fiction: A Focus on Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's *Chira*, Joseph Situma's *The Mysterious Killer*, and Carolyn Adalla's *Confessions of an Aids Victim*. She focuses on how authors portray various aspects of HIV/AIDS epidemics. Apart from looking at the artistic vision of Joseph Situma, Carolyn Adalla and Marjorie Oludhe, Komu explores the theme of HIV/AIDS stylistic choices in the selected novels. She notes that the HIV/AIDS pandemic affected society. Through her study, she opines that writing about pandemics helps in restoring humanity through narration thus contributing to creation of awareness (138). Although Komu's study focuses on HIV/AIDS pandemic, it is relevant in my study since the idea of representation of HIV/AIDS in the three novels is a similar concept in this study though I look at anthologies of poems in East Africa that deal with the idea of disease and in this case the COVID-19 disease.

Otieno Sam in "Archives of a pandemic: Song and the mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic in East Africa." Acknowledges the importance of music in archiving COVID-19 Pandemic. He notes

that “We can track the experiences of distinct populations at specific points in history through music. It has been used to entertain, educate, and preserve the histories of communities across East African societies (1). His paper also opines that music in East Africa has played a very vital role in the mitigation of COVID-19 Pandemic since the audience follow the singers’ message on how to curb the spread of COVID-19. With reference to this, the anthologies of poems in this study thus play the role of archiving the COVID-19 pandemic. The poems other than teaching about the COVID-19, also can be a reference to future pandemics and this thus is a humane way of contributing to the betterment of humanity. Sam’s study is an essential ingredient in my study. It underscores the fact that artists are important in the role they play in documenting the pandemics. This study thus becomes a tool to educate society on why it is necessary to come together in fighting against the disease scourge.

Gregory Barz and Judah M. Cohen in *The Culture of AIDS in Africa: Hope and Healing through Music and the Arts* have also contributed to how music played a significant role in the prevention of HIV/AIDS as a pandemic. According to Barz and Cohen, "health interventions unavoidably meet significant hurdles along cultural, political, and economic lines [...] and people have found ways to convey the disease throughout history" (4). Poetry being artistic, helps to alleviate the challenges of pandemics through artistic expression. Barz and Cohen support this claim by stating that artistic movements around the world give HIV/AIDS a voice, a sound, and an image (4). Though Barz and Cohen base their findings on HIV/AIDS, their study is relevant with the COVID-19 pandemic. Poems being written about COVID-19 disease are a way of poets’ expressing themselves. For some, it becomes therapeutic especially if the poem talks of the loss of a loved one. This is because the poet purges the negative emotions and can thus sigh with relief.

Susan Sontag in *Illness as Metaphor* notes that people should not refer to diseases as a metaphor, for her, she felt that it would be victimizing the patient. She argued that metaphors are ineffective for patients because they make them believe that their illness is the result of their feelings rather than a lack of adequate therapy. She added that the most effective method to think about sickness is to avoid metaphorical thinking. Looking at Sontag's deliberations, I disagree with her since disease and metaphor helps one in understanding a particular disease. African societies have always associated some diseases with other names which is a kind of a metaphor. The disease can be seen from the prism of metaphorical angle and literal angle. COVID-19 Pandemic has been written and it is still being researched worldwide. Poets have written about it. The effect it has on people cannot be ignored. In this study, referring to disease as a metaphor is significant. The malady and illnesses in society as a result of societal ills are what causes discomfort and suffering among people just as a pathological disease causes discomfort.

Jeroen Dera in *Evaluating Poetry on COVID-19: Attitudes of Poetry readers towards corona poems* argues that corona poetry has little attraction for readers of poetry (88). Dera's arguments are unfounded since poetry is a genre of literature that expresses emotions. During the COVID-19 period, the pandemic effects were felt worldwide, numerous people turned to many forms of entertainment and poetry was one of them. Poems in this study express concerns that readers can associate with and interact with intellectually.

Jennifer Muchiri in an article in *The Standard* is of the opinion that poetry of Diana Rop's "Of A Thousand Voices" addresses issues that are commonplace in society (no. page). Muchiri adds that poetry should be concerned with the essence of humanity which is the ability to treat each other with love. One can deduce that Muchiri's article encourages poetry to reveal the ills in society and

to find a way in addressing such ills. Though Muchiri's article narrows on one Diana Rop's collection of poems, her findings are useful in this study. This being a study on how East African poets represent disease and dis-ease, her article sheds light on the idea of societal ills that have existed in Kenya. One gets a feeling that then, poetry should paint life as it is. The problems facing society like poverty, sorrow, despair, rape, school dropouts, and orphans are all a reflection of disease in the metaphorical sense. These are the issues that this study proposes to address in East African contemporary poetry.

The above literature review has looked at how literature has handled pandemics through explorations by authors and researchers. The poetry on COVID-19 has received minimal attention, most works focus on other genres of literature namely the novel, the play and the short stories. This shows there is a dearth in scholarship on poetry about COVID-19 pandemic. My study thus contributes to scholarship by focusing on how East African poetry has been used to present the concept of disease and dis-ease in regard to COVID-19 pandemic. Literature is an archival tool, since my study is limited to selected poems on COVID-19 by East African poets, it will seek to examine the impacts that COVID-19 had in society and more so in portraying human suffering because of pain, loss and trauma experienced as a result of Coronavirus disease.

1.8. Theoretical Framework

To achieve my objectives, this study is grounded on the theory of stylistics. The beginnings of stylistics can be found in the poetics and, particularly, the rhetoric of the classical world. According to Paul Simpson, '... There is undoubtedly an argument for suggesting that some style work is very much a later manifestation of conventional rhetoric,' (50). Moreover, Paul Simpson explains that a specific field of academic inquiry emerged at the turn of the twentieth century and has had a long

and profound impact on current stylistics (50). This is what is frequently referred to as Russian formalism.

The formalists were concerned with the poetic form of literary language and were influenced by the early theories of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, as well as several aesthetic notions arising from the field of visual art. The most significant of these was symbolism, which arose due to the earlier naturalism/realism movement. We can see how the formalists argued against Plato and Aristotle's theories on mimesis (art resembling nature), which were covered in the previous chapter when 'poetics' was examined. In a nutshell, and in line with the symbolists of the time, the formalists believed that art should not mimic the natural world but rather communicate the concept of truth, represented indirectly through imagination and dreams.

According to Jakobson, literary writings and other verbal arts frequently focus on the text's message: the poetic function. However, the poetic function is not limited to literary writings, and not all literary texts have a dominating poetic function. He also stated that factual materials, such as history books, differ from poetic texts in that they are focused on the context: the referential function. Jakobson was primarily interested in the poetic function of literary texts because he wanted to know what makes a work literary.

The poets in this study employ deliberate stylistics in the poems. "Poems have the highest concentration of aesthetic effects which are realized at the level of language (Indangasi 42). This implies that poetry is best studied through the theory of stylistics. In this study, the theory of stylistics will enable me to not only respond to form in the poems but also to the content of the poems which will be important in the analysis of the selected poems.

As a response to COVID-19, the sociological literary theory is essential to explore the dis-ease among people. According to Auguste Comte's Structural Functionalism, all components of a society are interrelated and always contribute to each other's well-being. The study questions whether coronavirus sickness shattered the notion that man is a sociable animal. Sociological literary theory critics contend that literary works should not be divorced from their social surroundings. Sociological critics focus on literature by examining the dynamics of a given society. Thus, the theory will guide this study in understanding how COVID-19 impacted society's sociological aspect.

1.9. Research Methodology

This study is mainly a library exploration, reading and collecting important data from primary and secondary sources. The primary focus is on three anthologies: *Soaring above the Pandemic Poetic Echoes from East Africa* (2020), *Millennial Voices East African Poetry* (2020) and *Musings during a Time of a Pandemic*. Mugenda Olive and Mugenda Abel claim that in purposive sampling, a researcher only uses examples with data relevant to his subject. Their suggestions guided the study to pick poems only on COVID-19. True to this, these were the poems which could only meet the objectives of the study. My methodology included a close reading of the anthologies with particular attention to poetry from East Africa composed about the Coronavirus disease. I analysed the poetry to show how dis-ease is portrayed in the selected poems. I relied on stylistics in the analysis of the form and content of the poems. Sociological literary theory enabled this study to give further meaning to the poems by looking at the interaction between literature and society during the period of Coronavirus.

The three anthologies, in totality, have over one thousand three hundred poems. In *Musings During a time of Pandemic*, over five hundred poets from various countries contributed to the poems in the anthology. I have selected poems from poets of the East African Region. There are twenty poets from East Africa in the anthology, and I will only study seventeen poems that focus on Coronavirus disease. In the two other anthologies, two hundred and sixty-nine poems are strictly from East Africa. The poems cover various issues affecting society, but I have restricted this study to only poems about COVID-19 disease. In *Soaring above the Pandemic*, I will study fourteen poems. In *Millennial Voices*, I will analyse five poems because the rest of the poems in the anthology do not cover the subject of Coronavirus disease. This study thus shall focus on thirty six poems in all three anthologies. Procedurally, the selection of poems was after a total reading of all poems and initially, the reading was done to identify poems about the Coronavirus pandemic. Finally, a reading of secondary resources from journals, books, online peer reviewed articles, theses, dissertations and also newspapers on Coronavirus disease complements this study.

1.10 Chapter Outline

Chapter one lays the foundation for the study and outlines the research problem. The chapter also states the research objectives, hypotheses and justification of the study. There is a discussion of the scope and limitation of the study, the literature review, theoretical framework and methodology.

Chapter two examines the representation of Coronavirus disease in selected poems in the anthology: *Soaring above the Pandemic*. It also explores the form and content of poetry about COVID-19 pandemic. Form and content in this study are inseparable. It is clear that poets use various poetic/ language strategies in the selected poems to represent dis-ease, a conspicuous thematic concern, in poems on Coronavirus.

Chapter three examines the representation of Coronavirus disease in society in two anthologies of poems, *Millennial Voices* and *Musings during a time of Pandemic*. The chapter also deals with the way poets use poetic strategies to represent dis-ease in society in regard to leadership, culture and various aspects in society that cause uneasiness and lack of comfort due to the pandemic.

The final chapter is dedicated to the research findings and conclusions. It compares the arguments adopted in the three anthologies and validates the various approaches taken. It evaluates how far the objectives have been achieved.

CHAPTER TWO: REPRESENTING DIS-EASE IN *SOARING ABOVE THE PANDEMIC*

2.1. Introduction

In order to appreciate the literary prowess in *Soaring above the Pandemic*, I will read and analyse the selected poems and examine what the poets say about the Coronavirus disease and how they represent Coronavirus. This is a holistic approach to examining the poem's form and content. Henry Indangasi highlights the necessity of studying the form of poetry and its content. He claims that: "...Form and content are opposites that interpenetrate, which they do in the realm of semantics. What you say is not synonymous with how you say it; nonetheless, what you say is shaped by your style of saying it" (Indangasi vi). The viewpoint advanced by Indangasi that form and content interpenetrate in the realm of semantics is shaped by the style in which you express poetry. This supposition is helpful in this thesis. I rely on stylistics theory in this section as I seek to explore how selected poets represent Coronavirus disease. The poets use poetic language for aesthetic and didactic functions.

The internal and outward structure of a work of art is referred to as form. In this approach, the use of images, symbols, and other stylistic devices, partly constitute form in a literary work. On the other hand, content refers to the subject that a writer exposes in a literary work. Some critics have observed that the form and content debate is yet to be fully resolved. My submission is that though the two appear independently, they function as an entity. That the aesthetic effect, achieved through the style of a written piece of poem, expresses the message.

2.2. *Soaring above the Pandemic: Introducing the Anthology*

Soaring above the Pandemic: Poetic Echoes from East Africa, edited by Peter Amuka, Bryson Omwalo and Egara Kabaji, sees poetry as a way of celebrating life and articulating the events that are in our lives. The anthology brings together poets from East Africa, old and young, legends in the field of East African poetry to contemporary poets with the aim to voice and reflect the situation experienced during the time of the pandemic. The anthology has numerous poems written during a time of crisis. The poets in the anthology reflect on how Coronavirus has affected humanity.

There are a hundred and thirty nine poems in the anthology. The poems focus on various concerns such as love, femininity, politics and governance, death, environment, and spirituality. I have selected fourteen poems that focus on the subject of Coronavirus. The majority of these poems are from Kenya, while three poems on COVID-19, have been written by Ugandan poets. Tanzanian poets are also included in the anthology but in regards to the subject of investigation, there is not a single poem with interest on COVID-19. Generally, the poems in the anthology are written at a time of different categories of crisis archived in human history. Nevertheless, some of the poets prefer to engage in other issues in society that include affection and love, politics and governance, pain and loss, death and fate, and finally on nature and environment. Since the primary focus in this research is specifically on pandemic, I have thus selected the fourteen poems on Coronavirus.

2.3. *Convergence and Divergence in Soaring above the Pandemic*

In convergence, the aspect of new identities associated with the interaction of Coronavirus emerge while in divergence, the negative perspectives of the disease are a major concern in the poems. This subsection discusses the two points of interpretation regarding how the poets represent disease. To some, the pandemic was a sigh of relieve but to others, it was a period of devastation and

suffering. There is also a continuous thread, in *Soaring above the Pandemic*, in regards to what the poets say and how they say concerning COVID-19. This subsection shall additionally focus on content and form which help denote the different point of view of the selected poems in discussing the representation of dis-ease. A term that when used without the hyphen, illustrates pain, and disorder. On the same note, dis-ease, looking at the second part of the word, it symbolizes positivity and comfort.

In Geno Apachi's poem "My New Husband", the persona appreciates the changes that Coronavirus has brought into her family. The persona, a wife, rejoices as a result of the fact that she now has time with her husband. She alludes that before the pandemic, her husband had ignored her for years. One can deduce that the husband was never around the house. The persona says: "Tik Tok/The sound of your breath wafts to my ears/You are sound asleep where you ignored for years/In the warmth of my arms" (Apachi 35). The persona reminisces the nights she was alone without her husband by her side as she refers to such days as free days. She further highlights the domestic violence meted out on her by her husband before the COVID-19 outbreak. Given the circumstances outlined, the reader would imagine that the persona's relationship with the husband was acrimonious. The persona uses sensual images like 'breath wafts', and 'sound asleep' to evoke the melancholy she experienced before the outbreak of Coronavirus when her husband, a reveler, would be out late into the night. She paints the husband before the pandemic to be an abusive, alcoholic and violent individual. The persona notes "When Eons ago you could walk by/With legs wobbly/Mouth runny/Insults uncanny/Leaving me to wipe the dust of your dancing shoes silently" (Apachi 36).

The poem captures the indifference that some married men usually have towards their women in the poem "My New Husband". This acrimonious attitude is the malady that has been in existence

in numerous marriages. Apachi paints the uneasiness that the persona experienced. The anxiety and uneasiness that is conveyed through the voice is what I refer to in my research as the dis-ease. Clearly, dis-ease is echoed in the poem through the events reminisced by the persona. The dis-ease denotes the lack of healthy relationship between the persona and her husband.

In stanza four, the persona recounts the vices that the 'old' husband, i.e the husband before the pandemic broke out, had towards the wife. The stanza is presented in a memorable and musical manner through the use of rhyme. This implies that the persona recalls the depressed moments she always had with her husband: "Your Breakfast went untouched/The Couch left un-warmed/ I am running late" you always claimed/Your duties to the conjugal altar, cold (Apachi 36).

Apachi's poetic genius is manifested in how she manipulates the language in the poem to reflect the situation that the persona experienced. The use of the phrase "Tik Tok" mimics the clock's sounds. This illustrates a time motif which implies that the time lived in the past was undesirable. This poem thus represents the challenges that the couples face. The time motif is also used to introduce the desirable qualities of the husband observed during the pandemic. The "Old husband" does not appreciate the breakfast prepared by the wife, he was never around the house, and always had an excuse to be away from the wife. There is also the use of metaphor in the above stanza, when the persona uses a conjugal altar that was cold which refers to the husband not being intimate with the wife.

Apachi's poem ponders on COVID-19 pandemic as a recovery mechanism in some marriages. This is because of restrictions imposed by the government such as lockdown. In the final stanzas in the poem, there is change that the persona notes of her husband and that is why she refers to the husband with the word 'new'. The new husband spends time with the wife and he commits to his duties as the man of the house. The persona metaphorically portrays the husband as a starving

rebel to denote a person that cannot be controlled when it comes to his sexual prowess. The persona says “My new husband clearly pitches his midnight desires like a starving rebel...” (Apache 36). This denotes change and shows how COVID-19 pandemic brought together some warring spouses. The poet succeeds in portraying the dis-eased marriage before COVID-19 that the persona experienced. The poem ironically appreciates the advent of COVID-19 as a measure to curb the spread of COVID-19.

“Side Benefits of COVID-19 Curfew” by Timothy Wangusa represents Coronavirus pandemic positively. The persona presents positive attributes of the Coronavirus disease especially in relationships and marriages. Wangusa poetically represents the pandemic as a blessing in disguise. He uses enjambment to highlight the central message of the poem. According to the persona, Coronavirus disease is a blessing in disguise in some marriages. Some women that love their own privacy have to accept the availability and presence of their men. Spouses that cheat have to be together for they cannot practise their infidelity in the presence of their spouses. The poet through the persona employs the use of alliteration that makes the poem musical and memorable as a result of the rhythm that comes from the choice of words in the poem. The persona notes: “...Humbled husbands/Whimpering wives/Forced faithfulness/Loveless lovers/Reconciled rejecters/Spooning separatists” (Wangusa 111).

The brevity of the poem creates a long lasting effect among the reader. It has eleven lines structured in two stanzas. From the positive angle the poem shows that despite the calamities caused as a result of COVID-19, there is hope for some couples saving their marriage and also awakening the love that was fading away. Paul Komesaroff observes that there are some positive outcomes that emerge after a global disaster. He postulates:

The rupturing of entrenched institutions and processes, the testing of seemingly unquestionable certainties, and the rupture of modernity's supposed consensus may all lead to a rediscovering of the problems that comprise an ethical existence. Elements of this process can be seen in the outpouring of community support and mutual compassion, in spontaneous gestures of joyous solidarity, in the suspension of old conflicts, and in the development of new forms of reconciliation. The experiences are tentative, and the outcomes are unpredictable, but for the time being, the prospect of a new path forward has been raised. (515)

The final line of the poem “Baby boom!” (Wangusa 111) symbolizes the hope that awaits humanity. The birth of the baby reflects a new era and prosperity of a better society. Hope in relation to a disease inflicted society is important to humanity. It denotes rising against all the challenges caused by the disease.

Whereas the poems discussed above deal with the positive effects of Coronavirus, the subsequent poems in this section will deal with the dark side of the pandemic. For instance, Raisy Harmony, in the poem, “Officer” deals with police violence that was experienced by members of the public in Kenya during the initial period of COVID-19. Violence was committed by law enforcement officers, as extreme measures employed to coerce Kenyan citizens respecting the COVID-19 restrictions laid out by the government. Obasogie Osagie and Zachary Newman perceive police violence to be a “systematic problem, not one that is individuated and momentary” (280). They define police violence as a use of intentional force or power, threatened or actual against oneself, another person, or against a group that results in injury, death, psychological harm or deprivation. This definition articulates a problem that has existed for many years not only in East Africa but

the whole world. Numerous people have fallen into this systemic problem which causes dis-ease among the victims of such brutalized force.

Harmony creates a conversational style in “Officer” where the persona attempts to engage in a dialoguing tone to convey his problems to an officer. The conversational tone brings out the catastrophic effects of police violence. The persona is portrayed as a man in anguish who has relatives that depend on him. He works double shifts to be able to provide for the family. He uses imagery “all their eyes are on me” to reflect a challenging situation if he fails to work. He proceeds to mention his ageing parents whom he refers to as “ticks sucking every bit of his savings” (Harmony 76). The use of the imagery reflects a common situation where elderly parents are supported by their children since they encounter health issues and other concerns with mobility that are generally associated with old age. The dependent image created in the poem denotes that the persona has been overwhelmed by everything around him due to the expectations of his family members. The night curfew as one of the restrictions imposed during the pandemic, symbolizes the suffering that poet persona went through at the hands of the police officers. This illustrates the negative effect of COVID-19 to the public. It illustrates the disease not only affecting the body but also exemplifies how the outbreak of a disease is used by the law enforcement officers to molest and exploit the people.

Please Mr Officer/Hit me not/My legs are weak/But a man must try/Let me speed off

And challenge the night curfew/If you hit me/Using the huge stick/You will break a bone
and bones/And my family will starve. (Harmony 77)

The above stanza highlights the problem that ordinary working citizens encountered during the period of COVID-19 outbreak. On March 25th 2020, the president of Kenya, approved the

nationwide curfew that would apply between 7:00 p.m. to 5:00a.m. This was to be in force from 27th March 2020 for thirty days (*Public Order* 2020). The rationale behind the curfew was to help in curbing the spread of the virus. However, as the restriction was imposed, various citizens experienced the ills of that order. Kabira and Kibugi (2020) assert that the aftermath of the curfew caused devastating effects among people (442). Members of the populace who were unable to make it to their home by 7:00 p.m. faced the wrath of law enforcement officers. Pictures uploaded and disseminated on social media portrayed how the police violated human rights in the name of maintaining law and order (Achuka in Daily Nation, 30th March 2020). Those who did not, were beaten and others jailed. Harmony thus articulates this situation in his poem. He portrays a diseased nation during the time of the pandemic. The use of the term dis-eased nation implies the evils and torture that the persona faced because of the excessive use of force by the police that the poem addresses during COVID-19. In stanza four, the persona is caught at the wrong time of the night, and thus pleads with the officer not to whip him. He notes: “Please Mr Officer/Don’t whip me/Your whip/May tear my skin apart/Leaving me bleeding/My parents won’t survive/Without their medication/Because I will be dressing the wounds/You inflicted upon me (Harmony 77).

The images of violence portrayed in the above stanza painfully reflect the situation that some people experienced during the time when COVID-19 restrictions were being maintained by the police officers. The suffering that the innocent citizens went through is the malady that infects many nations that have a record of police brutality.

The poem is laden with shorter lines which reflects the diminution to nothingness. Nothingness in this regard refers to a reflective degeneracy and deterioration of compassion and humanity. The short lines also spasmodically mirror the incongruities and frustrations that the persona experiences. This is what I refer to as uneasiness that was caused by the outbreak of the COVID-

19. The poem foreshadows a sense of fear, pain, and anguish. These images symbolize the situation when someone suffers from a disease. The confusion, cries and requests by the persona show a man who is suffering. The atmosphere highlighted in the last stanza signifies the anxiety that the man is facing. The use of the word “oh” in the poem, captures the emotions of despair, anger, disappointments which result in gasps and silent cries.

John Midega in “Pandemic Pandemonium” highlights the confusion of the people as a result of the Coronavirus. The disorder is not only portrayed imagistically and thematically but also, it is represented syntactically and visually. Evidence of the persona’s lament over the confusion caused by the COVID-19 is visible. This is evident in the poetic diction. For example, the persona notes: “Was it a disease? /... a plague? / A pandemic (Midega 89). In stanza one and two, short lines are used which denote the precariousness of the situation. The use of linguistic terms such as “sceptics”, “cynics”, “pessimists” in line five of the poem illustrates the uncertainties of the disease. This confusion pours down in the second stanza where the persona uses an interrogative technique. All the four lines in stanza two end in a question. The use of rhetorical questions in the poem illustrates the vagueness of life during the COVID-19. This denotes the unfamiliarity in association with Coronavirus disease.

In the preceding stanzas, the persona uses longer lines in the poem, a characteristic which signifies an irregularity in form of the poem. The lengthy lines are used when one investigates an idea or concept thoroughly thus creating the central tension of the poem. The poem’s irregular structure conveys a sense of uneasiness that has been marked by the advent of Coronavirus disease. The persona in the poem points on the uncertainties of the disease. In stanza one, the persona notes that nobody knew about the disease, from scientists to pessimists. In stanza two, the persona interrogatively asks if it is a disease, a plague or a pandemic, this reflects the confusion among

people. In the third stanza, the use of catastrophic terms in history of war like holocaust creates an atmosphere of fear and panic. The fear of COVID-19 disease made people point fingers and imagine that Coronavirus disease was a biotechnological war. The persona insinuates "...war of fear propagated by the East-West geo-politics" (Midega 89). The propagandist ideologies are as instigated by the confusion that people experienced.

In stanza five, the persona presents the harsh state of affairs through the use of rhetorical questions. The persona questions the orders imposed on people and their validity in curbing the spread of the virus. Ironically, these measures are meant to inhibit the movement of people with the stay at home requirement. It is ironic since the persona enquires of the homeless people. They cannot stay at home since they do not have a place to call home. Secondly, the person enquires about the other group of people that are to work from home. The persona notes that most people are unemployed and cannot stay at home. This according to the persona, is discriminatory. The persona also highlights the scarcity of resources in regards to COVID-19 preparedness. This is presented in a disorienting stream of consciousness thus creating suspense through premonitions and obsessive fears that describes the confusion. The persona asks:

...If the novel Coronavirus is airborne, how then does it survive in the air?

Hand-washing with soap and water, a mockery to those who had neither

Burials have now become disposal//Patients were told, have been treated and released,
but.../They say there is no cure for this disease! (Midega 90)

The persona in the poem "COVID-19 and our Humanity " by Indangasi is devastated by what the Coronavirus disease has caused to the people. The persona personifies the Coronavirus disease as an unwanted visitor who brings riotous confusion. In the first stanza, the persona reminisces about

his plans together with his wife to have a wedding anniversary to celebrate their forty years of marriage. Unluckily, there is an outbreak of a pandemic. The mayhem that the disease causes makes the special event that the persona had hoped for to be canceled.

The persona refers to the restrictions imposed among the people as a new form of language that was learnt by people. The persona insinuates that this new language replaces the one that is more interactive, the one that reflects our humanity. One such language is the implementation of social distancing. Wilder-Smith and David Freedman explain the importance of social distancing in Pandemic. It slows down its transmission (1). Staying apart for two meters from one another ensures non-contact interaction of people. This implies that known forms of greetings like handshakes and hugs had to be stopped or limited. This, according to the persona, thus signifies the rise of a new form of language of interaction. Wearing of masks removes our facial identity and thus it becomes difficult for one to recognise their friends or the people that they know.

This new language that the persona highlights affects human behaviour and more so in terms of social interaction. The distancing induces feelings of rejection which results in mental depression. Spending more time with another and interacting with each other closely has an important part in the well-being of an individual (Bernstein et al. 14). Sun and Harris have also done studies on the psychology of human interaction and their research justifies that human interactions are essential for the mental growth of an individual (1487). The persona thus highlights the negativity that COVID-19 has impacted in the social interaction sphere. The new interaction expresses the uneasiness and discomfort as highlighted in the poem. This supports my argument that COVID-19 disease has caused dis-ease in society. He notes “We started learning a new language/The language of social distancing/Wearing masks, washing our hands/Every time we encounter our fellow humans” (Indangasi 90).

The persona exemplifies the negative effects of COVID-19 in the poem. The persona notes that by the time he is writing the verse, the pandemic has killed half a million people worldwide. This reflects the somber mood of the effect of the deadly Coronavirus disease. The persona notes the seriousness of the disease, thus denoting why the disease should be dealt with carefully. He adds that the Coronavirus disease has consumed real people and the numbers keep rising. The persona employs the images of destruction to signify death to those that do not wear a mask. Through the use of a simile, the persona compares not wearing a mask to like “drunken driving.” This highlights the destructiveness of the disease to mavericks: “the choice, we hear, is stark/If you do not like wearing a mask, /You will hate wearing a ventilator/If you are lucky to get a bed in the ICU” (Indangasi 91).

Indangasi in “COVID-19 and our Humanity ” uses a number of poetic strategies and one of them is enjambment. Enjambment is a literary term describing the continuing of a statement or phrase from one line of poetry to the next. It comes from the French word "a striding over." An enjambed line often lacks punctuation at the line break, so the reader is moved smoothly and fast to the following line of the poetry without interruption. According to Mary Oliver, "When... the poet enjambes the line—turns the line so that a logical phrase is interrupted—it speeds the line for two reasons: curiosity about the missing part of the phrase impels the reader to hurry on, and the reader will hurry twice as fast over the obstacle of a pause because it is there" (45). Indangasi utilizes enjambment for a variety of reasons, including quickening the pace of the poem or creating a sense of urgency, tension, or growing emotion as the reader is drawn from one line to the next. In the sixth stanza of the poem, the persona notes:

With its birthplace in China/This cruel but invisible enemy/Started blowing like a storm
across the globe/A cyclone, a hurricane, a typhoon rolled into one/And here it is: it has

come to Kenya/With Nairobi as the epicenter/And the city in the sun has been under lockdown/It's never us, they say, until it is us. (Indangasi 91)

Indangasi describes a frightful characterization of Coronavirus disease. It is cruel and invisible. Something dreadful and invisibly ghastly. The use of similes as the persona compares the pandemic to storms such as “cyclone, a typhoon and hurricane” that denote environmental destruction symbolizes the devastating effect of the pandemic. These forms of disaster linked to climate crisis are amalgamed with COVID-19.

The persona continues to recount the effect that the dreadful disease has had among people including his relation, in stanza seven he has to be careful when interacting with his daughter, son-in-law, and the infant. The disease has denied him that tender touch with his grandson because he has to be careful with the grandson for the fear of contacting or infecting the child, this reveals the pain that the person experiences, the Coronavirus disease denies the grandfather a moment to connect with the child. The persona, who is a grandfather, desires to hold the baby. He yearns for the touch but due to the fear of one of them contracting the disease, he keeps distance. This poem highlights the value of human connection that has been dreadfully affected by the pandemic.

The persona's bitter attitude towards the disease is evident in the second last stanza when he refers to it as “murderous monster” This imagery represents Coronavirus disease dreadfully. The persona notes the lessons that the Pandemic has had towards humanity. Our vulnerability and obsession with our identity has been exposed. Paradoxically, the persona notes in the final stanza that despite the Coronavirus separating humans, it has reaffirmed our common humanity in dealing with it relentlessly.

“The Pandemic!” by Gladys Jerobon focuses on a diseased society amidst the pandemic. The term disease refers to the metaphorical sense denoting moral decadence subjected to school-going children. The persona refers to masked beasts to imply people that behave inhumanly. When the pandemic struck, schools were closed for many months. Young school-going girls were at home, and some became the prey for child molesters. According to Zulaika Garazi et al., COVID-19 containment measures negatively impacted school-going girls in low-income families. They argue that this is because of economic strain (8). Girls from low-income families experience these hardships. Many are easily dubbed into engaging in sexual activities for economic gain. Once pregnant, the girls are left alone (Mersie 16). Mersie highlights one such case in her article published in Reuters. Jerobon thus reflects the situation that teenage school-going girls found themselves in during the pandemic. The poet paints the ‘disease’ of early pregnancy that infected many girls, especially in Kenya.

In the first stanza, the poet uses ‘we’ a generalization of the persona to refer to school going children. They are at school and happy. The use of images such as the sun which is associated with positive attributes makes stanza one contrasted with the other stanzas, the happy mood in the stanza is also highlighted by how the students are hopeful about their future.

In stanza two, the persona is full of uncertainties as a result of the sound of the bell. This denotes a change which is also reflected symbolically to articulate uneasiness as a result of confusion due to the time the bell rings. The students are anxious, frightful of the unknown. The persona reveals the reason as to why they were summoned by the sound of the bell rung at an unfamiliar time. The persona reveals the deadly disease which has visited the country. The students have to vacate the school and go home.

...we pray, pack, hug tightly and tearfully happy;/School deserted, gate closed

Knowing not of tomorrow/But sweet Home became a cave/As pots and pans
befriend/Weeks snails into months! /Then News break;/Four thousand pregnant at home

The real pandemic! (Jerobon 92)

The persona reveals the real monster of diseases affecting many young girls during the time of Coronavirus. The bitter and disdainful attitude towards the pandemic is thus highlighted by the persona. The attitude is bitter because COVID-19 effect is felt deeply among young school-going girls. Since they were at home for a long period of time, many as the persona reveals became pregnant. This is contrasted with the hope that these young girls had before the Coronavirus. The pregnancy slows down their hope and thus the persona calls this the real pandemic. Through the use of metaphor, the persona refers to the men that made these girls pregnant as “masked beasts” who went on “rampage” on young teenagers.

Sexual abuse that the persona highlights is a menace in many societies. Societies faced with devastating occurrences such as war, poverty, pandemics and epidemics usually leaves young girls to be vulnerable. Onyango Monica et al study on effect of girls during an Ebola outbreak affirms the gigantic problem of sexual molestation of young girls (121). The researchers postulate that pandemics are a prelude for crime related activities. The persona thus highlights these challenges during the Coronavirus. Sexual abuse is an illness in metaphorical sense. It exemplifies the discomfort that young adolescents are subjected to during pandemics. This is what I refer to as a dis-ease. Coronavirus causes such devastating evils among the young girls since some adults take advantage of the situation to commit the crime.

“Coronation of Terror” by Richard Mbutia is a poem that looks at three eras during the Coronavirus. The poet uses the title of the poem ironically to draw attention to the terror causing disease. It is ironic since the term is used in celebratory occasions especially since its origin is in England. Coronation is a term used in monarchies to bestow leadership to another person to rule a kingdom for an unknown period of time. Shils and Michael explains the term as:

a kind of ceremonial in which the society reaffirms the moral values which constitute it as a society and renews its devotion to those values by an act of communion. The Coronation Service itself is a series of ritual affirmations of the moral values necessary to a well-governed and good society. The key to the Coronation Service is the Queen's promise to abide by the moral standards of society. (67)

It is thus ironical when the poet uses the term as reward of terror causing disease. The choice of word is evident as to how he structures the poem in three parts. Terror, is a word that denotes fear and has been used numerous times to refer to the evils of terrorism. The poetic diction thus builds up the attitude and the mood of the poem. This elucidates the uncertainties, fear, and uneasiness that Coronavirus has caused among people.

In stanza one and two, the persona dates back to pre-corona period where he talks to an imaginary person of how they were social partners. Through the use of imagery, the persona reveals a happy atmosphere during this time through the use of positive images that highlights the peace and stability and happiness that was around. Words like flowing banter, dollop of choicest butter and the image of a sea of rocking laughter, hugs and kisses and hefty high fives are used to denote the pleasant and joyous moments.

The other stanzas except the last one reveals the time of the COVID-19 which the persona highlights which creates a somber mood. Symbolically, the Coronavirus disease is referred to as “an enemy with boots of steel” (Mbutia 94). These “boots of steel” signify the power of destruction of the virus’ activity. The persona’s previous joy is taken away by the present terror which is revealed to have come from the Orient. The enemy from East Asia has trampled over many people already as it is shown in the poem. The use of “West, North and South” (Mbutia 94), symbolically represents European nations, United States of America, South America. The persona’s worry is built on the fact that such powerful countries have been overwhelmed by the Coronavirus disease infections which has caused many to be hospitalized yet the west have the best health care facilities, then this thus shows how the Coronavirus brings about terror among many individuals. The persona further notes that COVID-19 has redefined human communion: “...rewritten the constitution of human interaction;/...reapplied the Rusty rules of social Ethics;/...reworked the art of Worship/for Churches and Mosques are closed!” (Mbutia 95).

The representation of COVID-19 disease by the poet reveals the change that humanity has to embrace in order to fight the disease. The terror of Coronavirus is dealt with by use of quarantine that will restrict the movement of infect people to only one place. People have to change their ways of interacting with one another, the persona notes that they have to social distance, wash their hands, stay at home and observe highest standards of hygiene. The persona highlights that Post-Corona life will not be the same again. People have to live side by side with the Coronavirus disease.

Similarly, “The Changing of Days” by June Chelule presents a change caused by the Coronavirus disease. The poet articulates the disillusionment as a result of dying hope caused by the pandemic. The idea of masking is highlighted in the poem to refer to the secrets and honesty that cannot be

seen from outside. The persona notes that there are days that are difficult and others “easy”. The use of “tough” and “easy” in the poem illustrates change as a thematic concern. It shows the different situations that humanity has been engulfed in as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The change as a result of Coronavirus disease is also evident in stanza two. The persona metaphorically refers to the “world as a tomb” (Chelule 104), which suggests the high casualties of death caused by the pandemic. The use of masks which the persona hyperbolically asks whether they hide the terror of COVID-19 reveals the attitude that the persona has towards the Coronavirus disease and the restrictions that have been imposed by the governments. The poet uses enjambment in the poem to create the tension. The persona notes: “Did they shield the wearers’ expressions?/Of Morbid fear/Of contracting by contacting?/Just the other day we shook hands/We laughed, we kissed...” (Chelule 104).

The above lines illustrate the use of enjambment in the poem. There is continuation of sentences without a pause beyond the end of other lines in the stanza. The persona notes that before Coronavirus disease, people laughed, kissed, and shook hands without any second thoughts. The disease is seen as a restrictor of happiness and social interaction. The use of the word leper in the second last line in the poem which denotes sickness that did not allow human interaction highlights the social stigma towards people assumed to be infected by Coronavirus disease.

Furthermore, “Zoonotic Metacompilation” by Beatrice Mbori is a lyrical poem that awakens powerful emotions brought as a result of the pandemic. The poem's title captures a situation in which a disease is transmissible to human beings because of close contact with animals. This alludes to how COVID-19 came to be. The infection of the disease among persons is what Mbori focuses on in the poem. The poet employs rhyme and repetition, thus creating a musical pattern in

the poem that sings the negative energies brought by Coronavirus disease, which causes uneasiness that I refer to in this study as dis-ease. The persona's emotions are visibly apparent and highlight the disgust and bitterness towards COVID-19. Mbori's poem is a strong example of the power of words and the rhythm that comes naturally through the end rhyme in each stanza. The poem's first stanza has "depression rhyming with "cessation." In the second stanza, the word "leading rhymes with "waiting." This pattern is evident in all the remaining stanzas. The poem contains an intimidating number of themes and ideas on Coronavirus disease. The poem lacks punctuation, a feature common in contemporary poetry, which reveals the use of enjambment that relies on the persona's emotions spread in subsequent lines.

The poem "Zoonotic Metacompilation" begins with the line "great depression". The Great depression is a worldwide depression that struck countries with market economies at the end of the 1920s (Smiley 1). The phrase "great depression" symbolically refers to disaster and it is equated with Coronavirus disease in the poem. The next line of the poem utilizes a self-referential device, drawing attention to the COVID-19 pandemic through the line, "Tis cessation..." (Mbori 104). This happens on many accounts during this poem, emphasizing the piece's ability to stand alone, exist without a creator. Memorably, the lines in the poem are stuck in the mind of the reader due to multiple rhyming pairs of words per stanza in the poem.

The persona lists the effects of the pandemic aftermath. They include: the cessation of movement, social distancing and lockdown. The persona also highlights the negative effect of Coronavirus among the powerful nations. Through the use of personification, the poet highlights how a great nation like Italy bleeds. Metaphorically, it represents the majority of lives lost during the Pandemic in Italy. In 2020 alone, a research conducted estimates COVID-19 related in Italy to be around a hundred thousand five hundred and twenty six (Dorrucci, Maria, et al. 927). The disastrous effects

of COVID-19 in Europe are terrifying yet they are countries with the best system of dealing with such situations. COVID-19 is represented as a disease that terrorizes and negatively affects countries by making their economies spiral downwards and also by loss of lives. The persona notes: “The US is leading/Great a nation/Italy is bleeding/Big economy/China is shut/Great population/Europe is waiting/For descension” (Mbori 105).

The persona also highlights the consequences of the Pandemic in Africa. He points out the devastation it has caused. He notes: “Africa is daring/Tis pandemic/Great destruction/COVID is causing” (105). The persona also zeros down to COVID-19’s effect in Kenya. Through the use of referential technique, the poet reflects on the situation of counties and villages in Kenya. In the counties, the representation of COVID-19 reflects a worrying trend. The persona articulates the disruption of cultural practices in the villages. The persona notes: “...Villages are claiming/Culture disruption/Burying disrupted/Rites omission/Graves are filling/Great depression/Doctors decrying/Tis transmission/Spread depressing/All united” (Mbori 105).

The way of living is altered because of COVID-19. Due to impositions of preventive measures such as social distancing, normal social interactions like shaking hands are affected. Through the use of enjambment, the persona lists this change that has affected almost everybody. Due to cessation and lockdown, boarding of planes to other countries is almost impossible. The poet uses personification to illustrate the effect of the pandemic. Due to closure of churches, the poet notes that pastors are retreating, graves are complaining which exemplifies the deaths as a result of Coronavirus disease. People have to be restricted at home as unemployment increases.

Alternatively, “Scientific Response to COVID-19” by Timothy Wangusa is a poem that is minimalistic in its line structure. It is composed of forty three lines appearing as a stanza. Each line has two words. This poem has characteristics of poems of a famous Korean Poet known as Ko

Un(b.1933). Ko Un's poems are often meditative of Buddhism (Park 81). Wangusa borrows from Ko Un's style of writing. This is evident since the lyrical poems of Ko Un are long poetic meditations that are witty and often insightful. The short-line lyrical poem "Scientific Response to COVID-19" employs such a format. Contemporarily written, the persona through the use of enjambment, a technique that pulls the reader along from one line to the next, establishes the rhythm needed in reflecting on the advent but very devastating nature of Coronavirus disease.

The use of irony in the poem is a technique to satirize some of the responses to the Coronavirus disease. The structure of the poem is unique for it has two words per line. For instance, the persona notes: "Scientific henceforth/ Scientific country/ Scientific plague/ Scientific pandemic/ Scientific thundermic..." (Wangusa 112). The word "Scientific" is repeated in the first word of each line throughout the poem. Repetition of the first word of the poem also creates resonance throughout the poem thus revealing different emotions of alluded words at the end of each line in the poem. With the emergence of COVID-19, the persona reflects on the science around Coronavirus. The usage of the word in the poem satirizes the response taken towards the disease. The poem interrogates how the pandemic has destabilized people. Coronavirus is reflected in a manner that is beyond human comprehension.

Similarly to the poem by Wangusa on "Side Benefits of COVID-19 Curfew", "Soaring above the Pandemic" by Bryson Omwalo is a poem about hope amidst the Coronavirus disease. The title of the poem is also selected for the entire anthology. Imagistically, the title refers to an eagle and how it flies above the skies even during bad weather. The poem thus carries a symbolic representation to denote hope during the pandemic. The persona in the poem is a photographer. He notes: "I am a professional photographer/...though my lenses will locate dead bodies/...and snapshot required love and dedicated service" (Omwalo 116). The persona notes the need to react quickly in dealing

with the pandemic. The use of images that denote speed which has been artistically portrayed by the words “swoop and swiftly” (Omwalo 115) implies the quickening reaction.

The persona notes of the corrupt ways in which tenders are given to specific people in government and also poor leadership. Though the persona yearns to soar above these disturbing and dehumanizing situations, the poem still is able to highlight the ills in society thus the poem succeeds in representing a diseased nation within the time of Coronavirus. Through the use of irony, the persona laments of people suffering and writhing in pain yet cartels and powerful criminals steal drug consignments meant for the sick in hospitals. These free drugs are later sold to patients expensively. The persona notes: “As drug consignments are carted by cartels/To their private partitions for personal profit/As they pray to the Lord who helps/Them that help themselves” (Omwalo 115-116). The use of the phrase “beyond half dozen moons of unpaidness” (Omwalo 116) symbolizes the many months that doctors work without pay. This articulates the decadence in government ministries. It denotes exploitation and absconding suits of some of the leaders. This in the poem, reflects an illness that eats the public officers in the government coffers.

The persona’s resilience and determination highlights the hope that we all need in fighting against any pandemic. Pandemic as used by the poet refers to any situation that makes people suffer thus creating uneasiness. The poem thus artistically portrays the Coronavirus disease and the dis-ease within society as a result of exploitation, corruption, and poor governance. The poet refers to such ills in society as pandemics worth tackling.

However, in the poem “The Remnant” by Muriithi Burton, the persona is a teenage girl in isolation due to the effects of Coronavirus. The lines of the poem are short thus reflecting a voice that is trembling and aching due to the confusion, anxieties, and uneasiness that the pandemic has caused

to her. The mood in the poem is somber: “My smile fades to thinness/Casting shadows of fear around./Hot waves of sorrow beat/The little hope enshrined/In my weakening mind (Burton 131). The lines in the poem portray the mood of despair. The smile fading away reveals unhappiness. Pain and fear are in control. The persona highlights the gloomy atmosphere when the little hope left is imprisoned in the persona’s mind. The mind is weakening which articulates the misery that the persona faces.

In the second and third stanza, the persona’s painful memories threaten her survival. The persona is terrified of the outcome of the disease. The restricted movement slices her freedom. The persona appears to be infected with Coronavirus disease, she describes the symptoms associated with Coronavirus disease. Her “nostrils are cocked” (Burton 132), a sign of difficulties in breathing. This thus shows that the persona has the signs of a COVID-19 infected person.

The fourth and fifth stanzas paint a picture of suffering in desolation. The pandemic has destabilized the persona. The persona reveals she has suffered because of the disaster that left her alone. Due to the infection of the Coronavirus disease, she has to stay isolated. This explains why the persona has to be under curfew.

The poet has dealt with Coronavirus from a realistic end. The poet uses the artistic voice of the persona to reveal the social economic situation during the Pandemic. The persona’s crises is reflected in the remaining stanzas. She notes how destructive the pandemic has been to her personal and social life. Her face has changed, her natural beauty fading. The persona notes: “...On my face defaces/My natural beauty...” (Burton 132).

In the final stanza, the persona notes that staying at home kept her safe from double tragedy. Evidently, she is a young teenager. During this period of COVID-19, it is estimated that 152,000

teenage girls in Kenya became pregnant between March and May 2020 due to economic hardship during the country's nationwide lockdown (Partridge-Hicks 3). COVID-19 confinement measures harmed vulnerable adolescent girls. The persona notes that: "But sage to stay home/Kept me safe from a double tragedy/And pangs of teenage delinquency/Glaring at me/A glad remnant I remain/To tell a story of a season/That was to wipe me away" (Burton 133).

The representation of COVID-19 disease in the poem thus reveals a bitter reality that young teenage girls face. Burton artistically succeeds in portraying the tragedy that many teenagers faced as they were away from school during a pandemic. The persona considers herself a remnant. She survives the second tragedy of being a prey to sexual monsters that hunt young girls. Defiling and assaulting young teenagers is an illness in society that causes uneasiness among the teenagers and their relations.

In "Reset Button", Frankline Nyatemu deploys enjambment to bring to attention the changing life within the city during the COVID-19. The city of Nairobi which was ever bustling before COVID-19 outbreak, is engulfed in silence. The persona presents a quietened place because people have deserted as a result of measures that the government introduced to curb the spread of Coronavirus disease. The persona notes: "The bustling City stilled/The rushy Gikomba vanished..." (Nyatemu 134). Markets such as "Gikomba" a source of income for many people are empty. Devastatingly, this implies that many people that depend on the market will suffer due to its closure. Lack of food for families that depend on jobs that the market provided for them represents the destabilization effect of COVID-19 to families.

The use of enjambment fills the poem with many details of how people have left their way of life like merry making and have retreated to their homes because of COVID-19. The poet presents the Coronavirus as a robber that has stolen the norms of the city people. Celebrities have to retreat

because places of entertainment have been closed. “Wahesh”-derived from Swahili word *waheshimiwa* (honorable) - is a term that the persona uses colloquially to refer to members of the political elites. Ironically, they “mumble” because the government has banned gatherings. One would expect them to legislate measures that would be beneficial to vulnerable families during the pandemic.

There is a sharp contrast with the setting of the poem. In stanza one, the setting is in a city. The second stanza has a rural setting. This use of contrast between the ruler and urban setting reveals the normalcy that is experienced in the rural setting that lacks in the first stanza. The use of nature imagery in the second stanza reveals calmness and continuity of life despite the COVID-19 pandemic. In stanza two, the sun still rises which metaphorically represents continuity of life and prosperity. Dogs barking, cocks crowing, crickets chirping and cows mowing reveals an attractive and pleasant setting with nothing contaminated with the Coronavirus. The frustration of life in the city is contrasted with life in the village. The images of nature reveal the mood of nostalgia which articulates the beauty of the rural setting. The persona is able to acknowledge that the past is better than the present moment of desolation due to Coronavirus.

Kate Sakari in “Behold the Novel” is a poem that embraces the new norm during Coronavirus. The persona outlines the change experienced by people as a result of the pandemic. The title of the poem supports this assertion. To “behold” is to direct attention to something. It is a word which has biblical origins. The word “novel” in this context refers to Coronavirus disease. The persona is reflective of the consequences of Coronavirus in society. The persona notes: “The hearty handshake and hugs/Turn to weary weighty waves/The adversary so perilous/Fiercely ferocious/Keeping friends away like foe/remotely recognizable/visibly invisible.” (Sakari 136-137).

The persona proposes that one has to live with the Coronavirus disease as long as existing guidelines on COVID-19 restrictions are observed. The free written verse employs enjambment thus revealing the outpouring of emotions of the persona. The cut in the social interaction of people by Coronavirus disease is highlighted in the poem. The persona uses the phrase "...an adversary so perilous" (136) to denote the destructive and terrorizing characteristics of Coronavirus disease. Feelings of despair and helplessness are thus revealed in the poem.

Pamela Oloo in "Have we lost it all?" uses a host as a persona. The host addresses the visitor. In the poem, the visitor is a metaphor that the poet uses to refer to Coronavirus disease. Metaphor and rhetoric are important features in poetry. Stuart Brown writes that rhetoric and metaphor create: "Awareness of the tenor/vehicle interaction, comparison and context are the key elements in using this instrument. They provide the composition or grounds for the meaning-making potential of the metaphor" (qtd 142).

Use of metaphor and rhetoric thus makes the poem socially interactive and the meaning is revealed in the poetic diction. The poem begins with the rhetorical question which makes the reader to be persuaded of something. The question is for the reader of the poem. Such a question helps one understand that the poem is about the effect of COVID-19 on people. In the second line of the poem, the persona refers to Coronavirus disease through the use of personification. He calls it "a strange one with strangeness unlimited" (Oloo 161). The use of personification is evident since the disease is given the humanistic trait. The metaphor in the line refers to the disease. In the initial stages of the outbreak of the pandemic, Coronavirus disease had strange characteristics, it was invisible and it spread strangely, and unnoticeable.

The second stanza reveals the mysteriousness of the Coronavirus disease. Its presence was announced officially in what the persona calls "fanfare". The use of rhetorical questions in the

stanza reveals the date COVID-19 was officially announced in Kenya. The “uninvited visitor” metaphor is used by the persona to refer to how Coronavirus distracts the peace and stability of people. The persona notes “...The visitor instructs.../Instructs us in our own home-/Into which she sneaked/And overstayed her unwelcome’ (Oloo 162).

According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), in 2020, the youth unemployment rate was 32.4 percent for youths aged 20-29. This startling data is attributed largely as a result of the pandemic (*Kenya Bureau of Statistics* 2019). The persona reveals the irony of some of the containment measures that people have to follow. The washing of hands is mostly done when there is food to eat in most African homes, the persona questions the essence of washing hands yet many families lack basic necessities like food and water. Additionally, the persona is critical of hand washing. The families are not supposed to observe the stay at home regulation. This is ironic since the majority of such families do not have any formal employment. They can neither stay at home nor work from home. This implies that it would be difficult to find work that could provide for their basic needs. The persona laments:

...For why should we wash hands/When there is no food to eat?/When we have greeted no one?/And where I the water to waste?/And why should you eat when you have lazed indoors-/.../How do you wash and not eat? (Oloo 163)

Evidence from the above lines in the poem illustrate the difficulties that the pandemic causes. Through the use of rhetorical questions, the persona highlights the absurdity of washing hands amidst hard economic times because of the disease. The rhetorical questions also reflects on the irony of the situation. People are advised to wash their hands yet “food” which symbolize help does not come their way. The poet through the persona criticizes the measures advocated by the government. The “we” in the poem symbolizes the majority of people that re suffering as a result

of the pandemic. The universality in the poem highlights the collective human suffering in the face of the pandemic that causes uneasiness due to hunger because people are not allowed to travel to work so that they can get their wages and buy food.

2.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, I have analyzed fifteen poems in the anthology of poems: *Soaring above the Pandemic: Poetic Echoes from East Africa*. The poets successfully employ poetic strategies such as imagery, metaphor, symbolism, irony, personification, enjambment, contrast, and rhyme. These poetic devices are used strategically to represent COVID-19. The idea of Coronavirus disease and its effect on people is what the poems bring forth. Though the poems are about COVID-19, there is also an aspect of uneasiness and anxiety that the poems address.

The poets responded to the disease by writing about how it affected people. Some of the containment measures as a result of COVID-19 sabotaged people's way of life. The mask mandate, violent officers, changing social norms, and cessation of the movement- which caused unemployment to many people- prove that COVID-19 caused uneasiness.

In a nutshell, the stylistic disposition of the poets in the selected fifteen poems helps in reflecting on disease and dis-ease in literature. The emerging issues that the COVID-19 resulted in are also identifiable in the poems. The poems are thus proof that the emergency of COVID-19 enabled a literary reflection on Coronavirus disease.

CHAPTER THREE: REPRESENTATION OF DIS-EASE IN MILLENNIAL VOICES AND MUSINGS DURING A TIME OF PANDEMIC

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the representation of dis-ease in *Millennial Voices: East African Poetry*, an anthology edited by Barack Wandera, Adalo Moga, Bryson Omwalo, and John Midega. The other anthology of poetry that I shall examine is *Musings during a Time of Pandemic: A World Anthology of Poems on COVID-19*, edited by Christopher Okemwa. I will discuss the two anthologies separately. In the first anthology, I shall analyse five poems. The anthology: *Millennial Voices: East African Poetry* has over one hundred and thirty poems; however, five poems are specifically about Coronavirus. The anthology, *Millennial Voices: East African Poetry*, was published around the time of the Coronavirus pandemic; the majority of the poems do not cover the issue of Coronavirus. The poems tackle new realities and experiences in East Africa. Significantly, the poems selected in this study cut across miseries and pain and the insurmountable resilience to survive the pandemic. I shall examine the form and content of the poems to determine how they portray the concept of disease and its effect on people.

In the second part of this chapter, I shall examine seventeen poems in the anthology: *Musings during a Time of Pandemic: A World Anthology of Poems on COVID-19*, edited by Christopher Okemwa. The anthology has over five hundred poets from the whole world. I shall only explore poems from East African region. Kenyan poets have written several poems on COVID-19 compared to other East African counterparts in the anthology. This implies that the anthology

covers a high percentage of Kenyan poets on the subject of Coronavirus. In this study, the question of how the poets respond to the Coronavirus pandemic in East Africa shall be answered.

3.2 The use of Paradox in portraying Social “Coronization”

Paradox as a poetic technique represents the absurdities of the situation in society during the pandemic. The emergence of new ways of living as a preventive measures caused havoc and wrecks the hopes and dreams of people. Socialization is affected during the pandemic. People have to embrace new form of socialization that this section refers to as “coronization”. The COVID-19 outbreak resulted in word coinages. Odhiambo's poem "These Times of coronization" exemplifies the emergence of new literature terms like “coronization”. This is called “neologism”. Durham defines neologism as "a new word or a new manner of using a word that is not yet widely accepted." It must identify a long-lasting, meaningful concept to survive infancy, and the word/usage must be relevant" (1). The coronavirus pandemic's declaration set the stage for creating new terminology connected with material changes that have become commonplace in people's daily lives worldwide. The novel coronavirus has imposed its terminology, compelling individuals to adjust to the new circumstance by adopting special terms that assist them in "making sense of the changes that have suddenly become part of our regular lives" (Lawson 1). The word-formation mechanism in the poem is thus a poetic strategy that the poet uses to show how coronavirus-based terminology has spread throughout the world's languages. This adds credence to the notion that neologisms are a genuine reflection of language change and evolution. The impact and effectiveness of evolving terminology and lexical innovations can be seen in the majority of word formation and derivational processes.

In Christopher Odhiambo's poem "These times of coronization", the persona highlights the social-cultural disturbances of the peoples' social and culture during the pandemic. The paradox in this new word is that it cuts one from other people. The poet's semantic use of the word "coronization" in title of the poem insinuates COVID-19's control and dominion in peoples' lives. Ronald Horvath defines colonialism as practice of one country taking full or partial political control of another country (46). The word "coronization" signifies the use of neologism which illustrates the poet's use of literary device. The invention and innovation of new words, expressions, etc explains the idea of what the new pandemic brings.

Structurally the poem is a one-stanza poem made up of thirty nine lines. This unique representation of the poem is significant in the poem's overall message. The compactness of the many lines into one stanza reflects on the unity that is needed in fighting Coronavirus disease. The fight is necessary because of the impacts that the pandemic has on the people as highlighted by the persona. There is the disruption of social-cultural realities. The persona notes:

Where the normal becomes abnormal.../And the abnormal becomes normal!/And the social distance becomes intimate!/ And the mask becomes a symbol of life:/ And not the symbol of covert identities--/ for terrorists and bank robbers. (98)

The persona notes that there is change as a result of the pandemic. People are not use to this new but "abnormal" kind of life. Absurdly, that which was unacceptable becomes the acceptable. The persona highlights these disruptions through the use of enjambment. The continuation of the persona's reflections in subsequent lines provides the poem with the unity that makes the poem a metaphor of life during a crisis. The paradox is also used in the above lines in the poem "These times of coronization". The persona uses a group of statements that leads to a contradiction. The phrase "the abnormal becomes normal..." is a contradiction of what one would call a reality.

Normally, masking signified an act of violence which robbers used to hide their identity. It would be unacceptable to walk in the streets while masked. People would visualize you as a criminal. During the pandemic, masking becomes “a symbol of life”. Without the mask, it is absurdly interpreted as a death sentence. The persona thus signifies the importance of wearing a mask. He notes: “The mask:/the shield and defender;/for to hide identity,/...is to hide from invisible enemy./ A necessary feature of combating an invisible foe!

The persona also highlights the idea of home as a space that is safe from the “invisible enemy”. Home becomes a battle ground to fight the “Coronizer”. Normally, the best way of fighting an enemy is with guns, missiles, bombs, tanks and other advanced military weapons. Since the enemy is “invisible” the safest way is to stay at home. To avoid social interactions is the best technique in winning the way against COVID-19 which has invaded the society and that still continues to wreak havoc in the social, economic, psychological and political systems. Carole Despres refers to home as “the sole area of control for the individual and as providing a sense of physical security... (97). Despres also sees a home as a “as heaven or sanctuary (98). Despres definition of a home is a good example of how the persona in “These times of coronization” paints a home. The persona remarks: “The home:/Our fortress-/to fend away the enemy” (Odhiambo 98). The persona identifies a home to be a safe sanctuary when he uses the word “fortress”. Implying that the outside worlds’ disturbances and disruptions cannot affect the peace within the house. This image denotes the effectiveness of staying at home as a retaliation of the war against Coronavirus. The absurdity of the times of COVID-19 are evident in other lines of the poem. Through the use of rhetorical questions, the persona reflects on washing of hands during the pandemic. The impact of Coronavirus in the simplest of the tasks is examined. Normally, washing of hands is associated with the act of eating. The persona notes: “Didn’t your mother tell you? / To wash your hands? /

Before eating? / Times have changed/...Hand washing is no longer about eating. / As it has become a cleansing ritual (99). The rhetorical questions highlight the change as a result of the pandemic. Washing of hands becomes a very important survival aspect as a way of purifying oneself against the disease. The absurdity is evident in the manner that one has to wash their hands not to eat but to protect themselves. This becomes essential in curbing the spread of Coronavirus.

The COVID-19 invasion of cultural norms is reflected in the poem. The persona laments about the virulent nature of the disease when humans socialize. Socialization becomes venomous. He notes: "...For human contact-is now a poisonous chalice. /...as the dead bury their dead, / A 'times wee hours of the night.../And the lovers wed without witnesses/ For the enemy, /Might be among the witnesses?" (Odhiambo 99). This reflection by the persona highlights the helplessness that the people feel. Cultural practices of marriage and funeral that have existed for many years become absurd. Many cultures do not bury their dead at night. Weddings are happy occasions and people gather to celebrate such social functions. The Kenyan government imposed guidelines on how to conduct funerals. Through the Kenyan Gazette, it was noted: "Where a person infected with COVID-19 dies, the body shall be interred or cremated within forty-eight hours from the time of death" (2). Additionally, the number of people to attend funerals was reduced. It was noted:

a funeral shall not be regarded as a prohibited gathering provided that— (a) attendance at the funeral shall be limited to fifteen people; (b) night vigils shall not be held in relation to a funeral; (c) hygiene conditions under rule 6 are adhered to; and (d) all the conditions under rule 8 (1) of the Public Health (Prevention, Control and Suppression of COVID-19) Rules, 2020 are adhered to. (*Kenya Gazette Supplement* No. 41)

Mercy Juma explains the importance of cultural practices in regards to death in African societies. She posits:

In many African societies death and life are intricately tied. Many traditions see death as a rite of passage - a transition to another form. Hence the importance of ancestors - they are the people who have died but continue to "live" in the community. This, in turn, means that when people die they must receive a perfect burial - complete with rituals that have been observed for generations. For the communities in western Kenya where I come from, like the Luo and Luhya, a person's death and their burial are incredibly important events. (BBC News)

COVID-19 thus deprives people of their valued cultural aspects. The persona notes that: "...For human contact-is now a poisonous chalice." This implies that being in contact with many people might result in one getting infected with the Coronavirus. In the next line, the persona notes that "...bury their dead, / A 'times wee hours of the night'". It is unfamiliar to hear the dead buried at "the wee hours of the night'. As a sign of respect for the dead, the majority of African societies conduct burials during the day. According to Rebekah Lee and Vaughan Megan, "death rituals frequently serve to steer both the dying and the living into a good and life-giving balance with each other (344). Funerals are thus regarded highly in many traditions. The connection between the bereaved and the departed this calls into question the disruption that the pandemic had on such traditions. The helplessness among the people during such occurrences explains the devastation of Coronavirus as a disease that caused the majority of these deaths and also robbed people of their cultural norms.

Correspondingly, in "Shattered" by Evon Amboga, the title presents an absurd situation that the sick find themselves during the pandemic. The image portrayed in the title of the poem articulates a sense of irredeemableness. The persona opens with the words: "Hospice environs are an ache in the bone". Hospice represents a place where the terminally ill get health care. The word "ache" in

the poem symbolize pain and suffering. The poem written during the time of the Coronavirus pandemic, it is apparent that health care providers are overwhelmed by the high number of cases of people infected with the Coronavirus disease. The images employed in the poem depict a paradox. Whereas a hospital presents a place of hope and life, the hospice in the poem portrays a sense of despair and uncertainty. The persona notes that “Eyes close at the sight of men in knee-length overcoats” (112). “Knee-length overcoats” represents doctors. The pandemic is traumatizing and destructive. Line three of the poem, “This fighter is afraid of the battle” suggests that hope has eluded the patient. Fear has engulfed the person. It is distressing as a result of the pandemic. Patients are not at ease with the Coronavirus disease.

The persona notes, “Idle tears gather in the eyes.../The pandemic renders worthless thy perfection/Creating uncertainty” (Amboga 112). Patients’ tears are visibly present. It symbolizes sadness and devastation. Images of brokenness that the title of the poem is based on are reflected in the fear of the pandemic. The use of words like “obituary”, “last pump of air” denote the demise of some of the patients. The poem is a reflection of the calamitous end of people whose weak immune system cannot fight Coronavirus disease.

Additionally, Bryson Omwalo’s poem “Daughter of the East” highlights the absurdity experienced as a result of the pandemic. The absurdity in the poem is portrayed paradoxically. The poet through the persona personalizes COVID-19. The persona documents the arrival of the “to be bride.” The “bride” symbolizes a marriage. However, the “bride” brings forth sadness and suffering. The title of the poem is used metaphorically to represent Coronavirus disease. The use of “daughter” implies the disease is a female. The persona notes that the “daughter” comes from the “East.” This symbolizes the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first case was discovered in Wuhan, China, a country located on the East side of the globe. The “daughter” metaphor as used in the poem

refers to the act of a bride moving from her “home” to the “bridegroom’s” new place. The movement denotes the spread of Coronavirus from where it was first discovered and spreading rapidly globally.

The persona highlights the confusion and anxiety as a result of Coronavirus. The disease is identified as “a daughter” waiting to bring doom to humanity. The persona notes: “Daughter of the East/ You mocked us/ You smiled and made faces to mock us/For the folly of our holly and hyped preparedness/ As we waited eagerly for the/ Bridal entry with Bated breath...” (Omwalo 107). Ironically, the disease is not welcomed despite the “preparedness” It is a “forced marriage”. The persona notes: “We the groom of the night/Heavy with fear, boiling with anticipation”. COVID-19 is portrayed as a “riddling sphinx”. Reference is made to Greek mythology. It is believed that those that were not able to answer the riddle, the monster ate them. This insinuates the sickness and death that the pandemic has brought to human beings. Sickness and death are the aftermath of not “answering the riddle of the sphinx”. This highlights the difficulty of accessing a cure for the virus especially during the early stages of the pandemic.

Devastation of COVID-19 causes uneasiness among people and nations. The devastation is also caused by the unfamiliarity of the disease. It is a new disease that does not have a cure. The persona refers to the destruction it caused to other places before its arrival. He notes: “The singer yonder, on the other side/ Had composed ballads that reached us/ Extolling in mournful melodies/Your Thunderous stamp of presence/ Your totality of your embrace/ And ensuing choral dirges...” (Omwalo 107). The poetic diction portrays sadness. “Mournful” and “choral dirges” refer to deaths due to Coronavirus. People are afraid of the pandemic. As a poetic strategy, the poet employs a literary allusion of King Oedipus. “Answering the riddle of the sphinx” as used in the poem signifies uncertainty associated with COVID-19 and its tragic nature.

The poem's punctuation is grammatically non-standard. Periods are omitted. Enjambed lines are rampant. This highlights the emotive nature of the poem. The poet is able to pull the reader from one line of the poem to the next which establishes a fast rhythmic pace. Enjambment allows the poet to break the lines in the poem thus facilitating a pause in the reading of the poem. For instance, the following lines in the poem are enjambed: "For the folly of our holly and hyped preparedness/ As we waited eagerly for the/ Bridal entry with Bated breath..." (Omwalo 107). A break of the line in the phrase "for the" leaves the reader wanting to know more. It also creates a sense of confusion that the poem intends to portray.

3.3 Images of Hope during the Pandemic

In this subsection, the study focuses on poems that explore the idea of hope amidst the storm experienced as a result of COVID-19. Kolawole Ogunbesan and David Woolger's assert that, "the words of poetry are compressed, filled with meaning and importance" (qtd. in Mwamburi 1). This is to suggest that the poets' use of words is a way to appeal to a readers emotions. Imagery help signify meaning of a poem. This is possible when the reader is able to create a visual picture of what is described in a poem.

The use of positive images in the poems illustrates the ease with which some people coped with the pandemic. Poetry as a medium of expression thus helps the reader appreciate poems not only as an instructional manual but also as a way of giving people hope for a new dawn. I shall focus on the poems: "Hold on" by Betty Nduku and "The Ogre" by Jane Bwonya.

In "Hold on" by Betty Nduku, the persona implores a "close relation" to be optimistic despite the devastation of COVID-19. It is a poem that gives hope to humanity amidst the pandemic. The persona notes: "Hold on my dear never let go/ amidst the fear, panic and isolation/ and sometimes

Death./ Hold...For every storm, calmness” (Nduku 111). The poetic diction in the first stanza alludes to the calamitous pandemic. Coronavirus disease causes people to be anxious, and afraid. The persona assures the addressee to be hopeful for a new dawn.

In the second stanza, reference is made to the signs and symptoms associated with Coronavirus pandemic. The speaker notes: “And predictions of doom come to pass/ And we from cough to sneeze/ and headache to suffocated stillness/...Only silently declaring our solitude” (Nduku 111). These symptoms fated one with the disease. Despite the complications, the persona encourages the addressee to be steadfast and fight the disease by being strong. The poem’s message of hope to the addressee is important in encouraging the reader to soldier on with life during the pandemic.

In the poem “The Ogre” by Jane Bwonya, the persona addresses the “ogre”. The title is metaphorical as it is a comparison between the “monster” and COVID-19. Coronavirus is also personalized. This personalization highlights the cruelty and the devastation of the pandemic in the lives of people. The persona traces the arrival and origin of the “ogre”. The advent of Coronavirus is likened to “a thief”. This implies that the pandemic was unexpected: The persona notes: “Stealthily, like a night thief you pounced/And with a festival trumpet your fame pronounced” (Bwonya 99). The “night thief” imagery which borrows from the biblical allusion that the unknown arrival of the messiah denotes the uncertainties and unpredictability of the Coronavirus disease during the first instances of its outbreak. This sets the mood of the poem which signifies the vulnerabilities that would be subjected to the people since the outbreak of the pandemic was hard to predict and control.

The persona interrogates the origin of the COVID-19 and reflects on the confusion that it has caused among races, scholars, historians, travelers and parents. He notes: “You the main celebrant dressed in oriental gown./ Not Black, not white, not brown./And we churned narratological

theories/ To frame the map diffusion histories...” (Bwonya 99). The use of apostrophe is evident in every stanza in the poem. Barbara Johnson defines apostrophe as a “direct address of an absent, dead, or inanimate being by a first person speaker” (29). In the third line. The persona uses an apostrophe to personalize Coronavirus by addressing it: “You...in...oriental gown”. The use of the phrase “oriental gown” implies countries from East Asia. This places the origin of the Coronavirus in China.

In the second and third stanza, the persona highlights the effects of the pandemic. Isolation becomes an important survival strategy for the persona. The personified disease “turned homes into fortresses’ ’. Home becomes an important place to stay during the pandemic. Preventive measures are employed to avert the cruelty of Coronavirus. The persona notes: “Dire deeds like clutching floating straws to avert your caresses.../No out no in, no out no in, no greetin’ no greetin’ (Bwonya 100). The metaphor in line two stanza two “clutching floating straws” signifies the need to find a solution. This reflects on the persona’s respect for the government imposed restrictions. Isolation/ staying at home thus becomes important for survival. Helplessness and the longevity of the pandemic makes life unbearable. This as per the persona, it creates uneasiness and discomfort. The persona notes; “Days passed but still not seen, only heard/Unknown and almost unknowable.../ And we...oh poor we, greatly stifled/ And the mighty and proud humbled/ All in uniform helpless” (Bwonya 100).

In the fourth stanza, the persona reflects on the tragedy of the pandemic. Images of death are recurrent in the stanza. The persona alludes to funerals and images of war which denotes devastation and the horror of the Coronavirus. The disease causes havoc and terror. This dis-ease is reflected in the poetic diction that signifies people's helplessness during the pandemic. The persona interjects: “So in burrowed existence we peeped through the glass windows/ And lo and

behold! We saw the fatherless, widowers and widows/ The aftermath of your Trojan incursions!/ City and village turned desolate” (Bwonya 100). The line “peeped through glass window” refers to the act of viewing the dead during the burial ceremonies. The usage of “Trojan incursion” in the poem illustrates a poetic strategy of historical allusion evident of the tragedy that befell the city of Troy in Greek mythology. The persona uses the phrase to symbolize the invisibility of the virus. Trojan implies a thing that hides to destroy. COVID-19 is compared to the Trojan horse, a dangerous threat unseen and disguised as something else. The word “burrowed” signifies Coronavirus's effect in terms of its destruction. This symbolizes death. It alludes to a dead person talking while in the grave. The apocalyptic imagery contributes to the somber mood of the poem that the persona exemplifies as a consequence of the pandemic. The phrase “peeping through the glass window” exemplifies the act of the dead looking towards those that have been left alive. This image evidently captures the loss of lives of people during the pandemic. The persona further proves that the image is of a deceased person because “they” are looking at the living persons that have been left “fatherless”, “widowers”, and “widows”. The implication of this pronoun “we” alludes to the idea of majority. This implies that many people perished as a result of the pandemic. In stanza four, it is used twice. Firstly, to allude to the dead observing the living and to refer to those left in the world of the living.

The final stanza symbolises hope amidst the pandemic. The persona employs positive images that denote new beginnings and rebirth of people. The persona addresses the disease with new found grace and resilience. He notes: “ No, Mr Ogre, like Osiris and Heccal we are rising/ Hear the new song we are singing/ That harbingers a new dawn/ A dawn we must own/ A dawn that will flow like the Nile.../ Your existence and clutching claws shall lack substance” (Bwonya 101). The imagery of Egyptian mythical goddess Osiris, god of the deceased, in the poem symbolizes a new

beginning, resurrection and rebirth. The imagery through the use of simile in river Nile implies a new hope and survival.

3.4 COVID-19 Vulner(abilities) as dis(ease)

The coronavirus crisis revealed the vulnerability of many of our country's systems, including public health, the schooling system, the economic crisis, and human relationships. The adverse effects of COVID-19 articulate the vulner(abilities) associated with the pandemic. The vulner(abilities) articulated in the poems selected for this subsection evaluates how people use their abilities to deal with the pandemic, thus highlighting ways in which they can safeguard themselves from the pandemic.

In Alex Kitaka's "The Diplomatic Meeting", the persona uses dramatic mediation to explore COVID-19 challenges. Interestingly, the persona addresses coronavirus throughout the poem. The persona talks of the conversation he had with the disease in an attempt to understand about this pandemic. He notes: "It was a diplomatic meeting I held/With COVID-19/It's true that they say, she's only 19./ Hadn't been for such a meeting./ I would be sailing in a sea of lies" (Kitaka 30).

The persona reveals the perceptions he had heard about Coronavirus disease. Initially, the uncertainties and lack of knowledge of the disease made him unaware of the facts about COVID-19. The phrase "she's only 19" exemplifies the persona's realization of the year that Coronavirus was first declared. The persona identifies the disease as a young teenage girl coming of age. The personification, exemplified by giving Coronavirus outbreak year, highlights the uncertainties that one experiences when courting a lady. The expectations unknown thus foregrounds the persona's need to discover COVID-19. The "meeting" with the "lady" implies a close encounter with

Coronavirus. The encounter refers to the outcome of the disease in some parts of the world, especially the devastation it has caused.

The persona also exposes the devastation of locusts and political illnesses in Uganda during the advent of COVID-19. The images of “Nzige ” chewing plants were an occurrence, especially when the first cases of Coronavirus were announced in East Africa. According to Rodney Muhumuza, large swarms of locusts’ entered Uganda, and the infestations had spread to over twenty districts (1). Locust invasion in East Africa is one of the many challenges that cause food insecurity. The persona mentioning the outbreak of the pandemic plus the invasion of locusts highlights the devastation the two would cause. That explains why the persona engages with COVID-19 in a “diplomatic meeting” he requests for some time so that his country would be prepared. This diplomacy is “fictional”; the engagements with Coronavirus are thus imagined and not performed. The imaginations are a strategy employed so that the leadership would rethink how they deal with the invisible menace. The uneasiness of the disease is further extended by the persona’s reflection on the political state of affairs. He laments: “Just hold on to the 32 days/ To see how they make up for 34 years/Of our political pandemic” (Kitaka 31). The persona thus questions how the dictatorial leadership of Uganda's current government, which has held power for many years, would deal with the pandemic. The statement is satirical. It highlights the unpreparedness of the government in dealing with the pandemic. The “political pandemic” shows the ills of the political class to the people.

"Gulu's Quarantine" by Aliko David Martin is a poem that explores the aftermath of COVID-19. The persona highlights the effects that the pandemic has had on all people. Though humans are vulnerable, the ability to rise against the disease becomes the message in the poem. He notes: "...our families are confined like concentration camps/ Cartoons have replaced English Premier

Leagues/Our neighbours are no longer strangers/Daddy is no longer uncle anymore..." (Martin 36). The lines above highlight the positivity of the current situation. It represents the ease with which people are living with the pandemic. Families previously separated stay together, fathers have more time with their children, next-door neighbours can converse freely, and children who were ever in school are at home with their parents. In line six of the poem, the persona notes: "Adam and Eve are friends again" (Martin 36). The biblical allusion symbolizes the relationship between husband and wife. This shows that most couples reconciled during the time of the Coronavirus.

The persona also portrays Coronavirus disease as a disruptor of people's norms. This vulnerability is exemplified by the in which the social, political, and economic models were devastated. This is a strong indication that COVID-19 caused suffering among the people. The persona notes: "Pier A2, looks lifeless on a cemetery road/Buganda pub is now as lonely as a widow/The Open Mic is closed like a bottle of beer"...(Martin 36). "Pier A2" is a place of entertainment in Uganda. It is where revellers meet to quench their alcoholic thirst. It is the same as Buganda Pub, where people meet to engage in drinking sprees. The use of simile in the two lines above reflects the atmosphere that the pandemic has created. Places of entertainment had to be closed, and they are compared to the silence experienced in cemeteries. Deserted and closed, this affects the owners who depend on such places for income. "The pub lonely as a widow" articulates the somber mood, thus reflecting on the vulnerability experienced due to the pandemic. This vulnerability causes uneasiness among people that depend on such places to survive.

The persona highlights the effects of COVID-19 in the remaining lines in the poem by employing a visual strategy. The images that represent the visibility of the current situation. The persona notes that Cuk Cereleno market is empty "as a barren womb" The image here shows the absence of a

source of income for those that work in the market. The comparison to a woman that cannot give birth is a negative image that reflects on the current tragedy of the pandemic. The persona thus depicts a state of despair among market people. According to Andariya online newspaper, feeding and taking care of families was one of the challenging times during lockdown (Ojok). In Gulu District (Uganda), women traders suffered as a result of Coronavirus restrictions imposed by the government of Uganda (Ojok). The struggle to cope with life during lockdown is thus reflected in the poem.

The poem ends in positivity thus giving hope to humanity. Reference is made to Uganda's history especially in regards to difficulties faced. Ebola outbreak in Uganda in 2000 especially at Gulu, a district neighbouring South Sudan is highlighted by the persona. The pandemic was managed due to the preventive measures that were employed at that time. According to Okware and Omaswa Ebola infection is principally transmitted by close contact with body fluids from Ebola cases. Therefore a system for isolation and barrier nursing, contact tracing and safe burial of the deceased was established to minimize further spreading of the infection (1070). The persona also articulates the confidence of “Mapinduzi” in dealing with dictatorial regimes, the name “Mapenduzi”, an English word for overthrow refers to Museveni of Uganda, who overthrew Milton Obote’s regime. That confidence is the one that is needed in “overthrowing” COVID-19. The persona notes:

Our faith lies in our history of Ebola in the year 2000/ Our hope lies in Odama’s prayer at the cathedral/ Our confidence lies in Mapenduzi and his Leadership/ Our courage and resilience is from LRA times/ Our strength is from within ourselves. (Martin 37)

The persona thus highlights the need of people to rise and be hopeful despite the challenges that Coronavirus brings among the people. Though the pandemic affects the lives of people thus

making them vulnerable, the persona encourages one to employ their human abilities and call for confidence, hope, faith, resilience, courage to deal with the COVID-19.

“Salvage the Mortal Beings” by Bonface Isaboke, is a poem that recounts the persona’s suffering as a result of COVID-19. The Coronavirus disease destructive nature recurs throughout the poem. The poet, through the persona, narrates the devastation it has caused to him. He laments the lack of food for his children and himself. He is resigned to his fate. The imagery of death is evoked in stanza one. Directly as a fate that he is ready to embrace and secondly because of the numerous “dead bodies” that he counts. The persona laments: “I may sure die today, let it be/ Hunger is sipping my only tummy/ My children on either arm, no food/ Dawn to dusk, I count the dead and dying” (Nyamweya 148). The persona’s somber mood reflects on the dis-ease caused by Coronavirus.

The persona also recounts the effects of the pandemic. He moans of “joblessness” and death of his dear wife. He insinuates Coronavirus disease to be the cause of her death. He lost his job because of the quarantine he underwent. The signs and symptoms of Coronavirus disease become evident in stanza two. He notes: ...”lost my job because of quarantine and lockdown/sipping air like porridge, copiously sweating/Politely fearful, I may sure die today” (Nyamweya 148). The persona is surrounded by neighbours who are also infected. The “coughs” and “sneezes” are the sounds that punctuate his social relations. The poem thus exposes the effects of COVID-19. The people are vulnerable to the infection. This highlights the discomfort that is experienced when one gets infected. Nyamweya thus portrays a state of mental breakdown of a person that got Coronavirus. This exemplifies my argument of disease causing uneasiness, suffering and destruction.

Calvin Adwar’s poem “Six Feet Apart or Six Feet Under?” explores life before and after COVID-19. The change experienced as a result of the pandemic is even reflected in the title of the poem.

The poem challenges social interaction of people by giving an alternative. That is to stay together to perish or to stay apart to avoid death. “Six Feet Under” denotes death. The poem thus represents the complexities experienced during the times of the pandemic. Complexities in this regard refers to the act of leaving the normal and embracing new way of operating during the pandemic. This is denoted in the first stanza where the persona notes: “...love parts the hearts albeit for a while/Have you coughed in your partner’s torso?/No apology is humble enough for pardon./Two incidents of a common cause/...The virus that is love ultimately trembles” (Adwar 167). The persona explores the effect of Coronavirus among couples. A slight “cough” warrants war among the two lovers. The phrase “virus that is love” is used to denote the separation of lovers. Due to the pandemic, closeness of persons has to be avoided. The trembling is because of the fear of getting infected. This supports my argument of a disease causing dis-ease i.e. discomfort, anxiety, fear among people.

In stanza three, the persona also exemplifies how COVID-19 affects social interaction. He notes: “If stepping away will seem antisocial, pardon! / Counsel spells desperate times, / Desperate measures six feet part, though/ Intimacy has never wielded a lethal hand. / Death has never known a kind smile;/ Again, the love birds must choose, / Six feet apart or six feet under!” (Adwar 168). The poet, through the persona, is in agreement with government imposed restrictions. For one to be safe, observing social distance is important. This change of isolation and avoiding contact with people seems to be the best solution to dealing with pandemics. It is the reason that the poet chooses the title with the intention of advising the reader of the choice they have in dealing with the pandemic even though it will be about sacrificing the closeness of people important to us. This is evident in the lines “Intimacy has never wielded the lethal hand/ Death has never known a kind

smile” the two lines thus support the poet's message in the poem. Of sacrificing our closeness to the people we love so that we can avoid death.

In Charles Okumu's poem “Corona Virus”, the persona personalizes COVID-19 and laments about the change it has brought to humanity. In stanza one, the persona expounds on the change that man has gone through because of the pandemic. The concept of masking plays out in the stanza. Masking in the poem is seen as a way of robbing human beings their identity. The images of animals and beasts shows the vulnerability that the virus has caused to the people. The persona laments: “Coronavirus, you have turned Man into beast/ We have become race horses, muzzled-masked/ we have become ploughing-oxen, masked/...What are we if not beasts? (Okumu 189). The poet through the persona addresses Coronavirus disease. The addressing of an abstract and unseen disease is called apostrophe. The use of apostrophe in the poem allows the persona to bring life to the abstract so that he can express his emotions directly to the non-existent person.

Stanza two of the poem reflects the change in social relations. The pandemic has broken the closeness of family members. People cannot interact as before because of the virus. Once close, they are vulnerable. The persona laments about this in the poem. He notes: “Corona Virus, you have broken the age old/ Family bond, family oneness, no hugs, no cuddles/...one must stay socially distant” (Okumu 189). According to Cohen, Sherrod and Clark, social interaction is crucial for psychological and physical well-being. Their research also shows that human interaction help reduce depression and low esteem (963). The persona thus decries about the isolation that COVID-19 cause to families. He explains: “...The gap deprives our children from our love./ The gap deprives the couple's loving shared-warmth./ The gap loosens the bond of friendship” (Okumu 189). The gap as used in the three lines implies of the social distancing. The repetition of the phrase the gap in the poem shows the usage of anaphora. This logical emphasis

of the phrase outlines the discomfort that Coronavirus disease causes among people. The persona rebukes the pandemic and asks it to “leave”. This authoritative attitude is symbolic of the way in which pandemics should be handled. Authority and good leadership from all concerned parties.

Christopher Okemwa, who is the editor of the anthology: *Musings during a Time of the Pandemic: A World Anthology of Poems on COVID-19*, also contributes as a poet in a way of reflecting about the Coronavirus disease. His poem “The War has Just Began” is about the war between human beings and an “invisible” enemy. Fighting an invisible disease is a challenge. Coronavirus is difficult to deal with. This is evident of the many “weapons” that the persona outlines to use. The “weapons” represent the government imposed restrictions that one has to use in order to avoid getting infected. The persona notes:

The war between human an invisible/devil/has just/Began/Put on/ your visor, hand gloves/
face mask/ and overall/ carry a super spray/ of sanitizer/ Carry your bubble/ of soap/...hide
the octogenarians/ under the bed/...let the battle commence. (Okemwa 211)

The poem is free verse, for it lacks a metrical pattern. The freedom to structure the words in the poem reflects the poem's message. One can be free to choose any method of dealing with Coronavirus disease. I have noted that the persona outlines many ways of dealing with the "invisible enemy"; it is not fixed. Back to the poem's form, I describe it as a short-line, enjambed and visual poem. Some lines have only one word, and the others range from three to five words. For example, line two and four are composed of the words: "devil" and "infants." Enjambment runs throughout the one-stanza poem. The poem's unpunctuated single lines are cut by line divisions between phrases. This is exemplified as follows: " Carry your bubble/ of soap/...hide the octogenarians/ under the bed/" The slashes denote the divisions. The irregularity of the poem

conveys a lack of order and organization. It reflects the message of the poem, that of "a battle scene." Fighting COVID-19, a disease that little is known about, a disease that governments did not know how to deal with, is thus reflected in the structuring of the poem. The unclear way of dealing with the pandemic is evident when the persona outlines many ways of fighting the Coronavirus disease.

Denis Waswa Barasa's poem "Masks" is a persona's reflection of masking as a strategy of fighting with COVID-19. The persona highlights the vulnerability of getting infected. There is a subtle sense of despair that the persona is feeling. Although the poem is read in an attempt to document the effects of Coronavirus, the speaker leaves the reader with hope if only masking is observed during the pandemic. Masking thus becomes important in keeping the disease at bay.

In reflecting on the pandemic, the persona highlights the devastation it has caused to families. The persona presents us with an image of someone in quarantine. As a preventive measure, any person infected or one that shows signs of an infection of COVID-19, is supposed to be in quarantine. The description of the person in isolation exemplifies one that is suffering silently. Lack of clear visibility of the individual symbolizes the uncertainty and the fear of the unknown since Coronavirus at the time was difficult to treat. The persona notes: "A faint glimmer, a distant din/ A silhouette seen from my safety/ Is all, all the form I find of you" (Barasa 250). "Silhouette" is used specifically to represent a metaphor of obscurity. This is also evident in stanza two line two. The persona notes: "Your radiance rendered dark" (Barasa 250). Being a poem written during the pandemic, the persona highlights the invisibility of the disease. People have to be in quarantine to prevent contact with other persons. The alliteration of the first and second lines of the poems: "distant" and "din", "silhouette" and "seen" highlights the contrast experienced between the persona and the infected person. It also draws attention to the invisibility surrounding COVID-19.

As I mentioned earlier in my analysis of “masks”, the hope that is left is in masking. Though it is preventive in nature i.e. to avoid getting into contact with the Coronavirus, the persona portrays how wearing masks hides our identity and expressions. “Now we wear masks/We hide our lip-glossed lips/ Hide our nauseated nostrils/We are wearing masks/ Hiding ourselves! (Barasa 250). The use of the word “hiding” implies that masks protect people from inhaling traces of the virus. Though they are uncomfortable to people when worn, they protect against the disease.

A sign of hope is visible in the last stanza of the poem. The persona yearns for a new dawn where human expressions of happiness will be visible, people being at ease without any disease around them. The persona notes: “A smile unfiltered/ A person free of the virus, and the vice/ Is one that I seek and see/ Post-mask” (Barasa 250). The persona is optimistic of a future without the pandemic. He implies that COVID-19 will end but only if humans observe the restrictions imposed on them. Isolation/quarantine and wearing masks are cognizant of the fight against the pandemic.

Evans Gesura’s “Musings during a Time of Pandemic” poem is the anthology's title. It is used as a whole to represent poems written during the Coronavirus pandemic. The COVID-19 outbreak created an avenue for poets to reflect on the disease. The poets documented the beliefs and attitudes on Coronavirus, thus giving one important insight which will help a reader understand the pandemic. The poem's title is significant because it reflects the thoughts of poets about the global pandemic. The poems are a tool of inquiry about the nature and the effects of COVID-19 among people and different nationalities.

Gesura, through the persona, reflects on the pandemic that has brought devastation to humanity. In an effort to understand the Coronavirus, the persona tries to engage his mind in order to understand the pandemic. The poetic diction though the use of words such as “doomed fears”, “breed lethargy” and “angel of pandemic” insinuates a sense of hopelessness. Lack of clarity of

the pandemic is evident in the poem when the persona sees the pandemic as “a red armoured angel on a misty chariot” (Gesura 329). The word “misty” portrays a sense of invisibility, the “enemy” is invisible yet causes havoc and destruction. In the first stanza, the persona uses biblical allusions to depict the destruction and loss of life caused by Coronavirus. He laments: “Passing over cities, few with a mark a lamb’s blood/ To tell it to pass-over, while we buckle belts/ To begin an exodus to a COVID-Free Canaan!” (Gesura 329). The lines above depicts the biblical story of the “angel of death” who killed households that did not have blood smeared on their doors. The analogy of this in the poem is important. The persona notes that few houses have “a mark of the lamb’s blood” ; it denotes that “the angel of the pandemic” which signifies COVID-19, brought destruction and death to many people and nations.

The persona also highlights dis-ease in the time of the pandemic. COVID-19 as a disease not only affects the physical state of a persona but also the emotional state of an individual. The persona laments” I glance away from the greying cloud of thought-/ Far from that would make my eye flow with tears” (Gesura 329). “The greying cloud of thought” is symbolic of the negative emotions that are a burden and causes confusion to one's state of mind.

The persona uses images of destruction in describing the pandemic. For instance, phrases like “Dreadful horse of apocalypse”, “clouds breathing a fire of unquenchable from its iron nostrils...” symbolizes the destructive nature of Coronavirus. The “fire” imagery that denotes destruction. In the poem, “fire” is used in its excessive nature when the persona says “unquenchable”. Symbolically, it implies Coronavirus’s total annihilation. These images are contrasted with the choice of words used in stanza three. There is a shift from negative thoughts about the COVID-19 to a positive historical reference to another pandemic. The persona with a sign of rebirth and renewed hope alludes to tales of “Decameron”. The tales are known to capture the themes of love,

fortune, and generosity during the time of plague, specifically, the outbreak of Black Death (epidemic of bubonic plague) in fourteenth century. Hope during a pandemic in reference to Boccaccio's tales, is seen at how the characters would embrace positive mentality as a way of dealing with the plague.

The persona reverts to a sense of uncertainty and fear in stanza four of the poem. The poet, through the persona, does it by employing literary allusion. Reference is made to Poe's lyrical tale: The Masque of the Red Death. Red death was a disease in which people who were infected suffered death. It is believed that Poe lost his family members due to the disease. The persona notes that he is "hunted as Prince Prospero" Prince Prospero is a character in The Masque of the Red Death. The persona referring to himself as Prospero implies that despite his stature in society if doing anything to prevent COVID-19, all will be in vain. The coronavirus knows no boundary, race, class, or age. It consumes those in its path. The persona is thus hunted by the possibility of contracting the dreaded disease. This explains the dis-ease that the persona insinuates in the poem. The fear of falling victim to the pandemic. This is evident in the poem. The persona laments, "...I am brought to this languid silence/ That is the one thought I should not share/ As the red angel shears though deep seclusions/ Of Covid silenced secure neighbourhoods" (Gesura 330). The persona here highlights the rapid spread of the pandemic and its effects, leaving people vulnerable.

3.5 COVID-19 Contestations

The Coronavirus outbreak in 2020 spurred confusion among scientists who advanced different theories to try and explain the COVID-19 most of which are controversial. There was a lot of conspiracy regarding the pandemic. According to Antonio Guterres, the secretary General for United Nations, about the Coronavirus, he says "we are also seeing another epidemic itself- a

dangerous epidemic of misinformation” (United Nations Pakistan 0:09/1:52). The misinformation that Guterres refers to include, viral circulation of fake news, conflicting views on the pandemic, contradictory message from scientists and leaders and propaganda. COVID-19 fallacy was expected in the initial stages of its outbreak. According to Walker, “outbreak of a pandemic ignites unfounded rumours, innuendo and misinformation” (43). The arguments opined by Walker and Guterres help cement my view of the poem “What is Overwhelming is not Just the Deaths” by Freddy Macha. In his poem, through the persona, it is evident that people had many different views about COVID-19. The persona exemplifies these variations of thought in the poem. The poem documents these contests in an interesting but critical way.

The persona employs the use of imagery in the first line of the poem. “Bird wafting above twigs/ and trunks.../ If not a hawk it is a sparrow; or another airborne creature” (Macha 346). This sets the mood of the poem, the unassertive, skeptical and mistrustful thoughts about the type of the bird ignites the poem’s central tension. This uncertain attitude is weaved throughout the poem. The persona notes: “...virus was created-like an auction man’s mallet- to stamp our brains and psyches our/ skin pores/ So now imagine the Rastaman and Auction man wrestling and wrangling and rolling and/ arguing/ Imagine that/ Row/ As/... Horizon cheers their duel” (Macha 346).

The images of war in “Rastaman and Auction man” denote the battle with controversies surrounding the pandemic. One notes of the widespread unreasonableness concerning the Coronavirus disease. The pandemic debate is also from line twenty of the poem. The persona notes: “...claiming that the virus came/ From those masts and labs obeying government orders, conspired by hearsay and true-say/ and social media fake news...Everyone has an opinion of Coronavirus” (Macha 346). The public understanding of the pandemic was skewed and biased. This confusion

and uncertainty of the disease is seen as the main contributor to the high cases of infection and death because people mythicized the pandemic.

The poem's structure is essential in terms of cementing the thematic concerns. The poem's lines are a mixture of short words of about one word to about eighteen words per line. This represents the chaos and disorder that the poet wants the reader to see. The irregularity of speed and rhythm mirrors the incongruities and frustrations of COVID-19 effects among people. The poem reflects a failed attempt to make sense of the pandemic. The short lines portray a sense of nothingness punctuated by the varying opinions about the disease. The use of short lines such as: "THIS," "Row," and "As" depicts a sense of incompleteness in understanding the pandemic. Macha's poem thus exemplifies the infordemic worse than the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Imali Abala in "COVID-19, an Invisible Tomahawk", the persona reacts to the Coronavirus pandemic outbreak. The poet through the persona highlights the turn of events since its official confirmation. The poem's message is grounded on observing factual and scientific proven guidelines that help in fighting the disease. The persona notes that she did not fall into the fallacy of misinformation, especially from politicians about the pandemic. She remarks: "It wasn't to those with deep pockets to whom I turned/ Or Politicians, trumpeters of deceit, to whom I looked/ or holy folks who put faith before science to whom I listened" (Abala 441). The persona trusted information from those that gave "caution", "anchormen and women", "white garbed angels masked in rubber clothing". For the persona, trusting information from doctors and news reporters was the only way for her to trust news concerning the pandemic.

The poet through the persona remarks that she could only help by writing a verse to appreciate the frontline workers. Despite the renewal of hope, the persona is anxious of the spread of the

pandemic. She remarks: “Fear and anxiety raid and shroud my heart, unable to set foot a door!/
The sun’s warming glow is hardly enough to uplift my fledgling sprit/ Against this invisible
tomahawk missile that doesn’t discriminate” (Abala 441). Coronavirus is present at the time the
poet writes the poem. People are still vulnerable. The use of the military imagery of “tomahawk
missile” represents the destructive nature of the pandemic. It wipes everything along its path. This
is evident when the persona notes that “it doesn’t discriminate/ Paupers from the rich, kings from
queen; all alike are its easy target”.

The persona’s hope is based on science. A new dawn is only possible when scientists will be able
to come up with a vaccine to help in the war against the Coronavirus Pandemic. “Today, as we
look to science, I remain hopeful/ That our angels will these darkened hours weather with grace”
(Abala 441). Human abilities against COVID-19 menace are the hope that the persona purports to
reflect in the poem. Hope to re-adapt in the midst of the pandemic, hope that the frontline workers
will be able to overcome the “darkened hours with grace”.

The speaker transitions between the negativities to possibilities, appreciation and love by showing
gratitude as a result of “selflessness” of those people that care for the others. The persona refers to
health personnel and service providers during the time of the pandemic who have braved the
pandemic to assist other persons. The persona’s awareness about the pandemic and its devastation
is important in spreading that awareness to the readers of the poem. Despite the frustrations and
the change that the pandemic has caused, the poet through the persona reflects on the positive ways
that people can help in fighting a disease. Though the poem is a reaction to the pandemic, it helps
in archiving the events about the Coronavirus and hero(rising) those that have helped in keeping
the pandemic at bay.

Jackline Lidubwi's poem "Act of Kindness" highlights the consequences of Coronavirus disease. Despite the negative impacts, the poem provides solutions that will help amidst the pandemic. In the poem, the persona reflects the demerits that people experience during the pandemic. The persona sees "lonely roads" this is because of stay at home guidelines, cessation of movement or insinuates that it might be time for the curfew. It is evident that the change as result of biological devastation has shifted people's way of life. Social interactions are no longer allowed. The pandemic is like an apocalypse. The mood is somber. Children's laughter" is muted. The persona notes: "The once lively fields/ Are now green en{sic} grim" (Lidubwi 467).

Evidence of dis-ease is denoted in the manner at which the persona highlights the trauma that causes close relations to crumple. The persona notes: "We eye one another/ With Covid suspicion, / but my lover/ Has gone cold/ Has gone mute" (Lidubwi 467). When human interactions are interfered with, it leads to traumatic experiences. This results in discomfort and stressful situations. In the second stanza of the poem, the persona highlights instances of despair and depressing situations.

The fragility of human interaction is depicted in the poem. Women sit in silence, feeling of uneasiness, people are scared and afraid of another. Feelings of isolation, dread, loneliness, and insecurity are highlighted in the poem. The speaker notes:"...Faces of desperation/anger and agony/ They find no clients,/Not any customers./None trusts mama fua/ Nor Mama mboga/ Nor Mama Kiosk/ The mothers look suspicious..." (Lidubwi 467). People are doubtful of one another. They are afraid of coming into contact with someone infected. Since it is not possible to know one as the carrier of the virus, they reasonably assume everyone to be infected. The use of local dialect is evident in the poem. Mama is a word that denotes mother, "mboga" and "fua", refers to those

mothers that sell vegetables and those that help in laundry respectively. This spices the poem's locality. It exemplifies how the disease has penetrated into people's lives.

The persona arrives at an optimistic conclusion. The persona submits that through "act of kindness" to people, many shall heal from the effects of Coronavirus disease. The persona notes: "I call for kindness/ Just a little kindness/ Some kindred humility/ For you to touch a soul" (Lidubwi 468). It is important to note that kindness is not only an individual's obligation, but also by the government. The speaker adds: "Relax those taxes/ Bless your employees,/ Your help, your guard,/...For us to survive/ Touch a life each day/ Do that single act/ Of kindness...Together we'll concur/ Covid-19" (Lidubwi 467). Government intervention is crucial in dealing with COVID-19 challenges. Use of short lines and punctuation helps create harmony in the poem. The persona notes: "I see unity/ I see hope/..." (Lidubwi 468). Dashes help reduce the tempo of the poem. "Long unmasked faces-/... Nor Mama Kiosk-/The mothers look-" (Lidubwi 467). These poetic strategies are crucial in advancing the poem's message.

John Ndavula's poem "Breaking Loose" documents the effect of COVID-19 on couples. The persona laments about the lockdown and cessation of movement that separated him and the wife for months. He notes: "I took a bus down route 29/ It has been almost a year since I saw my betrothed last;/ The pandemic had torn the country in the middle/ She was on one divide and I on the other,/ We couldn't cross the barriers" (Ndavula 503). It is apparent that restriction of movement into and out of some areas was barred. Since the poet is a Kenyan, it is clear the poem highlights the implications of government imposed strict restrictions to help curb the spread of Coronavirus. Some of these restrictions included: Cessation of movement in and out of Nairobi for a period of twenty one days with effect from 1900 hours on Monday 6th April 2020 (Republic of Kenya issue No 41).

The persona is traveling to meet his wife. This is around the period when there is a phased reopening from the COVID-19 lockdown. Evidently, in the poem, the deserted streets and closed shops illustrate the desolation and emptiness that people experience. The persona notes: “The bus shoved us back and forth/ On the bumpy road,/ All around me I saw closed shops and abandoned buildings” (Ndavula 503). The abandoned and isolated buildings depict lack of liveliness and human activity because of the fear of Coronavirus. The persona highlights the negative effects of the pandemic among people. He notes that his wife had lost her job. The result is confirmed through the use of second person narration highlighted by the message in the persona’s mobile. It reads: “Get off the bus, walk down the street,/ Turn to the first high-rise building...read her sms,” (Ndavula 503). I would argue that the pandemic made life unbearable for the persona’s wife and that she had to move into an affordable house. The unsanitary surroundings depict a sense of suffering that the persona’s wife experiences. The persona notes: “Just an old potholed road/ With streams of raw sewage crisscrossing it/ Mixing with uncollected garbage,/ I soiled my best trousers/ In the unlit street where slime reigned” (Ndavula 503). The images of waste depict the degradation of the environment. Limited access to modern facilities highlights the ills that human beings in the slums go through. This economically represents a discrepancy that underprivileged persons and unemployed went through during Coronavirus pandemic. This highlights the dis-ease that people face. Apart from the devastation of COVID-19, the people are depicted to be uneasy with the calamitous state of their environment. The persona notes: “Hordes of people with masks hobbled past/ Like men drenched by the rain/ A subdued, scared nation” (Ndavula 503). The imagery portrayed in the above lines symbolize the suffering that many people face due to the adverse effects of Coronavirus. The direct comparison of these people walking and the visual of persons “drenched in rain” denote the hardships that are beyond their control. The persona

interjects by giving a commentary of their fear when he notes: “a scared nation” This supports my argument in this study of the uneasiness that Coronavirus causes. The unsanitary conditions of the place are punctuated by images of violence and brutality. The persona reveals disturbing images that make the place inhabitable by humans. The persona notes:

I saw a police patrolling in a distance/
Suddenly there was a burst of gunfire/
Screams issued from the dark alleys/
...Its walls were riddled with bullets/
Inside, it was pitch dark/
...I groped in the dark grasping murky walls,
Slimy stinking water from the washrooms,
Assembled annoyingly on the stairway. (Ndavula 503)

Despite the vulnerabilities experienced, there is a sign of hope towards the end of the poem. The poor state of the environment punctuated by the isolation of the persona’s wife, unhygienic environment and violence around the area and COVID-19 devastations, human compassion is the only hope left. The persona notes that: “I saw a flicker of candlelight/
From a wide crack in the door/
I pushed and the sight of her/
Promptly brightened the dark room/
She hugged me and wept and wept.../
I whispered, amid the crack of gunfire,
Our love has conquered the pandemic, and bullets” (Ndavula 504). The above stanza highlights the unity in which human beings should embrace to fight with societal illnesses. That our human ability to cooperate with one another is crucial in surviving hard times.

3.6 The Dis(ease) of Protective Confinement

COVID-19 not only affected grown-ups but also young children. Guidelines to help people face the hard times of the Pandemic are essential. In this subsection, I shall examine how one poet employs a preventive measure that I refer to as protective confinement as a strategy of facing and dealing with Coronavirus.

Josephat Mauti's poem "Corona" highlights the challenges that children face amidst the pandemic. Some restrictions rob children of their social interactions and playtime. The persona, who happens to be a young child, is curious with the sudden turn of events. The curious nature helps portray the negative effects of the pandemic on the economic status of the parent and social life of the child. Through inquiry, the child persona, naively, questions the scarcity of meat in her meal. This highlights the tough times caused by the pandemic and thus the parent opts to ration food. The child persona does not understand as to why she has to be denied the basic commodities she is used to in her life. The child notes: "I let my little fingers slide inside,/ Searching desperately,/ Beneath the slimy syrup,/ Nothing!/ I raised my terrified face,/ 'Papa, but there is no meat in my soup!'/ 'Corona my child, you understand?'/ I did not" (Mauti 512). The lines above highlight the child's innocence. Ironically, she does not comprehend the intensity of the disease and the realities of the pandemic, it is absurd for her to be told that everything is because of the COVID-19.

The rhetorical questions in the poem highlights uncertainty. The ambiguous responses by the father leaves the child in a state of hopelessness and misunderstanding. The child's persona repetitively responds "I did not" to imply the difficulty of the situation. It is beyond her comprehension. This uneasiness is further exemplified in the second and third stanza. The child's desire to play outside is cut short when the father "roars" authoritatively that she should "stay inside". The strict nature of the parent is crucial in preventing possible infections and thus the child has to be confined inside the house as a safety mechanism. Coronavirus is portrayed as a destroyer of children's social interaction. The choice of the child persona in relation to disease and dis-ease is important in this poem. The child persona symbolizes the innocence and naivety in which children look at tragedies that face humanity. The child persona's naivety in understanding the negative effect of a pandemic are underscored in the poem. For the child is used to accessing and getting what they desire. This

causes a parent to suffer the consequences of not providing for the child thus adding more traumatizing and depressing thoughts on themselves. In my view, this explains the uneasiness caused by the pandemic.

3.7 Coping with the Pandemic

My analysis in this subsection briefly sketches the idea of living and coping with the pandemic. I argue the pain and hardships of COVID-19 should not restrict one to being confined in one place for fear of getting infected. Observation of guidelines that help in minimizing the chances of the disease is vital in coping with the Coronavirus. I will examine poems with this thread of thematic exposition in addition to literary strategies brought forth in the selected poetry writings. Most importantly, I examine how the poems navigate the Coronavirus crisis as a guide in developing strategies to sail amidst a pandemic.

In “The Fire”, Joseph Muleka explores the devastation of COVID-19. Through the use of fire imagery, he highlights the negative effects of the pandemic. Fire is used to symbolize destruction and pain in the poem. The persona notes: “It started like a cry from outer planet, unimaginable/ At best an echo from distant yonder, inaccessible/ Speaking Covid-19, a dialect unknown” (Muleka 514). The first line of the poem denotes the uncertainty and confusion regarding the pandemic. The persona sees it as a disease from “outer planet” implying that it was not known before. This makes Coronavirus disease more destructive because of its invisibility.

The persona portrays the destructive nature of the pandemic by how it spreads. He notes: “Then like fire that burns/ Creeping beyond the fence of a homestead/ To burn the neighbour’s property yonder,/ The fire invisible, spread” (Muleka 514). The imagery of invisibility highlights the obscurity associated with the pandemic. It becomes more deadly since it spreads without being

seen. The persona's use of "neighbour property" imagery symbolizes the spread of the virus from one country to another. The swift spread of the virus causes confusion among people. The person remarks: "...Whose first drop draws panic/ Causing items aired out quickly withdrawn/ And into the shelter all hastily retreating" (Muleka 514). The fear of the dreadful disease makes people isolate and observe social distancing in order to minimize the chance of getting infected.

The persona's only hope is to embrace and live with the pandemic. He notes that if one is to be isolated for long, hunger would be his end. He notes: "...Force me back into the shelter that I must exit/ If I have to exist" (Muleka 514). The persona's only hope is to observe existing guidelines. Washing of hands, wearing of face masks and observing social distance are some of the ways that the persona embraces in order to cope with the pandemic. The persona addresses COVID-19 directly. This poetic strategy is called apostrophe. It is effective in ensuring the poet through the persona is able to share innermost ideas about the Coronavirus implications. This is evident in the last two stanzas: "Corona though you spared me/ You took away what belonged to me/ But you will not break me/ For you wrongly came to me//I will mask my face from you..." Muleka 515.

Sarah Acham in "A Smiling World Gone" highlights the horror of a pandemic that darkens the simplest of human expression. The one-stanza poem is laden with negative images that depict the unhappiness engulfed as a result of the pandemic. The persona notes: "Covid/Gives me a sad news-feed/ A nerve aching Saturday/Painful eyes on a stare/ A throat swallowing blind wishes/At the sight of number of victims" (Acham 876). The sad reality of life is punctuated as a result of the pandemic. High rates of infection insinuates calamity.

The persona yearns for hope amidst the pandemic. Disillusionment and despair traumatizes the persona. This is evident in line 9 through line fourteen. "Healers have returned to dust/ Swords have gone blunt/ Shields don't shield enough/Tears have soaked the ground/ The world is a globe

of panic and pain” (Acham 876). Coronavirus disease causes dis-ease among individuals. Uneasiness in terms of confusion, despair, devastation and unhappiness as portrayed through the negative poetic diction. “Tears”, “pain”, “broken soul”, “monster”, “plague”, “cry” are some of the choice of words the poet uses to denote hopelessness and vulnerability experienced as a result of COVID-19.

Children's innocence regarding COVID-19 is highlighted in Sharmila Jobanputra’s poem “My Baby”. The persona, who is a mother, portrays the consequence of the Coronavirus pandemic amongst her family. In the first stanza, the persona notes: “My baby/ Wakes up wanting to go to nursery/ To see her friends and play/ I don’t put on her uniform/ She wipes her tears and starts to play” (Jobanputra 930). Schools were closed at the time Coronavirus was officially confirmed. The child's innocence is reflected in the poem since she is young and does not understand the implication of the pandemic. For her, going to school to socialize with other pupils is her priority. Once this is not realized, she becomes emotional. Tears denote the child’s unhappy state. It exemplifies uneasiness as there is an urgency to attend school.

In the second stanza, the persona depicts the social distancing in terms of associating with close relations and friends. There is an element of positivity in terms of bringing families together. Despite the restrictions, the persona and her friends use zoom to socialize. The persona notes:” We zoom with friends at their homes/ We zoom with friends at their homes/We see parents keep them busy with activities and fun/ Nature walks and picking flowers has become fun” (Jobanputra 930). Interesting, despite COVID-19 havoc amongst humanity, the persona embraces positivity as a strategy of coping with the pandemic. Technology becomes an important tool for human interaction. Parents are able to come up with different activities to aid in children learning. Solution

to isolation is to engage in nature walks. This poem thus becomes a guide for readers in embracing positive ways of dealing with pandemic.

Stay at home rule of engagement, which to many was viewed contemptuously, becomes a happy occasion for the persona's son. The son is enjoying every moment. He can still learn while at home via distance learning, and does not have to change clothes to attend the online sessions. The ease at which he conducts himself plays out in the stanza. The persona notes: "My son/ Distance learning, oh what fun!/ Wakes up in pyjamas/ Stays in them all-day/ Meals in the room/Mum cleaning up" (Jobanputra 930). The speaker has fun while at home, there is entertainment, playing with the family and playing video games to "kill" time. The stylistic omission of punctuation in the poem which is important in depicting the thematic concerns in the poem. The absence of punctuation thus signals the continuation of enjambed lines. This is a characteristic of poems that employ a stream of consciousness. It helps portray clarity in poem.

Wafula Khisa in "Something Bigger than Us" through the persona shows empathy towards people affected by Coronavirus pandemic. The persona gives reference to persons locked in a foreign country during the time of a crisis. Uneasiness felt by close relations of such people is traumatic and dreadful. The persona notes: "I thought the saddest person then/ Is a parent whose child is locked down/ In a hostel somewhere in Wuhan or Italy..." (Khisa1034). Wuhan is where the first case of Coronavirus was detected. According to Dorrucchi Maria and Giada Minelli, Italy was heavily affected by the Coronavirus pandemic with high mortality rates. In the year 2020 alone, more than 100,526 deaths were recorded in Italy (927). Looking at these numbers, it is apparent that the persona emotive as a result of the devastation and uneasiness that the pandemic causes.

The persona reverts back to the Kenyan situation regarding the pandemic. Schools are closed down. Teachers use radio to teach, working from home becomes a new norm, and places of entertainment are closed also. This is in line with government guidelines to keep the pandemic at bay. Social distancing becomes a weapon to fight Coronavirus.

The persona highlights negativities associated with the pandemic through the use of images that depict hopelessness and despair. The persona laments “there is no food”, “We are imprisoned in dingy rooms”. Life during the pandemic is exemplified to be difficult and undesirable. Food is scarce. People are confined in small spaces. The persona notes how the pandemic is “deadly”. Its havoc and devastation explains why the poet uses the title “Something Bigger than Us” to imply its superior nature in terms of consequences it has caused globally.

3.8 Conclusion

The poems analyzed portray COVID-19 into two dimensions. There are poets that paint Coronavirus as a problem to the stability and peace of people. This implies that the biological crisis brings devastation to humanity. Others see the pandemic as a way to resiliently fight the ills that face human beings. I argue that Coronavirus disease reveals a level of vulnerabilities among societies. Some poets represent their poems as a way of looking beyond the hardships during a pandemic and embracing the practices of reparation. There is a message of resilience and hope amidst the pandemic. Survival becomes necessary. As a way of healing, some poems paint an image of recuperation of humankind during the period of COVID-19.

The discussion in this chapter has also exemplified that, in their vulnerabilities, human beings reinvent their abilities in a positive way. In some poems, it is evident that the poets reflect on the concept of disease. Disease as a biological burden that affects social-economic structures. The reality of Coronavirus causing deaths because of the destruction of one's immune system. The societal structures in this case once affected by the pandemic cause uneasiness, fear and anxiety. The pandemic affects people indirectly and directly due to unemployment, violence, unhygienic practices, congestion and poverty.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

This study sought to evaluate the representation of disease and dis-ease in the contemporary East African Poetry. This study was reckoned by the fact that the sudden outbreak of coronavirus disease quickly turned into a wildfire and in a span of days was pronounced to be a pandemic worldwide. Also, the study was motivated by the fact that globally, many people turned to writing poetry to express the presence, and their personal experiences with Coronavirus.

The study focused itself on three anthologies which are: *Soaring above the Pandemic: Poetic Echoes from East Africa*, *Millennial Voices East African Poetry*, and *Musings during a time of Pandemic*. From the anthology, *Millennial Voices East African Poetry*, the study identified five poems, in *Soaring above the Pandemic*, the study pitched fourteen poems and in *Musings during a time of Pandemic*, seventeen poems were selected.

The study was to achieve the following two objectives, one, to investigate the concept of dis-ease in the selected East African poems written in the years 2020 and 2021, and secondly, to interrogate the language strategies used to present dis-ease in COVID 19 poems from East African region.

This study was guided by the following two theories. One, the theory of stylistics, and the sociological literary theories. The theory of stylistics was very useful in interrogating the language strategies that have been used to present the COVID 19 disease. This theory argues that to understand a text, one should analyse its linguistic structure. It theory was useful in the analysis of the selected poems. The sociological literary theory was used to investigate the dis-ease among the people in society as a response to COVID 19. From this approach, the study noted that the Corona Virus disease had broken the idea that man is a social animal. By insisting on maintaining physical social distance as a safety measure by health experts, many close ties were broken and many went

to psychological trauma, some which led to hospitalization. Some of these cases were counted as part of the COVID 19 cases.

My investigation of the representation of dis-ease was restricted to the East African setting. This in itself has proven to be a difficult undertaking cognizant of the many poems written on the subject of COVID-19 in other parts of the world. Much remains to be investigated despite the lengthy discussion in the selected poems on the subject of Coronavirus.

The study has determined that poets represent the influence of COVID-19 on human social interaction negatively and positively. The new interaction with the disease emphasizes the feelings of anxiety and discomfort among people. This validates my claim that pandemic has created societal ills which causes uneasiness. Coronavirus infections causes people to be hospitalized. The study articulates how coronavirus has changed human socialization.

The dis-ease in coronavirus is alleviated through the use of images, tone, punctuation, syntax and other forms as it has been discussed in this study. People's interactions with one another change. The poems capture restrictive measures such as maintaining social distance, washing of hands, stay at home, and adhering to the greatest standards of hygiene. The poems emphasize that life after Corona would never be the same.

The research findings of the study were guided by the two hypotheses. The study hypothesized that contemporary East African Poems portray dis-ease as representation of the issues that people faced during Coronavirus pandemic. The study finds that COVID-19 disease is portrayed in two dimensions. On one hand, some poets construct it as a problem to the stability and peace of the people worldwide, a move indicating that the biological crisis brings devastation to humanity. This portrayal builds unfounded fear and anxiety even among those that were not sick. They foresee

imminent destruction from an unknown place which makes them suffer from anxiety disorder. On the other hand, some poets construct COVID-19 as a weapon that resiliently fought the ills that faced human beings. It proved some level of vulnerability among societies.

The study furthermore demonstrated that some poets represent dis-ease as a way of looking beyond the hardships during a pandemic and embracing the practices of reparation. From this perspective, the COVID-19 became a blessing to some families whose relatives were all absent from home. The curfews from early evening hours, the families had a forcible re-union. Some fathers had an experience of seeing their children grow for two years unlike before when they were visitors in their homes. At the same note, children bonded with their father as parental and fraternal love rose.

Moreover, the study revealed that some of the selected poems give a message of resilience and hope amidst a pandemic. COVID-19 leads to social amendments in some families. Possibly, this explains why some poems, as a way of healing, paint an image of recuperation of mankind during Coronavirus.

The second hypothesis articulated that poems on COVID-19 have embraced language strategies used to represent the concept of dis-ease. The study found out that the poets used language through various poetic techniques and literary forms like enjambment, imagery, paradox, irony, punctuation, symbolism, personification and many other literary forms to illustrate the presence of coronavirus in the society. The use of paradox for instance, articulates the absurdities of human life during the pandemic.

Moreover, the study establishes that coronavirus outbreak has exposed the vulnerability of country's systems, including public health, education, the economy, and personal relationships. The negative impacts of COVID-19 as seen in the analysis of some poems highlight the people's

vulnerability. This leads to dis-ease. From the findings of this study, it is clear that the vulnerabilities stated in the poems make individuals to use their abilities to deal with the pandemic, showing ways in which they can protect themselves from the pandemic.

The study recommends more studies into the presentation of COVID-19 disease in East Africa using different texts like oral poetry. This will add knowledge about this pandemic. There is a need to study the message of resilience and hope amidst the pandemic as the poems paint an image of recuperation of humankind during COVID-19.

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