(RE)STAGING KENYAN SPOKEN WORD POETRY IN NEW MEDIA

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a degree in any other university.

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my late dad, John Alfred Ekesa.

To my mum, Florence Ekesa.

To my husband, my children, and my siblings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of the new media as an alternative space for performing arts is slowly transforming the traditionally held view that a performance can only take place where the actor and the audience are physically present to each other in real time. The new media performances started off as simulations of the traditional theatrical performances, but over time they have acquired their own distinct features which set them apart. This study is an exploration of the new dynamics in the field of performance studies through the lens of spoken word poetry in new media spaces. A detailed description of the four forms in which spoken word poetry is adapted for performance in new media spaces is conducted. The features in each form have been extensively explored to establish their uniqueness. An analysis of the use of audio-visual images in spoken work poetry in new media is conducted, with a focus on how the virtual audience interacts with these images to create meaning in the poem. The research further examines how new media performances redefine the concept of a live audience, as well as promote collaborative poetry using components of the audience engagement theory. The research is an extension of the body of knowledge that exists in the performance theory, the post-modern theories of hyperreality and ecocriticism, and the audience engagement theory. The research is an exploration of how liveness is achieved in new media performances and how the virtual audience are part of the content creation. The concept of liveness in new media performances forms the backbone of this study as we explore how the hybridization of the live and mediatized enhance the post-modern tenets of populism and formlessness in new media performances of spoken word poetry in Kenya.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUBD TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The contemporary society has embraced the use of the internet in all aspects of life. The invention of new media spaces such as Facebook, You Tube, Instagram and Twitter has transformed the way people interact with each other and carry out their daily activities. The creative and performing artists form a great percentage of those who have embraced this digital media technology to bring forth radical transformations in the field of performance studies. This research examines the integration of new media into the performance of spoken word poetry, using existing theories of performance, hyperreality, ecocriticism and audience engagement in order to explore new dimensions in theatre studies.

The research explores the following spoken word poems: Dennis Mutuma's (Dorphan) "Mashuja', "Minority Report", "Mum Aliishia", "Najua" and "Nyota yangu"; Francis Onono's (Brigeddia Poet) "If I Die in the Battle Field", "Lizzi Mammu", "Mheshimiwa", "Special Dedication to Ladies" and "Story Zake"; Ken Kibet's (Mufasa Poet) "For My Future Wife", "Guns Don't Kill People", "I Heard About Chicago", "June", Mufasa Live In Concert", "my Boys are Dying", "My Uncle Wants to Play Match Maker", "She Different", "When You are Fourteen", "Tumechoka"; Kennedy Odongo's (Kennet B.) "Amani","Green Talk" and "Silent River; Mark Joshua Ouma's (Poet Tear Drops) "2017 Groove Award Tear Drops Performance", "Hello Corruption", "Story Come", "Vijana Simameni"; Namatsi Lukoye's "Insanity", "Not Yours To Fix", "Queen", "Tomorrow", "Words"; Raya Wambui's "You Work for Me," "Stand Up," "Wetu" "I am Not Sorry," and "An Ode to the Amazing Fathers of This World. The choice of the spoken word poems in this thesis is primarily based on the restaged performances in new media platforms, particularly, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter. The poets were selected based on their popularity both on the new media platforms and stage performances. Most of the poets are former winners in the annual

Poetry Slam Africa competition. The competition, which takes place in Kenya, invites poets from all over the world and the winner is crowned the Poetry Slam King/Queen, a title that runs for a whole year.

Hyperreality is a concept that was advanced by Jean Baudrillard to refer to a state in which one is unable to differentiate the real world and the virtual. The restaging of spoken word poetry on new media allows for the physical and virtual worlds to co-exist. This calls for a co-definition of what constitutes a performance. Ecocriticism further incorporates the theory of hyperreality by establishing the connection between literature and the environment. Umberto Eco focuses on the genuineness of ecology and asserts that hyperreality is a cultural condition in which simulations substitute reality. The theory of audience engagement is also used to analyze the behaviours of the audience in social media spaces. Marcel Broersma's distinction between the "manifest" and "latent" engagement of the audience also informs the study of the online audience in this thesis.

Spoken word poetry is defined as poetry that is read and performed before an audience. Since performance is the key component in this genre, it is important to examine how the mediatization of spoken word poetry creates new perspectives in performance studies. Originally, a performance was viewed as an activity that involved artists and viewers coexisting in a matching space and hour. This involved the actors staging a performance before a live audience that was physically present in the same building or space with them. The audience in this case was an integral part of the performance. Erika Fischer-Lichte acknowledges Max Herrmann as one of the pioneers of the performance theory, who redefined the relationship between the performer and the audience in theatre, by referring to them as "co-players". This means that a performance comprises of both the actor and the audience who must be physically present to each other. The two parties must also actively participate in the performance. Fischer-Lichte sums up Hermann's views by asserting that

performance constitutes "The bodily co-presence of actors and spectators" (2008, p. 32). She further states that, "For a performance to occur, actors and spectators must assemble to interact in a specific place for a certain period of time." (p. 32). However, the rise of spoken word poetry performance in new media is redefining the relationship between the actor and the spectators, in this case, the poet and the audience. The digital media technology has made it possible for the poet to perform live to an online audience without sharing the "bodily co-presence" with the audience. This is because the audience usually accesses a recorded act, which does not mean a real time co-presence since they are also spatially apart in such performances. This provides us with new ways of experiencing a performance that transcends the traditional stage.

At the turn of the twenty first century, theatre has become more of a collaborative action between live performances and digital performances. The digital performances have also given rise to other collaborative activities happening on the online platforms. This interaction has provided us with new ways of spectatorship and aesthetics in the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya. This research intends to view the performance of spoken word poetry in new media as expounded by Steve Dixon who views digital performance as encompassing all theatrical works in which "computer technologies" perform a primary function in the creation and delivery of content (Dixon, 2007, p. 271). In this case the computer is not just a medium of communication between the performer and the audience, but a platform that contains certain features that make it possible for performances to take place outside a physical space. The research interrogates selected spoken word poets in Kenya who use the new media as a key method in their performances. The chosen poets were selected based on their interaction with the new media during their performances in order to establish how the new media offers a new form of spectatorship for the audience in a manner that transcends the traditional stage. The research seeks to interrogate whether liveness can be effectively

achieved in the performance of spoken word poetry in new media on the various digital platforms.

The research relies on the performance theory and the postmodern concept of hyper-reality as the tools for analysis. The performance theory helps in discussing the essential features of a performance and help in explaining the transformations that take place when we move from the physical stage to the virtual space. Richard Schechner's idea of performativity guides the research. Schechner views performativity as a term that is wide in scope touching on different aspects of life. He argues that performance is not a preserve of theatre alone, but it is present in other aspects of life, especially where people have to deliberately behave in a certain way when carrying out their normal everyday activities. He asserts that performativity applies to the digital technology where there is a waning difference between media events and live events, which is the case with theatre and real life performances (Schechner, 2006, p. 123) Hence performance theory lays the basis of engaging in the interrogation of the performance of spoken word poetry in new media.

Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyper-reality is also explored in order to investigate the effectiveness of presenting spoken word poetry in the virtual space as a simulation of the real theatrical event. The research explores the various transformations that take place in a performance as it moves from the theatrical space to the virtual space. Mark Nunes (2006), views hyperreality in the context of the internet technology. He asserts that a "virtual world" is imminent by reviewing Baudrillard's idea that simulation happens when there is a transformation from the "real to the hyperreal." (Nunes, 2006). This research interrogates virtual performances of spoken word poetry to examine how the simulation of a real theatrical event in the virtual spaces can be used to bring about transformations in the relationship between the poet, the text and the audience. The research investigates the

transformations that take place to the spoken word poetry when it is performed in the new media, in order to examine the implications of such an adaptation in the field of performance studies.

The term "new media" can be traced back to Marshall McLuhan whose ideas in performance studies were geared towards establishing the relationship between the "new media" and the "old media". McLuhan states that a new media will always want to curve its own identity while at the same time exhibiting similarities with an existing one. He argues that the new media comes in to define itself and should not be seen as an advancement of an existing one. He argues that the new media will always disturb the stability of the old media until it finds its own unique structure that distinguishes it from its look alike. (McLuhan, 1964). McLuhan was referring to the integration of the mass media in theatre studies in the 1960s, before the advent of the internet. The "new media" then, referred to technological equipment such as the telephone, radio and television, which today are categorised as old media in relation to the computer-based technology. However, his views are still valid today in relation to the use of digital performances. The research seeks to find out whether the new media in the contemporary society has managed to give spoken word poetry an equal space to the one offered by the theatre houses, as projected by McLuhan. This is aimed at extending and updating McLuhan's contributions to performance studies. In this regard, the new media determines the context in which the older media operates, something that this research seeks to investigate. In the present world, Robert Logan defines new media as any form of computer technology that involves some form of interaction amongst its users. (Logan, 2010). This is the working definition of new media in this research, where the online performances of spoken word poetry are the point of focus. The research explores the interactions between the poet and the audience, and the interactions amongst members of the audience in the new media platforms where spoken word poetry is presented.

The phrase "new media dramaturgy" is important in this research since it was coined to discuss the relationship between technology and the body in performance. Peter Eckersall, Helena Grehan and Edward sheer coined the term, to explore ways in which the new media brings about changes in "live performances" (2015, p. 375). They believed that the new media dramaturgy brings together "the context, content, form and audience" in a performance. This research intends to investigate how this intersection culminates into a

simulation of liveness in performance poetry in new media. Simulation breaks down the barrier between the real and the imaginary. Auslander asserts that "Liveness" is a relative state since some performances involve both the physical aspects of a performance as well as the recorded aspects combined with digital media technology, giving rise to a "hybrid event." (Quoted from Tarcy C. Davis, Perfomance Studies, 2008, p. 109). This research investigates the relationship between the performer and the audience using a set of temporal and spatial variables that bring out the transformations that occur when the spoken word poetry embraces the new media technology.

Spoken word poetry in Kenya started off through poetry readings to a small audience on the streets and in the various theatre houses, but its popularity was enhanced by the new media as well as the mainstream media. This has seen the genre attract a wider audience beyond our national borders as seen in the number of 'views', 'likes' 'loves' and 'comments' on social media platforms, especially You Tube, Instagram and Facebook, from followers across the globe. It is for this reason that attention should be given to the place of new media as a space in the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya, and how this allows for the simulation of liveness, for the realisation of a new aesthetic appeal that allows the virtual audience and the poet to coexist in a harmonious theatrical event.

1.2 Definition of terms

Audio visual – A digital presentation that involves both sound and sight.

Co-presence – The connection between performers on stage, between the performers and the audience and between technology and performers.

Collaborative poetry – A performance technique in which poetry is created by more than one person.

Hyperreality – A situation in which an individual perceives a simulated reality as the reality due to technological advancements in postmodern societies.

Intermediality – The intersection between the real world and the virtual world in a performance.

Mediatization – it is a long-lasting process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as consequence of the growth of the media influence.

New Media – Digital media that is interactive and incorporates two-way communication and involves some form of computing. In this research the term new media will be used to refer to the virtual performance space.

Old Media – This is the traditional media that includes television, radio, print and outdoor messages.

Reality – The original state of a performance in a theatrical space.

Simulation of liveness – Imitation of a live performance in the new media.

Spoken word poetry – A popular art form of poetry that is read and performed before an audience and relies heavily on improvisation, rhythm wordplay and the use of slang.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Mediatization of spoken word poetry gives a new dimension to the traditional perception of the relationship between the poet and the audience in a performance. While some scholars have maintained that a performance can only be realized where there is bodily co-presence between the actors and spectators, this research interrogates how the new media technology is restaging the performance of spoken word poetry. The research seeks to investigate the transformations that take place in a text when it is brought to life in new media. The several levels of participation that emerge as a result of the interaction between the performer, the audience and the text in the virtual spaces are of concern to this project. The research explores the poet to audience interaction, the audience to poet interaction and the audience-to-audience interaction. The research also analyses the use of audio-visual images in the creation of meaning during the performance of spoken word poetry in new media. The research further seeks to establish how mediatization of spoken word poetry redefines our understanding of a live audience. The process of co-creation as an outcome of the interaction between the poet and the audience in the performance of spoken word poetry in the new media space will also be interrogated. The research explores the questions below:

i. What are the different forms in which the Kenyan spoken word poetry is adapted for performance in new media?

ii. What is the role of audio-visual images in the creation of meaning during the performance of spoken word poetry in new media?

iii. How does the performance of the Kenyan spoken word poetry in new media redefine the concept of a live audience?

iv. What is the significance of the interaction between the Kenyan spoken word poetry and the new media in promoting collaborative poetry?

1.4 Objectives

i. To investigate the different forms in which the Kenyan spoken word poetry is adapted for performance in new media.

ii. To analyse the role of audio-visual images in the creation of meaning during the performance of spoken word poetry in new media.

iii. To examine how the performance of the Kenyan spoken word poetry in new media redefines the concept of a live audience.

iv. To evaluate the significance of the interaction between the Kenyan spoken word poetry and the new media in promoting collaborative poetry.

1.5 Hypotheses

The performance of spoken word poetry in new media has brought about new developments in theatre studies that this research seeks to explore. In this research, the following hypotheses is tested.

i. The Kenyan Spoken word poetry is adapted for performance in the new media in different forms.

ii. The audio-visual images used during the performance of the Kenyan spoken word poetry in new media play a role in the creation of meaning.

iii. The performance of the Kenyan spoken word poetry in new media, redefines the concept of a live audience.

iv. The interaction between the Kenyan spoken word poetry and the new media is significant in promoting collaborative poetry.

1.6 Justification

The Kenyan Spoken word poetry is finding life in new media and it is a phenomenon that is gaining popularity in the contemporary society. Of interest to this research is the interaction that takes place between the text, the performer and the audience and how improvisation is pushed to a new level where the process of co-creation is a continuous event as long the spoken word poem keeps circulating in the virtual spaces. The research intends to contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding the debate on live performances versus mediatized performances through a Kenyan perspective. I argue that the field of performance studies should integrate mediatized performances as an equal player in the creation of an aesthetic appeal that transcends the traditional stage. The research seeks to interrogate the

transformations that take place to the performance of spoken word poetry when adapted to the new media.

At a time when the society is inclined towards the new media, it is important to venture into studies concerning the relationship between the virtual and the physical space. Most of the research on mediatized performances revolves around plays, but a lot still needs to be done in the field of performance poetry. This research seeks to fill this gap in scholarship by drawing attention to the mediatized performances of spoken word poetry in Kenya, as alternative spaces in which oral poetry can be (re)staged.

1.7 Literature Review

The main concern in this research is to investigate how the hybridization of the live and the mediatized performances restages the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya, and redefines the relationship between the text, the performer and the audience. The literature review discussed in this section is aimed at identifying the gap in scholarship that this research seeks to fill and the theoretical approaches that are used in data analysis.

The spoken word poets have been in the frontline in bringing change to the field of performance poetry in Kenya. In order to meet the demands of a society that is inclined towards the use of the internet, these artists have used the various social networks available to them to reach out to a wider audience that goes beyond our national borders.

Narvika Bovcon, in an article entitled "Literary Aspects in New Media Art works," reviews Vilem Flusser's idea that any work of art that uses technology is subject to "split authorial agency". She argues that Flusser's idea can be useful in the description of new media poetry. She expounds on Flusser's concept of "double authorship" in relation to the photographic image by comparing the computer technology to the photographer in the background and the poet to the "photographic image". She views the poet as the author "who constructs a specific new media communication" using the computer. She agrees with Flusser that it is important to focus on the final product, in this case the "photographic image" or the poem/poet, rather than the technology that produces such works. She further explains that literature of the new media is presented "on the rectangular surface of the computer screen as an image of two-dimensional or three-dimensional letters and words", which "can be animated and equipped with sound or can be used as hyperlinks." Therefore, Bovcon views literature as a

combination of digital media technology and performance. She compares this phenomenon with what Janez Strehovec refers to as "word-image-body-movement." (Bovcon, 2013). She further delves into the works of a new media poet known as Jaka Zeleznikar. She argues that studying such works can create the basis for "the theory of hybrid new media and literary works of art". She observes that Zeleznika's poems are written both as algorithms and literature hence creating a new "literary experience". She classifies these poems into two: "cybertext and ergodic literature". Both classifications introduce the idea of interactive poetry which allows the reader to be a co-creator of the poems thus contributing to "the reader's literary-aesthetic experiencing of the work". This research benefits from the concept of "double authorship" in new media poetry as advanced by Bovcon, but it also extends its use to cover the involvement of the audience in the process of creating this form of poetry.

Herbert Blau (1982) draws a line between live theatre and recorded performances. He views theatre and film as belonging to different realms and merging them can lead to "confusion of realms". In essence, Blau believes that the line between a live performance and a recorded one needs to be clearly drawn to avoid obscuring the two fields. However, Philip Auslander (1999), questions this assumption by using Fredric Jameson's definition of mediatization as "the process whereby the traditional fine art…come to consciousness of themselves as various media within a mediatic system" (Jameson, 1991, p. 162). According to Auslander, Blau views the relationship between theatre and film as belonging to separate cultural systems, but Jameson views theatre as having been mediatized due to economic and cultural realities. The integration of new media into the performance of spoken word poetry has been brought about by the consumer culture. Many aspects of life in the contemporary society revolve around the new media. Hence, the spoken word poets have identified this as a space to interact with the audience. While Blau draws a binary opposition between live and recorded performances, this research interrogates ways in which the live and the mediatized converge in the new media.

Janette Hughes (2008), in her article entitled "Poetry and New Media", explores ways in which poetry, and new media interact with each other by focusing on the relationship between text and image. She believes that "the computer and the web offer new ways of presenting poetry," which enable the reader to adopt a visual exploration of the poetic form, leading to new ways of interpreting the text. She argues that a new text is formed when a poem is accompanied by visual images and that the visual images are part of the poem and not separate entities. She asserts that the effectiveness of these images needs to be examined

from a pedagogical perspective. The projection of spoken word poetry on new media presents us with audio-visual images which provides us with a new way of creating meaning from the text. Hughes focuses on the interaction between the text and the audio-visual images, but this research is more interested with the performer and how he/she interacts through these images with his audience to mediate the creation of meaning in the text. This research intends to analyse the co-presence between the performer and these images as part of the form of the poem which is vital in conceptualising the content. The production of spoken word performances on new media allows the physical body of the poets to coexist with the projected images in a way that transcends the traditional performance.

Traditionally, all performed events were "live" in nature. A performance involved a face to face encounter between the actor and the audience in a shared space and time. Peter Brooks (1968), in *The Empty Space*, states that for an act of performance to take place we only need a man to walk across an empty space while another one watches him. This definition of a performed event depicts a live performance as one that requires the performer and the audience to share the same spatial-temporal space. Similarly, Antonin Artaud, in his argument against text-based theatre stresses the importance of the physical space as a yardstick of what a real performed event should entail. He says, "I maintain that the stage is a tangible, physical place that needs to be filled and it ought to be allowed to speak its own concrete language" (1970, 27). However, this position becomes problematic with the introduction of new media technology which allows poets to perform in a virtual space that is "removed from the face to face interaction" between the poet and the audience.

Walter Ong (1988) introduces the concept of "secondary orality" to discuss ways in which communication has been remediated due to electronic technologies. Through mediatization, the concept of liveness in a performance acquires a new meaning that recasts our perception of what constitutes a live performer and/or audience. Spoken word poetry in Kenya, has invaded the virtual space through such online spaces like You Tube, Facebook and Instagram, in which the poet and the audience are removed from the face to face interaction.

Paul Woodruff (2008) believes that so long as there is an audience, any part of the world can be a performance stage. He believes that "The art of theatre makes any part of the world a stage, for a time, if only the people around the new stage know how to give it their attention, then the two sides help each other bring off a successful time of watching and being watched" (Woodruff, 2008. P.4). Woodruff brings in the concept of mediatization in a performance by

drawing distinctions between theatre and film. While he admits that "the showing of a film is a kind of performance" and that it can be used in a live theatrical event (p.43), he argues that it lacks the "liveness" experienced in theatre since "the arts of watching and being watched are intertwined, and each affects the other". He asserts that film "seeks to make the film worth watching, not the action it is supposed to represent,"(p.43). This argument is similar to what Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb hold that "The most significant difference between films and theatre is the relationship between the performer and the audience" (Wilson and Goldfarb, 2010). They believe that theatre gives the audience a unique experience that is different from what one derives by merely watching a film. This research seeks to investigate ways in which the performance of spoken word poetry in new media bridges the boundary between stage performances and mediatized performances, to create a new form that expands our understanding of what constitutes liveness in a performance.

Karin Barber (1997), in her essay entitled "Preliminary Notes on Audience in Africa", talks about the changes that have taken place in the "traditional African audience" which was characterised by "older forms of communal cultural participation." She views technology of communication as being responsible for the removal of the face-to-face interaction between the "speaker and the hearer," in this case, the poet and the audience. She states that, "Television has made possible the imagining of an atomised, dispersed but mass audience turning in simultaneously to the same programme…" This assertion acknowledges that the introduction of mediatised performances recasts our understanding of the nature of the audience. Spoken word poetry is transmitted widely through the new media where the audience simultaneously tunes in to the performance from different geographical locations. This research intends to stretch the realm of the audience further by including the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya on new media. This is necessary due to the interactive nature of the online platforms which allow the performer to interact with his audience on virtual spaces.

Moradewun Adejunmobi (2011) asserts that "the increasing access to digital media has made performance of texts both more cost-effective and 'modern'." He explores ways in which oral traditions of the Mali people have been influenced by the accessibility to the new media, bringing forth "a new type of orality." He argues that the digital media has made it possible for verbal artists to invoke writing on the digital space as a marker of authorship and a way of expressing their modernity and revolutionary style of creativity. Spoken word poetry

performance on new media has made it possible for oral traditions of Kenya to be transmitted to a wider audience hence restaging the performance of oral poetry.

Steve Dixon (2007) in *Digital Performance,* takes us through the history and essential features of "new media technologies and their application within the performance arts." He argues that the age of the computer has resulted into new questions concerning the nature of performance. He asserts,

> Digital performance is an extension of a continuing history of the adoption and adaptation of technologies to increase performance and visual arts aesthetics effect and sense of spectacle, its emotional and sensorial impact, Its play of meanings and symbolic associations, and its intellectual power. (p. 40)

Mediatization is a new aesthetic method in the performing arts. Spoken word poets make use of the digital platform to reinforce their live performances hence adding a new aesthetic appeal to their work which interacts with a wider audience. Dixon further brings in the idea of presence and authenticity by looking at how technology has "destabilized notions of liveness, presence, and the 'real' (Dixon, 2007). The mediatization of the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya has transformed our perception of liveness in a performance. Liveness is not only limited to a face-to-face encounter between the performer and the audience but also to the interaction of the performer with his virtual audience on a digital platform.

Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), puts emphasis on the importance of presence in a performance. She asserts that the present involves what the audience sees and hears in a performance because "Performance is experienced as the completion, presentation, and passage of the present." (p.94). This means that a performance can only be complete where the performer and the audience are present, as observed by Brooks and Woodruff. This research expands our perception of presence to include the online presence in the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya as expounded by Dixon who believes that there is no significant difference between "a woman wearing a revolutionary flag as described in a novel, painted on a canvas, screened in a cinema, or standing live on stage" (Dixon, 2008, p. 132). Therefore, our understanding of presence in this research is based on how it contributes to the creation of meaning to a text rather than the media that has been used to present it. The research views mediatization as part of the form of spoken word poetry and not just a medium of presentation.

Patrice Pavis (1983) gives a description of presence in relation to performance by stating that for presence to exist in theatrical terms one needs "to know how to capture the attention of the public and make an impression" and be able to "trigger an immediate feeling of identification in the spectator, communicating a sense of living elsewhere and in an eternal present." (p.301).

Dixon also observes that "presence is about interest and command of attention, not space and liveness." This means that the most important thing in a work of art is not the medium through which it is transmitted but the work's capability to capture the attention of the audience. This then calls for an examination of the ways in which mediatization assists the spoken word poets to attract the attention of the audience by packaging their message in a particular way. The manner in which this message is delivered to the audience constitutes the aesthetic appeal that is of concern to this study. A similar view about what constitutes presence is held by Giannachi and Kaye (2011) who assert that presence is not "intrinsic to any particular medium" and that "there is no *a priori* opposition between media (theatrical, electronic, or other) with regard to presence." (p.19)

The research focuses on the ideas of Johannes Birringer (2008), who asserts that digital technology "has altered artistic practices and aesthetic experiences." He discusses how the traditional theatre has been transformed through technology where "stage presence has been replaced with online presence." It is this online presence and the resulting interaction between the performer and the audience, and amongst audience, that is of concern to this research.

Philip Auslander (1999) argues against the privileging of theatre over electronic media. He asserts that the contemporary audience views theatre through the lens of film and television. He admits to a belief in an oppositional conflict between theatre and media but challenges the notion of this binary. He views this binary as reductive and leads to an assumption that "the live event is 'real' and that the mediatised events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real." (p. 3) He challenges the assumption by deconstructing the inter-medial relationships, examining how various modes of representation remediate each other by unpacking "the mutual dependence of the live and mediatized" (p.11). Spoken word poetry in Kenya blurs the binary between the live versus the mediatised by integrating the two to form a new aesthetic. This is in line with Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt's observation that intermediality "operates in the spaces where the strict formal boundaries become blurred" (Chapple & Kattenbelt, 2006).

This research also seeks to interrogate the fluidity of the audience in an online performance as expounded by Goodeve (1997, 365) who asserts that "fluidity between audience and performer occurs in the online world…(where) participants…merge towards a being that is not audience and actor, character and author." In line with Goodeve's argument, the performance of spoken word poetry on new media allows for the audience and performer to interact as co-creators of the poems.

Vinay Kumar, Romesh Chaturvedi and Shruti Merhotra (2013), assert that "The convergence of theatre with new media provides opportunities for new types of viewing experience and engagement to audiences". They view the intersection between the virtual and physical spaces as a way of bringing forth "new aesthetic possibilities" in performance studies. They state that the new media has transformed the face to face interaction between performer and audience by transferring the "social and cultural activity" online:

> The convergence of theatre and new media does not approach internet Technologies as a distribution or 'transmission' medium; rather, the Internet is the site for the performance, & a creative medium. It is not about only making a stage performance accessible to an online audience. It is about discovering new ways of making and presenting theatre, and new artist-audience relationships in these new theatrical-contexts.

The performance of spoken word poetry on new media enables the audience to experience performance in a new space where they can actively interact with the performer and other audiences. This provides a new platform in which the process of co-creation of the performance text can begin to take place between the performer and the audience.

Auslander (2008) asserts that "the concept of liveness is a moving target whose definition changes over time in relation to technological development." (Quoted in Tracy C. Davis, Performance Studies, 2008, p. 110). He argues that liveness is not an absolute condition and that it is erroneous to classify a performance as either "live or not-live." He comes up with various definitions of liveness using the variables presented by Steve Wurtzler who believes that most artists blend technologically mediated performances and live unmediated performances. Wurtzler uses Whitney Houston's 1991 performance of the song "The Star Spangled Banner" at the Superbowl to show how a performance can contain both live presence and recording. In this performance Houston uses her recorded voice to perform the song to the audience. Auslander asserts that we can better understand the intersection between live and mediatised performances using a "set of temporal and spatial variables in

the relationship between performers and audience" as suggested by Wurtzler. This research seeks to interrogate the applicability of the concept of liveness as advanced by Auslander. This is useful in examining the transformations that take place in the relationship between the text, the performer and audience in the performance of spoken word on new media.

While Auslander employs the term liveness in reference to a live television broadcast, this research extends the use of the term to cover the performance of spoken word poetry in new media. The research goes beyond liveness in relation to live television broadcasts, to cover the liveness experienced when the Kenyan spoken word poets stage their performances in the new media spaces. The research explores ways in which the new media acts as a performance space that brings the Kenyan spoken word poetry to life outside the physical stage.

In conclusion, this study seeks to fill the existing gap in Kenyan scholarship about the staging of spoken word poetry in new media. While the internet has increasingly come to govern all aspects of our lives including the way in which the spoken words poets interact with their audience during their performances there is a gap in scholarship on how the new media is an alternative space for the performance of spoken word performances in Kenya.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the performance theory and the postmodern theory of hyper-reality which is relevant to the analysis of how mediatization has transformed the theatrical experience in the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya. Examining how mediatization contributes to the creation of meaning and recasts the definition of the audience in performance helps us to understand the concept of hyper-reality in the context of spoken word poetry in new media. The theory of ecocriticism further expounds on the concept of hyperreality, while the theory of audience engagement helps to explore the behaviours of the online audience which is at the center of this research.

In the field of performance studies Bertolt Brecht argues that theatre involves "live representation" of real or imaginary human experiences produced for the purpose of entertaining the audience (1964, 180). According to Gay McAuley, this description of theatre puts into consideration the presence of the audience due to the mention of entertainment. The idea of 'live' in Brecht's definition draws a distinction between theatre and mediatized performances Similarly, Grotowsky argues that theatre involves the actions carried out by the

actor before a physical audience. He disregards all the other things in a theatrical event as "supplementary" (Grotowsky, 1969,118). He refers to all the other activities that take place within a performance without the audience in mind as "paratheatrical" rather than theatrical (Grotowsky, 1969, 118). Eric Bently (1965) defines theatre as a situation where there is an actor imitating the actions of others before an audience. In this case a performance involves the relationship between the actor and the character. He transcends the traditional theatre by equating the audience to the actor who watches himself in the mirror as he acts. In all these descriptions of theatre, the bodily co-presence between the performer and the audience are key to performance. This research seeks to subvert this traditional understanding of performance by interrogating the various ways in which the use of new media in the presentation of spoken word poetry has brought about transformations in the relationship between the poet and the audience.

The research draws upon the concept of performativity. In reference to the term 'performative' J.L.Austin states that "To say something is to do something" hence in giving certain utterances we are taking part in a performance. According to Schechner postmodernism encompasses performativity where the "performance principal" is witnessed in normal everyday life (Schechner, 2002, 129). Schechner states that the "application of the 'performance principal' to all aspects of life" is the most essential quality of postmodernism. According to Schechener, performance is wider than theatre. In this research Schechner's concept of performativity is applied by looking at performance not only as presented on the stage but also in terms of the script and the preparations surrounding it. The roles that people play in society is of concern to this research, in an effort to establish what is mutually accepted as trendy in spoken word poetry.

The postmodern tenets of formlessness and populism are of relevance to this research. Formlessness is used to investigate how the performance of spoken word on new media leads to the mixing of genres hence the hybridization of live and mediatized performances. Populism will be applied to this research due to the postmodernist tendency to privilege media images as a reflection of reality. This research is guided by the concept of hyper-reality which was coined by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*. Hyper-reality is a condition in which an individual cannot draw the difference between reality and simulation of reality. Baudrillard defines hyper-reality as the current social condition which involves "creating something fake that is perceived as real." Mike Gane (2010) explains the stages involved in the formation of hyperreality from Baudrillard's perspective. He states that the

first stage involves the transformation from the original to the copy. The second stage involves collapsing the existing boundaries between the original and the copy, hence promoting the copy as the original. The third stage involves the total dismantling of the of the boundaries between the original and the copy which gives rise to a popular culture leading to a completely new product that exhibits its own features independent of the original image (Gane, 2010, pp.94-95).

The 1990s saw the innovations in the field of theatre studies. New terminologies such as digital theatre, multimedia performance and intermediality, were coined to discuss the intersection between live performances and mediatized performances. However, some critics like Peggy Phelan maintained that performance can only happen in the present moment and once it is recorded in any form and distributed, it ceases to be a performance (Phelan, 1993, p. 46). In this assertion, Phelan dismisses multimedia performances in which the performer and the audience are not found in the same physical space. She is opposed to the idea of equating a multimedia performance to a real stage performance since the former lacks the physical "co-presence" between the performer and the audience. This definition of performance echoes Herrmann's and Fischer-Lichte's views by privileging stage performances over mediatized performances. Phelan and other critics who conform to this school of thought are opposed to the idea of mediatized performances as constituting liveness, a term which refers to the bodily co-presence of the actor and audience. Since the presentation of spoken word poetry in new media involves recording, this research will interrogate the extent to which a recorded spoken word poetry performance can be considered as containing liveness. The research establishes ways in which the spoken word poets simulate a live performance using the new media technology.

Philip Auslander is opposed to Phelan's perception of liveness. He argues that the idea of liveness can only exist after mediatization of performances has taken place. Thus, there is no binary opposition between the live and the mediatized because liveness can only exist where there is mediatization. Mediatization of performances is what brings about the concept of liveness. As a result, one cannot exist without the other, and the presence of one does mean the absence of the other (Auslander, 1996, p. 198). He is against the idea of privileging theatre performances to mediatized performances because he believes that the world today perceives a "live" performance through the lens of film and television. This research covers the new media as a space for restaging live performances of spoken word poetry. Auslander further asserts that "mediatization is now explicitly and implicitly embedded within the live

performance" (Auslander, 1999, p. 35). This implies that the line between mediatization and live performance is waning since theatre is "saturated with and dominated by mass media representations" (Auslander, 2008, p. 1). Auslander is keen on how the mass media representations are manifested in theatre, whereby the actors integrate the use of film and television in a physical space. While Auslander is keen on the use of mass media in a live performance this research seeks to investigate how a mass media performance can constitute a live performance. This research interrogates how liveness can be created in the virtual spaces that have emerged due to the integration of new media into the performance of spoken word poetry.

Dana Phillips questions whether the truth of ecology lies in literature. His approach to ecocriticism is inspired by Umberto Eco whose concept of hyperreality focuses on the "double nature" of the zoo in San Diego which mixes both the natural and man-made elements while presenting itself as having the most authentic natural reservoir (Philips, 1999). Eco asserts that the inclination towards authenticity is what gives rise to hyperreality. Phillips extends this debate by focusing on the relationship between literature and ecology. He states that literary theorists are also concerned with the essence of representation just like ecocritics but ecocritics tend to avoid literary studies because of the tendency towards excessive application of theory.

John Tiffin and Nabuyoshi Terashima (2001:8) expound on the concept of hyperreality by referring to it as "a condition in which the real and the fiction are seamlessly blended together so that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins." As a result, people find themselves involved more in the "hyperreal world" than in the "physical real world". This research intends to analyze the concept of hyperreality in the light of technologically advanced postmodern societies where the physical reality comingles with the virtual reality in the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya. This is the hyperreal condition that Tiffin and Terashima are talking about when they say that the hyper world "is a seamless intermixture of a (physical) real world and a virtual world. A real world consists of real and natural features for example real buildings and real objects but in virtual world we have such things but in codes of computer or in three-dimensional way or like photos and videos although they are like models, but they are shot by a camera and are not real." (Tiffin and Terashima, 2001, p. 9).

Grounding the mediatization of spoken word in Kenya to the postmodern theory of hyperreality allows critical appreciation of the selected mediated performances in this research to lean on a critical pillar in as far as the performance of spoken word poetry in new media is concerned. Baudrillard believes that hyperreality goes beyond the hybridization of the live and the mediatized. He states that hyperreality is the formation of an image that is a representation of an imaginary thing. He explains the concept of simulacrum in semiotic terms. He views simulacrum as representational images that deceive us. He claims that the current society lives in a fictitious world where imitation is embraced (Baudrillard, 1994). According to Baudrillard, "simulation is the active process of replacement of the real" because the "sign is not exchanged for meaning but for another sign." (Baudrillard, 1994) The simulacrum is defined as a copy without the original. "The procreation" of simulacrum results into "a new era of simulation in which all referents have been abolished, and the distinction between the real and its representation has collapsed" (Baudrillard, 1994). Baudrillard identifies "four steps" in which simulation replaces reality. The first one is "faithful", where the image is a basic reflection of "reality"; the second one is "perversion", where "the image masks a profound reality"; the third is "pretence", where "the image masks the absence of a profound reality"; and the fourth is "pure", where "the image has no relation to any reality, and it is pure simulacrum". (Lechte, 2010, p.200). Disneyland and other imaginary worlds are considered as examples of simulacra in terms of hyperreality. Baudrillard argues that Disneyland is imaginary, yet it magnetizes people inside and makes them feel that the neighbourhood is existent. He asserts that "the Los Angeles area" is hyperreal because it is non-existent. Thus "Disneyland" combines imagination and fiction to create the "real".

The main concern in this research is to examine how the concept of hyperreality has been used in mediatized performances of spoken word poetry in Kenya. Textual analysis of the selected spoken word poems for this research will be relevant in studying ways in which such performances help in the creation of meaning and recasting the nature of the audience.

The theory of audience engagement has also been used to analyze the behaviours of the online audience in spaces where spoken word poetry is presented in new media. Mercel Broersma classifies the online audience engagement into the manifest level of engagement and the latent level of engagement. The manifest engagement classification has been used in this research to account for technological features of the virtual performances that are manifested through explicit details such as likes, emojis, views, comments and shares. The

latent classification has been used to explore the implicit details of online performances of spoken word poetry through the analysis of the perspectives, inferences and creations that the online audience develop as a result of their interactions with the online content (Broersma, 2019)

1.9 Methodology

This research uses the spoken word poetry mediatized performances from selected poets in Kenya as the main source of primary data. The works of other scholars on new media poetry were read both intensively and extensively and their texts reviewed under library research. The Primary data was collected from four different new media platforms, namely, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The data was collected through observation of spoken word poetry performances in the new media platforms, as well as direct communication with the respondents, in this case, the spoken word poets and the virtual audience. This data was recorded and stored in flash disks and Google Drive for further review. Direct observation of spoken word poetry performances in new media spaces helped eliminate the challenge of dealing with "uncooperative respondents" while at the same time ensured the collection of data that is current. Direct communication with the respondents was conducted in the form of interviews and questionnaires. The questions for the interview were modelled to evaluate the extent to which the new media platforms provide a hyper-real performance for the spoken word poets and their audiences. The respondents that were interviewed included the spoken word poets that have actively participated in the virtual performances using the new media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. These poets include, Dennis Mutuma (Dorphan), Kennedy Odongo (Kennet B.) and Namatsi Lukoye. The poets were selected due to their popularity in new media platforms based on the number of followers, views, likes and comments they have accumulated in the course of their virtual performances. The other poets used in this research were not available for interview, but they responded to my questions through other social media platforms. The selection of these spoken word poets was based on their creative use of the new media technology to enliven their performances. The next group of respondents was the virtual audience. This group of respondents was not interviewed but they were selected based on their reaction to the virtual performances of spoken word poetry. The reactions were viewed in the form of 'comments', 'likes' and use of 'emojis' and 'GIF'. All the data from the respondents was collected from new media sources including Facebook, You Tube, Instagram and Twitter, after which it was transcribed and translated. Secondary data was also collected from earlier research on Spoken Word Poetry in

Kenya as well as books, journal, magazines and newspaper articles about the performance theory and hyperreality. The secondary data was selected based on reliability, suitability and adequacy since "there may be a wealth of usable information in the already available data" (Kothari, 2004, p.112).

The interviews were conducted virtually in the month of August 2021, through Google Meet, and a recording of the interviews was done using the PowToon Screen & Cam feature. Ethical issues were also considered when carrying out this research. The poets agreed to have their interviews recorded on video using the "PowToon" Application. A link to the video recording is provided in the appendix section of this thesis. Since the interviews were conducted virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to meet the poets in person and have them fill out the consent forms, so the WhatsApp communication between the poets and I serve as evidence that consent was sought to have their information used by the university for scholarly purposes. It was also not possible to constitute a research ethical committee due to the pandemic. The expected committee members allowed me to proceed with the interviews independently, but they followed up through my report about the details of the interview in the thesis. The video recordings of the interview is also available to them.

The analysis of the spoken word poetry performances in new media is guided by the tenets of the performance theory, the postmodern theory of hyper-reality and ecocriticism and the theory of audience engagement. The spoken word poetry mediatized performances were subjected to the performance theory by observing ways in which a mediatized performance echoes a stage performance in terms of the liveness. This theory helped to establish the features of a stage performance that are present in the virtual space during the performances of spoken word poetry. This helped to identify how the poem is presented for performance in new media. The postmodern theories of hyper-reality and ecocriticism were applied to establish how liveness is achieved through the convergence of spoken word performances and the new media. Tiffin and Terashima use the phrase "Hyper world" to refer to the intersection between the physical real world and the virtual world. The theory of audience engagement was also used to evaluate the behaviour of the online audience and establish the authenticity of their reactions. This research was conducted to investigate how this intersection brings forth a new form of orality that emerges as a result of the interaction between the audience, performer and text. For example, a look at Mufasa's Facebook page gives a clear understanding of how the interaction between the performer and the audience takes place on new media through the process of co-creation. His audience reacts to his

poems in a number of ways. Some express their satisfaction by clicking on the like or love button while others throw in a few comments concerning the content or style of the poem. Others still create their own poems in response to Mufasa's poem, hence contribute to the process of co-creation. This enriches the theatrical event by creating a space for performance on the new media.

The research relies on hyper-reality to show how spoken word poetry performances undergo simulation when adapted to the new media. The research demonstrates how the virtual performances of spoken word poetry undergoes the four steps of simulation which are faithful, perversion, pretence and pure, as expounded by Baudrillard. Since Facebook and Instagram allow for live coverage, I used those spoken word poems that have been covered live in new media to show how the faithful stage occurs in a mediatized performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya. I used such performances to explain how a live new media performance is closely related to a real theatrical event but at the same time point out what is lost in the process. I also used the reactions from the virtual audience/poets to demonstrate how a spoken word poetry performance goes through the perversion stage where the new media technology allows for responses that simulate a real stage performance through the use of written comments, emoji and GIF. I also used recorded performances to expound on how spoken word poetry performances in new media go through the pretence stage where the virtual audience continue to react to a performance that is no longer taking place, and how this leads to the final stage of pure simulacrum where there is no relationship between the stage performance of spoken word poetry and the new media performance.

Therefore, the research examines the four processes in which simulation replaces reality in the performance of spoken word in new media.

1.10 Scope and Limitation

This research focuses on selected spoken word poets from Kenya who have incorporated mediatization in their performances. The spoken word performances under study capture the performances of spoken word in new media since 2008 to date. The scope of the study is Kenyan spoken word poets whose performances portray how the convergence between theatre and the new media restages the performance of spoken word poetry bringing forth a new kind of orality that transcends the traditional theatre.

The research makes use of seven spoken word poets whose performances were extracted from YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Some of these poets include Dennis Mutuma (Dorphan), Francis Onono (Brigeddia Poet), Ken Kibet (Mufasa), Kennedy Odongo (Kennet B.), Namatsi Lukoye and Raya Wambui. The research is limited to purposively selected, Kenyan spoken word poets and therefore spoken word poets from other regions were not considered for interrogation.

1.11 Chapter Outline

1.11.1. Chapter One

This chapter comprises of a brief introduction to the study.

1.11.2. Chapter Two

This chapter investigates the various forms in which spoken word poetry is presented in new media.

1.11.3. Chapter Three

This chapter analyses the role of audio-visual images in the creation of meaning during the performance of spoken word poetry in new media.

1.11.4. Chapter Four

This chapter examines how the performance of spoken word poetry in new media redefines what constitutes a live audience.

1.11.5 Chapter Five

This chapter evaluates the significance of the interaction between the Kenyan spoken word poetry and the new media in promoting collaborative poetry.

Conclusion

The conclusion consists of the summary, findings and recommendations of the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: THE ADAPTATION OF SPOKEN WORD POETRY IN NEW MEDIA

2.1. Introduction

This research focuses on the performance of spoken word poetry in virtual spaces. It is aimed at drawing the connections between theatrical performances and those performances that are staged in new media. The main goal is to examine the new dimensions in performance poetry as the genre transitions into the new media spaces. In this chapter we investigate the various forms of spoken word poetry in new media and how each form brings forth new ways of viewing a performance. The chapter explores what constitutes a performance in the traditional sense then goes ahead to investigate the extent to which liveness/presence can be achieved in the performance of spoken word poetry in new media platforms through the virtual audience interactions. The research depends solely on the contribution of the virtual audience with the assumption that the followers represent real people in real life who have interacted with the spoken word poems in social media spaces. However, identity issues of the virtual audience is another dimension to this research that requires further interrogation. The research involves the performance of spoken word poetry beyond the traditional stage with the aim of evaluating new trends in performance studies.

Russell Kaschula explores the interconnection between oral and written poetry in reference to Xhosa oral poetry in South Africa. He views the oral and written Xhosa poetry as a continuum in which the two carry "equal importance." He asserts that the boundary between a purely "primary oral" and purely "secondary oral" culture in South Africa have been consolidated giving rise to what she calls a "post-primary, pre-secondary culture that cultivates literacy, but also accepts orality." The dichotomy between the oral and the written Xhosa poetry is an indication of the interchange in the medium through which the poems are disseminated to the audience (Kaschula,1997). The poems are not only produced orally, but also in their written forms. The same trend has been observed among the spoken word poets in Kenya. They started by performing their poems to the public, then later moved to publishing their poems in books and blogs like Wordpress, even as they continued with their theatrical performances. They have now transitioned to the new media as a new space for

performing their poems, while maintaining their theatrical performances as well as books and blogs as alternative medium for their poems.

Kaschula coined the term "technauriture" to show the convergence between orality and technology. He further breaks down the term into three parts to show the meeting point between technology and orality. According to him "techn" stands for technology, "auri" for 'auriture', and "ture" for literature. Therefore, technauriture is defined as "an attempt to capture the modalities associated with the three-way dialectic between primary orality, literacy and technology" (Kaschula, 2017). In this research I look at spoken word poetry in new media as a form of "technauriture".

Karin Barber (1997) states that "technology of communication" can change the mode of spectatorship in a performance. She asserts that "literacy" and "television" have changed how a message is transmitted to the audience. The new media allows for both the written and the oral production of spoken word poetry in Kenya through such spaces as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. Spoken word poetry in new media is a return to orality as well as a repackaging of the written poetry. The new media therefore is a space that allows for both the oral and the written literature to co-exist, which is a shift from the previous spaces that promoted one at the expense of the other. The traditional classification of literature as either oral or written makes it problematic for emerging genres which have adapted to both forms. It is time we adopted a "broader categorization of literary genres" to include "online literature" which is a mixture of both spoken and written literature (Mnenuka, 2019). In this research we look at how even a written text can translate into an oral performance when transmitted in new media spaces. New art forms find themselves incorporating effects of traditional forms which occur at different stages of development. "Unspectacular social changes often promote a change in receptivity which will benefit the new art form" (Benjamin, 2008). The nature of the social media allows for both the written and oral forms of literature to thrive. Ruth Finnegan points out three characteristics of oral literature: performance, audience, and

occasion. She asserts that it is only through the actual performance that the aesthetic appeal of an oral literature piece can be fully realized. The performance element of spoken word poetry in new media will be examine in relation to both the written and oral poetry.

What constitutes a performance? David Osipovich defines a theatrical performance as "a particular kind of interaction between performers and observers…in a shared physical space." (Osipovich, 2006). This definition puts emphasis on the physical presence of the performer and the audience in the same place at the same time. Osipovich is opposed to those who hold the view that a theatrical performance is essentially an "interpretation of a literary work." He argues that each theatrical performance is unique and cannot be unscripted. He asserts that the beauty in a performance comes about through the interaction between the actor and the audience. He points out that "showing and watching" are the two main roles of a performance, where the actor "shows" while the audience "watches." Maria Van Nieukerken and Susan Pond highlight the elements of a theatrical performance when talking about choir concerts. They state that for a performance to take place a text must be in existence. This text is memorized and used as a source of interaction between the performer and the audience. They also highlight other elements of a performance like body movement in which "unusual formations/setups" are done by the singers, as well as the movement made by the performers as they sing. They also mention the use of costumes, props and lighting to create a theatrical impact in a performance (Nieukerken and Pond, 2016)

Spoken word poetry is meant to be "read and performed before an audience," (Eleveld, 2003). Originally, the presence of the audience in this definition would refer to a performance in which the poet and the audience are physically present to each other (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). However, as the world embraces technological advancement, the performance of spoken word poetry is slowly changing to adapt to the new trends in order to accommodate the needs of the techno-savvy audience in the contemporary society. Heike Schaefer asserts that since literature cannot be confined to a "unified single media" it is about time we

redefined contemporary literature as a "transmedial configuration or network." She argues that it is important to view literature as multi-disciplinary and focus more on its functionality and how it is evolving in the "digital age" (Schaefer, 2015). The new media allows for a hyperreal performance of spoken word poetry by creating a performance space that transcends the traditional theatre. Performance in this sense goes beyond the physical co-presence between the poet and the audience to involve the virtual co-presence between the poet and the spectators. Thomas Sheridan (1992) draws a distinction between telepresence and virtual presence. He argues that while telepresence is a situation in which one feels present at a remote location via technologies, virtual presence involves feeling present within a virtual environment. He asserts that presence in both telepresence and virtual presence depends on three factors: sensory information received, the ability to control the sensory environment and the ability to manipulate the physical environment. Carrie Heeter (1992) classifies virtual presence into three categories: Personal presence, social presence and environmental presence. Personal presence refers to the awareness of one's own body/self in a virtual space while social presence refers to one's awareness of others (human or computer generated) in the virtual space. Environmental presence refers to the awareness of elements in the virtual space itself. This research seeks to investigate the kind of virtual presence that is created when spoken word poetry is performed in new media platforms, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and You Tube. This chapter explores the four forms of spoken word poetry in new media. These include spoken word poetry as a written text, spoken word poetry as film, spoken word poetry as a recorded live performance and spoken word poetry as a virtual live performance. I will explore each of these forms of spoken word poetry in new media and examine the unique presentation of each form which gives forth a new art form that is born out of technological advancement.

2.2. Spoken Word Poetry as a Written Text in New Media

While it is argued that the computer screen distances the reader from the text (Armstrong & Casement, 1998) the new media uses the computer screen to bring the audience closer to the text and the artist due to its interactive nature. Lisa Brawley states that "On the Net, words are made to stand…as proxy for the person who types them" (Brawley, 1994). The words presented in text form in new media substitute the writer whose presence becomes obscure as the text begins to interact with the responses from the audience. The text therefore replaces the actor/poet as the audience begins to interact with it through comments, likes, shares, loves and emojis. The actor/poet takes back his active role in the performance by responding to comments by use of words, emojis, loves or likes. Brawley states that technology allows for people that have never met in person to interact with one another. Print makes it possible for a message to be delivered to the audience without the "face-to-face interaction" with the actor. The number of people that will read the printed text is unknown to the "speaker" because the message is "projected to an unseen audience," (Barber, 1997). The new media changes this perspective of the audience involved in the readership of the printed text. It is possible to know the number of people that have viewed a text presented in form of sub-titles on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter videos because these platforms have a special feature which allows users to see the number of people who have viewed a post. However, when the text is posted on these platforms in print form it is not possible to tell how many people have viewed it by simply looking at the likes, shares, loves and comments, because there are members of the audience who will read the poem, but will not react to it in the virtual space. To what extent therefore can we say that the performance of spoken word poetry in new media is a performance? Many spoken word poets in Kenya publish their written poems on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter where the interaction between them and their audience takes place. I will examine some of these poems and how the interaction between the poet and the audience takes place.

Ken Kibet, whose stage name is Mufasa Poet, has published a good number of written spoken word poems on his Facebook page. He usually posts a text-based spoken word poem on his Facebook page every Tuesday hence the hash tag #poetictuesdays on each of these posts. After posting each poem, he takes time to interact with his enthusiastic audience by liking their comments about him or his poem and responding to some of their comments. On 7th July 2020 Mufasa posted a poem which was accompanied by the hash tag #SabaSabaMarchForOurLives. In this poem he addresses the issue of ethnicity in Africa by drawing comparisons to racism in the United States of America and apartheid in South Africa. He mentions Rosa Parks and Emmett Till as an allusion to two African-American individuals who were both victims of racial prejudice in the United States. He also alludes to Steve Biko the anti-apartheid activist who led the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. The mention of 16th June is an allusion to the ambush that was made on many schoolchildren by the apartheid regime during the Soweto Uprising in South Africa, which left many of the students dead. He further exposes the racial stereotype of black people being referred to as monkeys when he says, "I heard about humans expected to stare at monkeys when they stare into the mirror." He draws comparisons between racism and ethnicity when he says, "But I saw it here." He talks about the risks involved in revealing one's second name in reference to the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya where different Kenyan communities rose against each other to protest election results. This led to the killings of many Kenyans by their fellow Kenyans which is a good example of black-to-black violence. In the poem Mufasa says "I saw how your wrongs can keep you alive but it is right that your second name can get you killed." There is something about a person's second name in Kenya. The second name in most cases reflects the ethnic community from which one comes from. During the post-election violence in Kenya, this was one of the ways the attackers were able to identify someone from another community that they were at war with. He mentions the ritual killings of albinos in Tanzania and the xenophobia in South Africa which are all

examples of black-to-black violence due to ethnicity. He criticizes the posting of dead bodies on social media before the family is notified about the death of a loved one when he says "Why do we share black bodies on our updates and don't even wait for their fathers to choose the date to view the body." He also talks about the unfairness of the police when dealing with civilians. This poem has attracted a lot of attention from the Facebook community with over 1000 likes, 58 shares and 78 comments.

Once Mufasa Poet posts this poem on his Facebook page his Facebook followers/audience begin interacting with it and their reactions are reflected through the likes, loves, shares and comments. The comments reflect the interpretation of the poem by the audience. Some use emojis to express what they feel about the poem. Emojis are computer generated miniature depictions of concepts and feelings. Facebook keeps designing new emojis for use. Each emoji has its own unique meaning which the audience use to express their feelings towards the poem. Below are examples of comments written by members of Mufasa Poet's audience on Facebook:

> "We want to know who teaches the police about rights because they are never wrong. 🌟🌟🌟🔥" (Eugizy Eugene Bii)
> "Deep😣.. 'don't even wait for their fathers to choose the date to view the body💔 who teaches the police about rights coz they're never wrong 😥😥" (Mitei Mercie)
>
> "Why do we feel like stepchildren 🥺hits different" (Purity naneu)

Eugizy Eugene Bii's comment is a repetition of one of the lines in the poem by Mufasa Poet. This kind of repetition is noted in many comments about this poem. This can be attributed to the fact that the poem was published at the time when the "Black Lives Matter" movement was being experienced in different countries across the world following the killing of George Floyd, an African American man, by a police officer who knelt on his neck and caused his death in the United States of America, leading to protests about systemic racism. By repeating this line, the members of the audience are sharing in the poet's view that the police

almost always get away with crimes committed against the civilians. Eugizy Eugene Bii uses two emojis to accompany these words. The first one is the glowing star emoji and the second one is the fire emoji. The glowing star emoji is used to depict something that is worth of praise. while the fire emoji is used to symbolize something that is attractive or excellent. These two emojis appear to be a compliment intended for the poet rather than a reaction to the line quoted. By using both the glowing star and fire emojis the reader is praising the poet for constructing such a witty statement. However, Mitei Mercie quotes the same line accompanied with the sad but relieved face emoji to show that although the people are sad at the hopelessness in dealing with wayward police officers, movements like "Black Lives Matter" are an indication of better things to come. She also uses the broken heart emoji after the words "don't even wait for their fathers to choose the date to view the body," to indicate the heart ache caused when people start posting photos of dead bodies on the internet before loved ones are notified of the deaths. Purity Naneu Quotes the line "Why do we feel like stepchildren" accompanied by the thinking face emoji to show that the member of the audience is in deep thought about how Africans discriminate other Africans, yet they are keen on noticing discrimination from other races. Worth noting in the comment section is that the audience responds to the poem by writing something in the comment section, but the poet only likes or loves their comments without any written communication. The only time he responds to a comment through written communication is if the comment is not related to the poem. For example, one of the followers reminds him that it is his birthday, to which he responds by wishing her a happy birthday.

Kennedy Odongo, whose stage name is Kennet B., uses text-based poetry alongside some of his video poems on YouTube. YouTube allows one to post a video that is accompanied with sub-titles, a feature that Kennet B. has taken advantage of to make sure that he meets the needs of his audience. Some of Kennet B.'s poems on YouTube combine both the written and the spoken word all in one video. One such a poem is entitled "Amani." In this poem,

Kennet B., is urging people to maintain peace and shun divisive politics. He is opposed to tribalism which characterizes Kenyan politics. He repeats the fact that it is important to greet your neighbour and tell them "Peace" and allow them to tell you "peace" first before asking for their name. As I had mentioned earlier when analysing one of Mufasa's spoken word poem, in Kenya, one's second name is important in identifying him/her with a particular ethnic community. This culture sometimes works as a disadvantage to many Kenyans when they find themselves among people who embrace ethnicity. Kennet B. discourages this retrogressive culture by encouraging people to interact with others freely without putting importance on their ethnic backgrounds. Since YouTube allows us to see the number of people who have viewed a post, it is important to mention that this poem has a large audience of over 3,000 views. For a performance to take place there must be a "performer" and an "observer" (Osipovich, 2006). Since in this section we are dealing with spoken word poetry in written form it is possible that there are members of Kennet B.'s audience that cannot hear him recite the poem, but they can watch the words as they move on the screen giving them a clear understanding of what the poem is all about. The sub-titles together with the visual images used by Kennet B. in this poem take the place of the performer and the person watching the YouTube video, is the observer. Technological advancement has enabled new modes of performance outside of traditional venues. This YouTube video poem with sub-titles has some comments from the audience. Below are some of the comments which can be obtained from Kennet B.'s YouTube channel.

"Amani Amani Jah bless inspiring bro (Robert Njuguna)
"Straight to the point……we need peace…." (Victoria Kyallo)
"Matata. Kali sana. Amani iwe nawe pia." (Wape Real TV)
"Share more teach more." (Kennet B.'s response to Real TV)
"Doing Something for Lake Victoria. Spirits are just calling, they keep on calling." (Kennet B.'s response to all.)

Dennis Mutuma, whose stage name is Dorphan uses both Facebook and Instagram to post his spoken word poems in written form. He is one of the few spoken word poets who interacts effectively with his audience on these platforms using written communication in the comment section. This is seen in one of his spoken word poems entitled "Mum Aliishia" posted on Instagram on 8th May 2016. The poem is about the effects of premarital pregnancies on the child. In the poem the persona laments the pain of having been raised without a real mother figure since his father took custody of him and handed him over to his parents (the persona's grandparents). He never enjoyed life like other children and his birthday always brought him painful memories as a child because there was no mother to sing him the birthday song like other children. This poem has attracted over 40 likes and many comments. One notable thing about Dorphan, is his one -on-one interaction with his audience. He responds to each comment from his viewers both in writing and through likes. Most of his written comments involve him appreciating his audience for taking their time to view the poem. However, there are times when he responds based on the content in the poem. In one of the comments, he calms down one of his viewers who had become emotional because of the sad mood in the poem. The viewer whose Instagam name is rono_linda had responded to the poem with a sad face emoji. Dorphan tells her not to be sad because it is a time to celebrate a queen, meaning that it is a time to appreciate his mother for bearing the stigma of premarital pregnancy at a time when the society was unkind to such women. Below is an excerpt of the comments from both Dorphan and members of his virtual audience.

> "This is so touching bro." (mikemwasi1)
> "@mikemwasi1 thank bro." (Dorphan)
> "@rono_linda don't be sad now. Now we celebrate a queen."
> (Dorphan)
> "Woi…but that piece is deep @dorphan_age." (rono-linda)
> "Hehee…much appreciation." (dorphan)

This can be translated as one of the elements of social presence in virtual performances. There is some degree of "immersion" in this viewer called linda_rono on Instagram whose

sadness is enhanced by the sad face emoji. Immersion is "the extent to which one feels psychologically and perceptually immersed in the environment." (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Rono_linda is psychologically affected by the sad mood in the poem and expresses it through an emoji. She later says that the poem is "deep," a Kenyan slang meaning that the poem involves intense emotions. Below is an excerpt of the comments from both the performer and the audience.

Therefore, to some extent we can say that the text in new media can act as a proxy to the performer in cases where there is some element of interaction between the poet and the audience. Mufasa interacts with his audience simply by hitting the like button to demonstrate that he has read the comment and agrees with it. While we might expect him to write more about the content of the poem the fact that he reacts to the audience through likes and sometimes even responds to a few comments is still some sort of interaction which could pass as a performance to some extent. Kennet B. and Dorphan are good at responding to their audience based on the content of their poems. Kennet B. will add a comment to describe what he feels about the poem he has posted while Dorphan engages his audience in interactive comments where there is a back-and-forth conversation about the poem like in the conversation between him and rono_linda about his poem "Muum Aliishia." To this extent we can say that there is some degree of presence in this type of spoken word poetry that is presented in new media, where the interaction between the poet and the audience is text-based. While the physical presence which is a requirement for a real theatrical performance is missing, there is still some degree of presence in these new media performances. The type of presence experienced is what Sheridan (1992) refers to as the "virtual presence", where those involved feel present in a virtual environment, in this case Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. The presence can further be classified into social and environmental presence as advanced by Hecter (1992). Facebook makes it possible for "social presence" to be

experienced because it has a feature which when enabled by the user it can help both the poet and the audience to see when one is online at the same time with them, and this can spark a conversation between the poet and the audience or amongst the audience in real time. All the new media spaces involve "environmental presence" because the audience is aware of the poem posted in text form within the virtual space which becomes the source of the interaction with the poet. The audience is also aware of posts from other members of the audience, and sometimes the interaction is between two or more members of the audience.

Therefore, text-based spoken word poetry in new media presents characteristics of both written and performance poetry. This type of poetry is presented as a written text, but due to the interactive nature of new media, it acquires the performance aspect as online readers communicate with the poet and other online readers through comments, likes, loves and shares. Spoken word poetry in written form allows the virtual audience to participate in a collective reading experience that enables them to actively share their reactions with others in the virtual space.

2.3. Spoken Word Poetry as Film in New Media

In this era of affordable digital media technology, spoken word poets have moved their creativity a notch higher, by incorporating film in their performances in new media. According to David Z. Saltz (2009), this type of digital technology is "vastly more ubiquitous, affordable, and accessible…in this era of iPods, iPhones, Second Life, Skype, Facebook, and Twitter." The use of social media is widespread which enables posts to reach a wider audience making it ideal for spoken word poetry produced as film. Making a film for new media consumption is far much cheaper than the theatres because the poet does not have to spend a lot of money on billboards and flyers to market the show, and even pay for the theatre house that will host him/her. The Poet already has his followers on new media who

will be a ready audience, and sometimes even invite others to watch, or share the post with others in their network. Chuck Tyron (2013) states that social media plays an important role in bringing the audience together to experience a movie or a TV show. In the case of spoken word poetry film in new media, there is that collective viewership from the audience who will tag others along or even share what they have watched on their own timelines, to be viewed by others in their network, hence increasing the number of spectators. While the film adds to the general aesthetic appeal of the poem, the members of the audience in such cases are more interested in the words of the poet. Their reaction is usually more about the content of the poem as opposed to what they saw in the film.

In this section we seek to establish whether there is liveness in spoken word poetry presented as film in new media by focusing on the interaction between the poet and the audience as well as the interaction amongst members of the audience when reacting to the poem. The focus is on performances by Brigeddia Poet, Mufasa and Kennet B., on YouTube. I choose YouTube for this section because most of the spoken word poets use it as a space for their film poems. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter also allow such films but most spoken word poets in Kenya prefer YouTube. They only post the YouTube link on those other social media spaces as a marketing strategy in order to get more spectators.

Brigeddia Poet has posted his spoken word poem entitled "Lizzi Mammu" on YouTube in film form. This poem is about domestic violence where the persona narrates the story of a childhood friend whom he loved very much when they were growing up. However, in their adulthood They each went their separate ways. This childhood friend found herself in a marriage that caused her great pain and suffering under a very abusive husband, who tortured her both physically and psychologically. In the end she walked out of the abusive marriage, and this is where the persona met her trying to make ends meet all by herself by selling groundnuts at a bus stop. In the film, Brigeddia Poet is seen narrating the story of Lizzi Mammu Through dramatization. In the film Lizzi's life's journey is acted out from the time

she is a young girl growing up in a happy home to the time she gets married to the abusive husband and walks out after days of enduring abuse in the hands of her husband. This poem has over 18,00 views, over 400 likes and over 70 comments which is an indication that it is popular. Below are some of the comments from the audience:

Malcolm David Sila - Bid Fat Farewell 3 years ago

Great message. Domestic and Emotional Abuse is something we need to condemn highly as we also create awarness about it , Well done!

CAPTAIN JAYBEE 1 year ago

This is great. Message is home. You're our shujaa.

REN MWENDWA 3 years ago

amazing

Lizz Mynym 3 years ago

Good work I must say...Umegonga ndipo, its a nightmare every single lady would never like to experience.. 🙆🏻💔.. Be blessed @briggediathepoet

Margaret Mwangi 2 years ago

Thank u soldier

Joshua Lumbasi 11 months ago

Bro your tallent is exemplary...the message is stright home with great eloquence. It's long since you did others...you need to keep on with this man.

Brigeddia General

11 months ago

Joshua Lumbasi thank you sir. I got you. I'm working on a couple of such pieces bro, I appreciate you so much art is good.

Ellen K 3 years ago

I can't believe I have never known of this guy. Dude,you're so good..market yourself well enough.I want to see a brother on an international platform.

Brigeddia General

1 year ago

Ellen K thank you so much, you spoke well of me, and now it's happening right here in Dallas Texas. God bless you

k respect 💪

michael ogola 9 months ago

Wow! A very vital message to help stop domestic violence

In the comment section of this YouTube post, Brigeddia Poet interacts with the audience based on the poem as well as issues outside the poem. Most of the comments are a reaction about the content of the poem. Majority of the audience like Malcolm David Sila, Lizz Mynym and Michael Ogola, recognize that the poem is about domestic violence by stating so in the comment section. There are also several spectators who commend the poet for the great work in composing the poem. Some of these comments elicit conversations between the poet and the followers on topics outside the poem. For example, Ellen K is fascinated with the poet's talent and goes ahead to tell him to market himself well, because he would like to see "a brother" performing on an international platform. Brigeddia Poet responds by appreciating the spectator for speaking well of him, probably on an international platform, and that he is now performing in Dallas, Texas. It should be noted that Brigeddia Poet started off his performance poetry while in Kenya, but he has since relocated to Dallas, Texas. Through such comments we catch up with what the poet is up to beyond the poem that is posted on YouTube.

Mufasa Poet also posts his film poetry on YouTube where he interacts with members of the audience. He posted his spoken word poem entitled "For my Future Wife" on 8th August 2018. The persona in the poem is a young man who is in love with a girl he wishes to marry. He expresses his feelings for this girl and states the things that make her stand out of the rest. She has a sweet smile "that stretches like a hand" and touches those around her, and she is also God fearing. These are the traits that the persona loves the most about this girl. In the

film the girl is a waiter at a restaurant and her beautiful features are enhanced with her

flowery uniform that contains shades of blue. She treats her customers with courtesy and

always carries a smile on her face. The persona who is also the poet is presented as a guest at

the hotel where the lady works as a waiter and that is where they met. This poem has over

110,000 views, over 3500 likes and over 400 comments which shows its popularity. Below

are comments from the audience about this poem.

> Ascar Sudi 1 year ago (edited)
> She who is shielded by God Cannot be seen through ordinary eyes Cannot be loved
> out of lust and attraction To pursue her you must pursue God Only then do your vows
> come to life Blessed is the woman who walks with God Blessed is the man who finds
> her.
> Kintango Chibelabela 1 year ago
> This is a very nice piece... Who is it attributed to? I would like to post it with proper
> credits.
> Ascar Sudi 1 year ago
> @Kintango Chibelabela I wrote it on a whim. You can post it.
> Kintango Chibelabela 1 year ago
> @Ascar Sudi thank you.
> caroline macharia 1 year ago
> God please raise men in our generation who have and acknowledge you as the centre
> of love and see you as the greatest example of love. Thanks for using this one this
> way.
> Jackline Ndung'u 1 year ago
> Caroline we thank God, because Mufasa is clearly on the list. And I believe our good
> God is never in lack of remnants. But I pray for more men to be audacious enough to
> stand out and be the gentlemen that Christ has made them to be with zero
> consideration on what the world has to say.
> ..well done!
> Eng Mwangi Ndaiga 1 year ago
> Dear future wifey, I left this comment so that you may know that I was here. I
> wouldn't say it any better than Mufasa did; but I promise to offer more
> Mufasa Poet
> 1 year ago
> 😄
> stacey faustine 1 year ago
> Jesuuus...I found myself crying..when a man knows God is love n acknowledge He
> shld be the centre that's it...felt as if am the future wife lol

The comments clearly show that the members of the audience are impressed by Mufasa's

skills in weaving a love poem. The first comment from Ascar Sudi leads to an interaction

amongst members of the audience. Ascar Sudi takes a Christian perspective in the poem and

adds his own understanding of what a good wife should be. He writes that a good wife comes from God and to find her, a man needs to seek God first. Kintango Chibelabela, responds to Ascar Sudi's comment by appreciating his observation and asking whom it is intended for. Ascar Sudi responds that he wrote it on a whim and encourages him to share it since he had requested to do so. Kintango Chibelabela thanks him and that interaction comes to an end. Caroline Macharia thanks God for having poets like Mufasa who acknowledge God as the centre of love. Jackline Ndung'u responds to Caroline Macharia's comment by agreeing with her that indeed Mufasa acknowledges God as the centre of love and that more men need to follow his example. Another comment comes from Eng. Mwangi Ndaiga who uses Mufasa's poem to address his future wife too. He says that since he is not endowed with the skills to communicate his feelings for her, he left his comment on Mufasa's poem so that she can know that he was there and would wish to tell her the same words, but he is not talented. Mufasa responds to this comment by using the Face with Tears of Joy emoji which is used to show that someone is laughing uncontrollably. This emoji is mostly used when laughing about something in a positive way. Stacey Faustine also leaves a comment on Mufasa's posted poem. She flirts with the poet by stating that she was pushed into tears and felt like she was the future wife referenced in the poem. However, she ends her comment with "lol" which is the short form of "Laughing Out Loud", so we are now sure that she was not serious about the crying bit in her comment, which makes it even more hilarious.

Kennet B.'s Poem "Green Talk" is also posted on his YouTube channel in form of a film. The poem is about environmental degradation. In the poem the persona is concerned about the state of our environment that continues to be depleted as the days go by. He cautions that if people do not start taking matters of environmental conservation seriously, the whole earth will soon be wiped out. In the film there are scenes where the poet is seen reciting the poem, and there are others where images of the environmental degradation are played for us to see

the effects of human activity on natural resources. The poet uses visual imagery to present to us where the earth is headed if measures to promote environmental conservation are not implemented soon. We are shown scary images of the earth burning up, animals dying and people lacking basic natural resources like water. The poem has over 2000 views and many likes and comments. Below are some of the comments from the audience.

<u>Jackie Mutua 8 years ago</u>
Wisdom right there. I love it :-)
<u>Franklin Macedo 8 years ago</u>
Cl@MOR ... Amazing Words....for a Livin' Plantet...NEW EARTH growing up...
<u>Kriss Rhymez 6 years ago</u>
man u got nice and educative rhymez. nice

Jackie Mutua, a member of the audience feels that the poet has invoked a lot of wisdom in the poem. Franklin Macedo repeats the phrase "for a living planet" which is used repeatedly in the poem like a chorus. Kriss Rhyme is fascinated by the educative attributes of the poem as well as the rhyming words in the poem. Kennet B.'s interaction with his audience in this poem is not observed. The number of views is the proof that the poem has a bigger spectatorship even though we do not see many likes and comments to match the views, which is a trend that seems common even with the other spoken word poets.

There is interaction between the poet and the audience as well as interaction amongst the audience in spoken word poetry presented in film form on YouTube. This interaction is in the virtual spaces and not in real time like what we have in a real theatrical event. Traditionally, performance involves physical co-presence between the performer and the audience which is lacking in this type of spoken word poetry. The whole film is recorded which removes the poet further from the audience, because what we have are representations of the poet and the accompanying audio-visual images. The comments from the audience do not affect the poet's performance in any way because by the time the comments start coming in, the performance is already done. However, there is virtual presence, since the audience is interacting with the poet and other spectators in a virtual space, sometimes even in real time. From the interaction

between Brigeddia Poet, Kennet B. and Mufasa Poet and members of their audience there is virtual co-presence. The three poets interact with their spectators based on the poem in the film. Some members of the audience even show their emotions through their choice of words in the comment section and the use of emojis.

Spoken word poetry as film makes use of audio-visual images. The poet uses these images to enhance the meaning in the poem. This will be discussed in chapter three. However, the reactions from the audience do not make any references to the audio-visual images in the poems. To the audience, it is as if it is only the poet's words that matter and not the accompanying audio-visual images. This is one feature of spoken word poetry that is worth noting: The poet's skilful weaving of words is what captures the attention of the audience more than anything else. New media by nature thrives in the use audio-visual images to relay information but spoken word poetry in this space is proof that in poetry words matter.

2.4. Spoken Word Poetry as a Recorded Live Performance in New Media

Some spoken word poets have mastered the art of interacting with both the physical and the virtual audience in a single performance. These poets have their live performances recorded which they then post on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and/or Instagram for their virtual audience. Their interaction with the physical audience in theatre houses meets the traditional definition of a performance which involves a situation where both the poet and the audience are physically present to each other (Fischer-Litche, 2008 The recorded live performance presents a unique type of presence that transcends the traditional theatrical performances. Theodore Gracyk (1997), highlights how the continued use of technology in live performances reduces the "radical difference between live performances…and recordings." He asserts that the two things missing in a recording that are usually experienced in a live

performance are "lack of visual data and the absence of the social event of the performance space" (p.139). He believes that technology can help overcome these two "deficiencies."

In this case the new media creates a virtual space where the audience can engage in a "social event" as they interact with the poet and others based on a recorded live performance in the virtual space. All the new media spaces covered in this research have a special feature which allows the members of the audience to comment on a post. This creates some social interaction between the parties involved. Gracyk is opposed to the idea of a musical performance being summed up in the "acoustical results." He states that an ideal musical performance should be "sequenced and coordinated by human performers in real-time, in the presence of an audience, for that audience" (p. 140). The audience interaction in such performances should be for the purposes of evaluating the actions of the performers (Gracyk, 1997). Therefore, when considering the spoken word poetry in new media as a performance we are not only interested in the poem itself, but also on the actions of the poet and the audience, during the performance. In the previous forms of spoken word poetry covered in this research our concentration was on the poem itself and the responses from the audience and the poet. In this section we are also going to look at the actions of the poet and the physical audience in a theatrical performance. We look at performance at two levels: the real theatrical performance where the poet and the audience are physically present to each other and the recorded performance where the poet and the audience share a virtual space. In chapter three we will explore the changes that take place when a live theatrical performance is recorded, especially in relation to the audience. The spoken word poetry of Namatsi Lukoye, Raya Wambui and Teardrops will be considered in this section. I will focus on their performances on YouTube since it is one of those spaces that is ideal for uploading posts in video form.

Namatsi Lukoye performs her spoken word poems entitled "Queen" and "I am Not Yours to Fix" before a live audience. "Queen" is a poem that celebrates African women in leadership.

She mentions some of the greatest African queens like Makeda, Nziga, Tiye and Cleopatra, and expresses her wish to be like them. This poem subverts the idea that the traditional African culture relegated women to the periphery by ascertaining that there were African women in history who took up leadership roles and participated actively in the political, social, religious and economical activities in their communities. "Not Yours to Fix" is a very emotional poem in which the persona addresses those who think that she is too fragile because of her depression and needs them to fix her life. The persona laments about the judgement in the eyes of those who think that it is their duty to fix her life and wishes that they could just let her be, because she will never be what they want her to be. The recording of this live performance begins when Namatsi Lukoye is already on stage. She adjusts the microphone and says "hi" to the audience as the instrumentalists begin playing their musical accompaniments (we have Brian Luvasi, the violinist and Cee L, the guitarist, with her on stage.) The audience responds by saying "hi," after which she thanks them for attending her show. She then says, "It is just an intro of how my poetry starts." Someone in the audience is heard saying "We are happy" but the camera does not capture him. We only hear his voice. She begins her spoken word poetry performance and there is silence in the audience. The camera man does not show much of the audience. We only see the poet and the instrumentalists. The poet makes use of non-verbal cues like facial expression, gestures, tonal variation and change in the pace of speech throughout the poem. The second part of her performance involves a fashion show where men and women cut walk across the stage displaying their fashion designs. The male models line up on one side of the stage while the female models line up on the other side sandwiching Namatsi Lukoye. The audience applauds the fashion show team once they are done with their performance, and they line up before them to bow out. Namatsi Lukoye uses this opportunity to introduce her final performance which involves her spoken word poetry recital accompanied by a dance from Calvin Odhiambo. This is a very emotional poem, and the dancer helps to enhance the feelings of the

persona by dancing around her and sometimes even rolling on the floor. At the end of the poem the dancer intimately touches the poet's hand as she completes her last line, then hugs her and together they walk off the stage.

Namtsi Lukoye's recorded performance on YouTube has over 5,000 views and over 35 likes and a few comments. There are two types of audience in this performance: the physical audience that shares the same physical space with the poet and the virtual audience which interacts with both the poet and other members of the audience in the virtual space. In chapter four we will explore the different types of audiences in a recorded virtual performance. This YouTube video does not show the physical audience, but rather concentrates on the poet and her team on the stage even though we can hear the voices from the audience. The virtual audience therefore misses on the non-verbal reaction of the physical audience as the poet performs, which takes away the total experience of a real theatrical performance. Their presence is only felt remotely through the comments they leave after watching the video. Below are some of the comments by the virtual audience.

Peetstar Poet 5 years ago

amazing.... dressed coool, and epic perfomance

Rhineheart Ogwedhi 5 years ago

Way to go girl ,Super performance!!

petrooz Music producer 5 years ago

namatsi you are blessed!!!!!!!!

Idi Amin 5 years ago

Great poem ... video guy failed you though

In the comment section most members of the audience commend the poet for a great performance, as seen in the words of Peetstar Poet, Rhineheart Ogwedhi, Petrooz and Music

producer. Idi Amin not only expresses her satisfaction with the poem, but also comments on the quality of the video. She feels that the person who prepared the video did not do quality work. The number of views for this post is over 5,000 which indicates its popularity on social media. The physical audience attracts a smaller audience compared to what we experience on YouTube, which is a clear indication that spoken word poetry has been popularized to a higher level by the new media technology. In the comments section I also noted that there is no interaction between the poet and her virtual audience.

Raya Wambui also posts her recorded spoken word poetry on YouTube. Her performance at the "Poetry Africa 2014" in South Africa was posted on YouTube by the Centre for Creative Arts. This performance attracted over 5,000 viewers on YouTube and about 63 likes and a few comments. She performs several of her poems on this platform which include: "You Work for Me," "Stand Up," "Wetu" "I am Not Sorry," and "An Ode to the Amazing Fathers of This World." During the entire performance, the stage is set with two microphones, where one is placed at the centre while the other one is placed on the far right. When Raya walks onto the stage, she carries the microphone placed at the centre of the stage and moves it closer to the other one that is placed on the far right while saying "I am so happy to be here." She begins to adjust the microphone while saying, "When you are in high school, and you are that loner in the corner writing in your book…that is the kind of thing that you dream of now. Somebody gonna call me up and take me to another country." She laughs, then says, "It is interesting that half a continent away these are things that we still have in common. We come from cultures that encourage respect for leaders. I understand you have a whole genre of poetry called praise poetry…yeah? (laughs)…In the end our leaders forget that they are our employees, and this is my reminder…" It is after this cue that she begins the performance of one of her poems entitled, "You Work for Me." Just like she says in her introductory speech before her recitation, this poem is a reminder to our leaders that they are employed by us and

their duty is to serve us. She taunts political leaders who forget serving the interests of their electorates immediately they rise to power. In her poem "Stand Up," Raya is sarcastic of political leaders who incite their communities to attack people from other communities leading to inter-tribal clashes like the one experienced in Kenya during the post-election violence in 2007/2008. Before the performance of this poem Raya gives a prelude about this poem. She informs the audience that the post-election violence in Kenya motivated her to compose this poem and she lets the audience know that she will be doing an impersonation in her performance where she will try to take over the form of these politicians that the poem addresses. She goes on to perform all the other poems while engaging the audience in an interactive session by asking them questions and giving them background information about each of the poems she performs. The physical audience with her as she performs cheers her on with claps every, time she completes the recitation of each of the poems. The virtual audience on YouTube cheer her on too by leaving their comments on the channel. Below are the comments.

> Gbla TV Online 3 years ago
> She revitalizes my soul and leaves my heart poetically riddled... She possesses great poetic elegance!
> Glady Mwende 4 years ago
> amazing. I love Raya
> Ezekiel Kuol Abuk 1 year ago
> Raya ni mnoma

There are only three comments on this virtual platform, and Raya does not respond to them. All the comments are in praise of the poet and her talent in poetry.

Teardrops whose real name is Mark Joshua Ouma presents his spoken word poetry on many platforms. One of those platforms is "Churchill Show", formerly known as "Churchill Live." This show is hosted by a Kenyan comedian known as Daniel Ndambuki and is aired on NTV Kenya every Sunday and Thursday at 8.00 pm. This platform is of interest to this research

because it is one of the few instances where the physical audience is captured in the recording of spoken word poetry posted in new media.

"Story Come" is one of Teardrop's spoken word poetry performances on "Churchill Show" posted on 25th April 2017 on YouTube. At the time of this research the poem had 270,276 views, 4,200 likes and 164 comments on YouTube, which is evidence that the poet has a big audience. The performance begins with the poet on stage dressed in a grey suit and tie, which is a deviation from the casual wear that most spoken word poets, including Teardrops himself, prefer. This could be partly because the poem is like a sermon since it makes use of Biblical allusion to a great extent. With his left hand in pocket and right hand holding the microphone the poet introduces himself as one who likes "words" hence his interest in poetry. He uses a pun to state that if his interest was in "chicks" (an informal word used to refer to young women) he could have ventured in poultry. This sends an uproar in the audience. He pauses to allow the laughter to cool down before he begins the recitation of his poem. He only removes his left hand from the pocket during the recitation of the first stanza. This stanza is an allusion to the story of Jesus in the Bible. The poem reflects upon the good deeds performed by Jesus which were taken for granted by the people, yet they were intended to save the world from some of the pertinent issues affecting us today. The poem contrasts the humility of Jesus with the extravagant life led by modern day celebrities who fancy publicity and recognition in public places.

> You see wanaweza kill the king but not the kingdom,
> Wanaweza kill the prophet but not the prophesy,
> Mtumwa hauwawi,
> Si aliheal wengi na bado wakamwita mchawi,
> Hakuhitaji red carpets chini walitandika matawi,
> Huskii hakuhitaji flashy light ya camera na action,
> Na flashy light kama masuperstar wa Hollywood,
> **Translation**
> You see they can kill the king but not the kingdom,
> They can kill the prophet but not the prophecy,

The messenger should not be killed,

He healed many but was still called a witch,

He did not need red carpets they spread leaves down,

He was never in need of the flashy light of cameras and action,

And flashy light like the Hollywood superstars

In the poem we learn that the role of Jesus was to make sure that the people lead holy lives unlike what we are witnessing today. The poem ridicules those who promote alcoholism by making sure that cheap liquor is in constant supply to the addicts. The persona is critical of the Kenyan culture where rich people are seen attending parties to buy alcohol for the masses and promoting drunkenness. At this point he points out that Jesus performed wonders which is an allusion of his changing water into wine which was intended to feed the hungry people and not just to make them drunk like our present-day celebrities do.

One of the stanzas is repeated throughout the poem in the form of a chorus. This chorus makes use of rhyme, allusion and sarcasm to emphasize the role of Jesus in the lives of mankind. The poet states that Jesus died on the cross for humanity and will come back like a thief to find many unaware of his role in the world. During the performance of this chorus the poet makes poignant pauses in specific parts to allow the audience time to applaud and cool down before he continues. These places where the poet pauses in spoken word poetry is usually referred to as a punchline. A punchline carries a very important message in a poem and most of the time the poet usually makes use of sound effects and humour/sarcasm to draw the attention of the audience.

Out of a pool of blood rose flower iligrow

He rose na akaraise ma'heroes

He is one in a million hao wengine ni ma'zeros

You see Jesus wept teardrops nikaflow

Ulikufa ndio niishi

Ulifast ndio nidishi

Forever uhimidiwe Jehova Nisi

Translation

Out of a pool of blood a rose flower grew,

He rose and brought up heroes,

He is one in a million those others are zeroes,

You see Jesus wept teardrops flowed,

He died so that I can live,

He dies so that I can eat,

Forever be blessed Jehova Nissi.

The reaction from the audience is the same every time this chorus is recited by the poet. Every time the poet rhymes "heroes" and "zeroes" the audience cheers him on and claps. Some who are conversant with the spoken word tradition of cheering on a poet snap their fingers to show that an important point has been made. The poet on his part makes a poignant pause to allow the message to sink, and to allow the audience to cool down before taking on the next stanza. By rhyming "heroes" and "zeroes" the poem makes it clear that the role of Jesus to humankind surpasses that of any other celebrity out there. The virtual audience on YouTube show their solidarity with the poet that God reigns supreme through their comments and likes.

Ibrahim Munduli

2 years ago

He Rose na aka raise ma heros, Hes one in a million, hao wengine ni mazeroes.
Anthoney Muthendu

2 years ago

Big up bro Jesus fasted for 40days ndio nishibe forever

KAKA MAASAI

3 years ago

Kweli uhimidiwe Jehovah nisi. Im jesus'holic. 🙌 praise love and respect to the almighty father. God is great.

Ibrahim Munduli's comment which is a repeat of one of the poet's punchlines is evidence that both the physical audience and the virtual audience find those lines impactful.

Every time after reciting this chorus the poet debriefs the audience by engaging them is a call and response session that requires their participation. He says, "Story story story, sema story come", which means "Story story story, say story come." To which the audience responds "Story come" as instructed, then the poet proceeds with his recitation. (Next: Talk about the santa claus part which is talked about by members of the virtual audience before the paragraph below which should be the last one)

Most of the time the virtual audience restrict themselves to talking about the poem or about the poem. However, one member of the virtual audience makes a comment about a physical member of the audience which opens up a conversation amongst the members of the virtual audience.

Salma sally

4 years ago

Huyu mzungu ako kwa VIP bt hashiki any..

6Rash Bash

3 years ago

salma Hussein hahaha umepima kweli

Joe Wamwai

2 years ago

Salma sally, ni sawa amelipwa vip..

In the conversation, a virtual member of the audience called Salma Sally observes that there is a white man in the VIP section of the audience who does not understand the poem because the poem is recited in Sheng, a Kenyan urban slang used mostly by youths in Nairobi, Kenya. Sheng is a combination of English, Swahili and African languages. Teardrops is known for his use of Sheng in his spoken word poems. In fact, he always ends all his poems by declaring that Sheng is his mother tongue.

Nimejua hii life ni drama

Kiswahili na English ni grammar

But Sheng ndio lugha ya mama

Another member of the virtual audience called Rash Bash laughs and responds to Salma's comment by stating that Salma is a very keen observer. This shows that Salma's remark has an influence on Rash Bash's reaction to the performance hence the laughter. Another member of the virtual audience called Joe Wamwai states that it is okay for the white man not to understand the poem because he paid to sit in the VIP section. This remark appears to be some sort of sarcasm indicating that the person who has paid more for the event is also the same one who is left out of the performance due to language barrier. This conversation between Salma, Rash and Joe, who are members of the virtual audience shows that members of the physical audience form another layer of the performance. They are also being viewed by the virtual audience just like the poet who is the centre of the performance.

Therefore, in the virtual space members of the virtual audience acquire a bird's eye view that enables them to view the poet as well as the physical audience. This attribute is unique to a virtual audience only since the physical audience cannot view the virtual audience. Another attribute of the virtual audience is that members can be influenced by the reactions of both the physical and the virtual audience. An uproar of laughter in the physical audience will most definitely cause a similar reaction in the virtual audience. Similarly, a comment or reaction by one member of the virtual audience is likely to affect all the other members who have access to it. While the physical space is set within a certain time frame, the virtual space is timeless. The virtual audience continues to influence the reaction of other viewers beyond the physical space.

2.5. Spoken Word Poetry as Virtual Live Performance in Social Media Spaces

Spoken word poetry as a virtual live performance pushes performance poetry to a whole new level. The poet and the audience interact with each other in real time even though physical co-presence between the two parties is not experienced. This type of performance is possible through the Facebook watch party feature which allows the user to either post a recorded video or go live for their audience to watch them perform and react in real time (D'Cruze, 2018). A few spoken word poets like Mufasa Poet and Raya Wambui have exploited this feature on Facebook. For a performance to be effective the oral artists must ensure that aspects such as "expressiveness of tone, gesture, facial expression, dramatic use of pause and rhythm, the interplay of passion, dignity or humour, receptivity to the reactions of the audience" are experienced by the audience (Finnegan, 2012 P.6). All these aspects can be experienced in a virtual live performance as opposed to all those other types of spoken word poetry performances on social media discussed in the previous sections. The recorded live performance allows for the reactions of the audience in real time. On the 7th of June 2020, Mufasa Poet held a Facebook Watch Party live event referred to as "Mufasa Live In Concert." In this performance only the poet and his crew were physically present to each other while the audience was virtual due to the COVID-19 restrictions that required social distancing during the pandemic that has claimed many lives globally. The concert was organized to raise awareness about police brutality and violation of human rights especially during the pandemic where a few Kenyans lost their lives in the hands of the police who used excessive force when trying to enforce curfew rules. In the virtual live performance, which is recorded on Mufasa's Facebook page the poet kicks off with a self-reflective poem in which he expresses his concerns about the modern-day perception of good works of art as those with more likes on social media. He feels that the content of a work of art should be used to gauge one's achievement in the performing arts and not just the number of likes.

See I always wanted my art to be about what I know,

But people keep making it about how many people know me,

How many directions I have to take,

Before I am as famous as one direction

I know my name every alphabet,

But you ask me to prove myself numerically?

Anyway, numbers won't count me out.

During this virtual performance Mufasa uses facial expression, body movement, tonal variation, and musical accompaniment to add meaning the poem. All these features were visible to the virtual audience at the time of the performance. The virtual audience interacted with the poet and with each other in real time as the performance was taking place. In the middle of his performance, Mufasa is heard saying that he will soon read the comments from the audience. In this performance "orality and technology" are intertwined (Kaschula, 2017) giving rise to a new aesthetic in performance poetry. Through the Facebook Watch Party feature the poet performed live to the audience who in turn used the comments, likes, loves and emoji features to react to the performance. Their reaction had an impact on the poet's overall performance. One of the comments from a virtual audience who experienced this social event sums up the beauty of this performance.

"Mufasa Kibet yours isn't just poetry but an outpouring of your soul... It's transcendent & beautiful 😭"

The actual performance is essential in oral literature. It is the "first and most basic characteristic of oral literature" that is often neglected by scholars (Finnegan, 2012, p. 4). The aesthetic experience of the performer and the audience can only be fulfilled through the actual performances. The Facebook Watch Party live is an attempt at keeping an accurate record of an actual performance to the audience in real time for future generations. The effectiveness of a performance depends on how well an artist manipulates the use of non-verbal communication and involvement of the audience (Finnegan, 2012). All these aspects

can be recorded in a Facebook Watch Party since the actions of the poet and the audience are captured in real time.

Mufasa Poet (Ken Kibet), a spoken word poet from Kenya, held a Facebook Watch Party live event on 7th June 2020. The event was called "Mufasa Live In Concert," and it was a virtual performance in which only the poet and his crew were physically present to each other, but the audience participated live through the internet. The whole event was recorded live and is available on his Facebook page. Watching the recording of the event gives one the feeling that it is live, because the comments keep popping up the way they did during the time of the actual performance, where they appeared in real time. Mufasa performs several poems in this concert. He starts off with a self-reflective piece, in which he voices out the challenges facing artists in the contemporary society, where the number of followers and likes on social media is equated to success, without considering the content of a work of art. He believes he has more to tell the world, and the number of likes is not a measure of his worth as a spoken word poet.

> See I always wanted my art to be about what I know,
> But people keep making it about how many people know me,
> How many directions I have to take,
> Before I am as famous as one direction
> I know my name every alphabet,
> But you ask me to prove myself numerically?
> Anyway, numbers won't count me out.

During the performance he says these lines with increased tempo. He also brings both his hands to his chest when he says *See I always wanted my art to be about what I know,* before releasing them when he says the next line. He moves each of his hands in a different direction when saying *How many directions I have to take*, before lifting up his left index finger when saying *But you ask me to prove myself numerically?* Afterwards Mufasa looks straight into the camera, as he nods his head when saying *Anyway, numbers won't count me out*. All these

add to the meaning and aesthetic appeal of the poem. The look on his face, when he says the last line, is an affirmation to his audience that he will not allow himself to be defined by the number of likes he gets for his performances, because he knows his real worth. He then drops his eye contact with the audience when he picks up the next line.

The "musical setting" of this poem also contributes to the general mood and atmosphere. As Mufasa begins to recite the lines quoted above, the musical instruments become louder than before, as if to draw the attention of the audience to the importance of those lines. However, the voice of the poet remains above that of the musical instruments, allowing the audience to get what is being recited. The element of musical accompaniment is common in the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya. Dorphan has made use of it in some of his poems like "Najua", "Mashujaa" and "Nyota Yangu", while Kennet B. did the same in his poems like "Silent River", "Amani" and "Green Talk." Namatsi Lukoye has also made use of musical accompaniment in her poems like "Queen", "Tomorrow" and "Words", while Brigeddia General used music in his poems "Mheshimiwa" and "Lizzi Mammu." All these poems are available on their YouTube channels, and some have even been shared on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. This is in line with Finnegan's observation that "Much of what is normally classed as poetry in African oral literature is designed to be performed in a musical setting, and the musical and the verbal elements are thus interdependent" (Finnegan, 2012). Such forms may have a soloist who may be accompanied by a chorus and musical instruments, which is common with most of Dorphan's spoken word poems. The feature of musical accompaniment is experienced throughout Mufasa's Live In Concert. There is a vocalist for every poem recited by Mufasa, as well as instrumentalists. The songs are used to heighten the mood of the poem, as well as complement the message.

The other visual elements of a performance, like the costumes and accoutrements, are also important in creating the general atmosphere in African oral literature (Finnegan, 2012). During the entire performance, Mufasa is adorned in a yellow, black and grey African print

regalia over a pair of black trousers, and a black round neck shirt with two long beaded necklaces hanging on his chest. The yellow in the regalia represents the title in Mufasa's spoken word poetry anthology, *Raising a Sun*. He uses the concert to advertise his newly released poetry anthology. "The title looks at a new dawn of Africa, a hopeful Africa with her youthful population steering the way, but in retrospect, things are not that easy as it were" (Okach, 2020). He also has his signature black beret on his head, and black and white sports shoes. The black colour is dominant in his costume, which may be taken to represent the race of the people whose plight he explores in his poetry. The décor has an image of a person's face with tears rolling down one eye. This is in line with the objective of the concert, which is aimed at sensitizing the public about police brutality and violation of human rights in Kenya.

 In African oral literature the audience is usually actively involved in the creation of a work of art. "An audience of some kind is normally an essential part of the whole literary situation" (Finnegan, 2012 – p.12). Spoken word poetry, performed virtually through the Facebook Watch Party feature, allows the interaction between the poet and the audience in real time. Members of the audience show their reaction to the performance by leaving a comment in the comments, liking or sharing the post with their social media friends. The like button allows members of the audience to use emojis, GIFS, or Avatars to show their reaction to the performance. During the "Mufasa Live In Concert" held on 7th June 2020 there were at least 13,000 Facebook users who watched the performance as indicated in the number of views recorded. Their reaction to the performance was recorded and can still be accessed to date. One of Mufasa's top fan writes "One day, one day a poet will get a million live viewers." This is in response to Mufasa's lament that sometimes people rate his poetry based on the number of likes/views on social media. Another member of the audience says "We can't forget the band the music at the background *iko freshi* kabisa 🕺💖💖💖🎼🎼♪ 𝄞 🎶🎶🎶". This can be loosely translated as "We cannot forget the band. The music in the background is awesome." This member of the audience uses emojis to show how much she appreciates the

musical accompaniment used in Mufasa's spoken word poetry. Therefore, it is important to take the entire performance into consideration during analysis rather than just concentrating on what the poet says. All the aspects of the performance contribute to the aesthetic appeal and how the message is understood by members of the audience. Below are some of the comments that can help us gain insights into how the spoken word poem was experienced by members of the audience who were mostly virtual. These comments together with the entire performance will be handed down from one generation to the next and will affect to a great extent how other viewers will react to the poem in future.

"Mufasa Kibet yours isn't just poetry but an outpouring of your soul... It's transcendent & beautiful 😣"
"We must change it for our children, women, men for everyone."
"Oyess n I love how they express themselves n the message that they are sharing to us ....n big up to them n will support continuously"
"Snap snap snap cheers   great work buddy"
"The saxophonist is on 🔥 and all the band guys are 💃💃"
"Are we the generation that could not generate the power to be unslaved? Eeeish! 🔥🔥🔥"
"huyo jamaa wa saxa apewe delmonte kwa bill yangu" – Translation: The guy playing the saxophone should be given Delmonte (juice from Delmonte company) on my bill.
"The melody is speaking. Have we failed as a generation?"
"That piece my boys are dying has hit home very differently🙌🙌🙌Thank you Mufasa Kibet. Also the dress code iko tu sawaaa. I like it." – Translation: Also the dress code is just okay. I like it.

As witnessed in the comments, the members of the audience are not only responding to the words in the poem, but to all aspects of the performance, including the musical accompaniment. Throughout the performance Mufasa is heard encouraging his virtual audience to keep writing the comments and tagging their friends. Members of the audience also react to the performance by sharing it with others or tagging their friends along. You can tag someone to watch/read a Facebook post by simply writing their Facebook name in the comment section, and the person will be alerted that their attention is required. All these comments are part of the performance and should not be left out in analysis. Mufasa takes his interaction with the virtual audience a notch higher when performing the love poem. He asks how lovers are handling kissing with masks on due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This acts as a

comic relief. The previous poem about the plight of young artists was emotionally charged, and Mufasa skillfully debriefs the audience from that mood to prepare them for a love poem, which he delivers effectively. At the end of the performance Mufasa joins the band in dancing and celebrating the success of the event.

 The actual occasion is important in the analysis of African oral literature. The occasion can "directly affect the detailed content and form of the piece being performed" (Finnegan, 2012, p. 14). Some oral pieces are designed for and arise from specific occasions. Mufasa Live In Concert was specifically designed for a virtual audience, because it came at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic was at its peak globally. Due to social distancing rules artists were not allowed to perform in physical spaces, that would require many people to converge in one place, as this would increase the risk of infection. The concert was organized with the aim of addressing some of the social injustices experienced in Kenya in time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Before Mufasa begins his performances, Lizzie Kiama, the managing trustee of "This Ability Trust" talks about the challenges faced by persons with disability in times of the Covid-19 pandemic. The next speaker on stage is Michael Hjelmaker, the acting ambassador and deputy head of mission, Embassy of Sweden – Kenya. He says human rights is the foundation of any civilized society. He talks of how the core democratic values are being "scaled back" and "infringed upon" during the Covid-19 pandemic. He emphasizes the importance of engaging in conversations about "human rights, democracy, rule of law," which he says the concert is aimed at addressing. These two speakers set the stage for what should be expected in the performance. Mufasa recites a total of five poems in this concert. Four of the poems are packed with tension, as the poet addresses challenges facing the marginalized in the society, including young artists, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Before Mufasa performs his second poem, he makes a short speech which helps us understand the context of the performance.

> Now it is a weird time. No one saw this time coming. Like I said it is a challenging time.
> I mean I was thinking to myself like no one downloaded skype thinking that he would

use it to bury their loved ones in the future. And so much is coming out, like there is this person, Maina, the guy who was beaten up by police for being late. It was like seven, and he was beaten up, and I realized one thing - that most of us are desensitized from issues that do not affect us. Like I remember one of the questions someone was asking on Twitter was "What was he doing at that time?" And you know that question comes from a point of privilege, like you were in the house, you were safe, so you don't really care much about someone. You question the situation. And there are other people as well that won't feel as long as we are not them. As long as we cannot see those people, who are in slums and where people are struggling, people who don't have savings and stuff, we have distanced ourselves from them.

This speech and any other in that event is part of the performance. In the speech Mufasa talks about the isolation that has been brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Gatherings even at funerals are prohibited, forcing people to bury their loved ones virtually. He addresses the challenges facing the poor people, living in informal settlements, where they are forced to go out and do manual jobs to afford a day's meal. During the pandemic, such individuals found themselves in trouble with the police, when they could not beat the curfew, leading them to be clobbered to death in some cases. It is such injustices that form most of Mufasa's poetry in this concert. The speeches provide the context for his poetry. Before Mufasa begins the recitation of his second poem, he ushers in a singer, whom he refers to as Ashley. The song by Ashley is very emotional and is characterized by repetition and tonal variation. The lines below are repeated several times, but each time the singer uses a different kind of stress and intonation to create a pensive mood.

> *We need to find a way to change tomorrow today*
> *We need to find a way to change tomorrow today*
> *Change it for the children*
> *Change it for the women*
> *Change it for the men*

Mufasa then comes in with his poem. In the poem he addresses the Covid-19 situation, and how the poor have been affected by it. Anyone reading the poem years after the pandemic might never understand why Mufasa uses the metaphor of the mask as a silencing tool. During the pandemic it was a requirement for people to wear masks in public places and defying this order would land one in a serious problem. The mask is supposed to cover a person's nose and mouth to prevent the rapid spread of Covid-19. This interferes with

communication among people. The persona in Mufasa's poem feels that the police should not silence people from voicing out their concerns just because there is a pandemic in their midst. He observes that the poor are struggling to make ends meet, while the police unleash all their wrath on them in the name of enforcing curfews. He states that whenever a country is going through a crisis, the poor people living in informal settlements are usually the casualties. They experience the crisis first hand by suffering in the hands of those who are charged with the responsibility of protecting them. The song is like a response to the poem, and the two must be analyzed side by side. Working towards change for a better tomorrow is what will ensure the wellbeing of children, women, men and the society at large. This message is emphasized throughout the concert. In fact, at the end of the concert one of the speakers sums up the main message of the day, "We need to find a way to change today for a better tomorrow for everyone." Her name is Catherine Khamali, Programme Manager, Forum SYD. She explains that her organization is geared towards supporting artists like Mufasa, and that that is one way of changing the future of the people. She talks about the role of artists in fighting social injustices and promoting democracy in our society.

> Just because they cover their mouth
>
> Doesn't mean the masks are supposed to silence us
>
> This Covid situation is unreal
>
> But police brutality and people's struggles are real
>
> I have realized
>
> Every time the country is burning
>
> People in slums get third degree burns
>
> They walk around with scars and scars are not like plastics
>
> They can't be burnt
>
> They are free to land on any part of your body

As stated before, spoken word poetry in social media spaces is a simulacrum of the oral tradition. The poems are spread widely from one person to the next through sharing and tagging friends. In non-literate societies stories and songs/poems were shared from one

generation to the next by word of mouth. Today, the social media is creating a transition into how oral literature is transmitted. The *like, comment* and *share* buttons on social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter are replacing the real physical movement of people from one place to another to transmit oral literature content. The introduction of the print media, as an alternative way of preserving oral literature for future generations, has been a subject of debate for decades, as some scholars believe that some features of orality are lost in the written versions of oral literature. The Facebook Watch Party feature allows oral literature performances to be streamed live to the audience in real time. This creates a virtual performance that meets the key characteristics of African oral literature where performance, audience and the actual occasion are all witnessed. Therefore, spoken word poetry in social media spaces is one way in which oral literature can be transmitted from one generation to the next and still retain the original content.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the four forms of spoken word poetry in new media which include spoken word poetry as written text, spoken word poetry as film, spoken word poetry as recorded live performance and spoken word poetry as virtual live performance. Even though all these forms are presented outside the traditional theatrical space, they still contain some degree of liveness due to the interaction between the poet and the members of the virtual audience in the new media spaces. While physical co-presence between the poet and the members of the virtual audience is lacking, liveness is still achieved through the comments, likes, shares and emojis left by both the poet and the virtual audience. These interactions are not limited to time and space for they remain active for as long as the spoken word poem remains visible in the social media space. Spoken word poetry as written text, spoken word poetry as film, and spoken word poetry as recorded live performance on new media platforms allow for the interaction between the poet and the audience long after the real theatrical event has been concluded. It is only spoken word poetry as a virtual live performance that allows

for the interaction between the poet and the audience in real time. The reaction from the audience affects the performance to some extent making this form the one that is closest to a real theatrical event than the other three.

CHAPTER THREE: THE USE OF AUDIO-VISUAL IMAGES IN SPOKEN WORD

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter we explored the various forms in which spoken word poetry is presented in new media. We analyzed four forms of spoken word poetry in new media which include spoken word poetry as a written text, spoken word poetry as film, spoken word poetry as a recorded live performance and spoken word poetry as a virtual live performance. Spoken word poetry as film involves dramatization of the poem by including actors to enact the poem. In this chapter we will focus on spoken word poetry as film in new media, with the aim of analyzing the role of audio-visual images in the creation of meaning. There is a space for audio-visual images in contemporary literature, produced in the digital media, and this is pushing literature to a whole new level. A new language of artistic expression is being born, and it is time we focused our attention on this new literary genre that is merging. Susan Sontag highlights the relationship between film and other art forms. She asserts that "Cinema is a kind of a pan-art. It can use, incorporate, engulf virtually any other art: the novel, poetry, theatre, painting, sculpture, dance, music, architecture" (Quoted in Gallager, 1978, pp. 157). Spoken word poetry as film in new media incorporates poetry and film, hence creating a new perspective into the debate about the relationship between film and literature. Kamila Junik-Luniewska explores this kind of relationship in the contemporary Indian narratives, where she looks at how the reproduction of "old traditional motifs and stories" in new media is bringing forth a "fresh meaning." She argues that a story can have several distinct layers when depicted through varied pictorial presentations. (Junik-Luniewska, 2019, p. 150). Heidi Peeters observes that this form of expression is not new, as it resonates with the "Avant-Garde interest in film and movement." He explores the benefits of audio-visual language in digital poetry by reviewing Pierre Alferi's merger between poetry and film. He asserts that Alferi's poetry is an indication that "Poetry is not confined to the word alone but can engage in stimulating interactions with film while integrating new media techniques" (Peeters, 2010, p. 63). It is this integration of film and poetry that is of concern to this research. In this chapter we analyze how spoken word poetry as film is creating a new aesthetic appeal that

integrates both literature and film to create meaning. This merger between literature and film helps to reinforce the meaning of the selected spoken word poems. In this section we analyze the use of audio-visual images in the spoken word poems to establish their effectiveness.

Spoken word poetry as film makes use of audio-visual images to enhance the imagery in the poems. This section is concerned with the effectiveness of this images in reinforcing the meaning in the poems. Brian Gallagher looks at the differences between cinema and literature in relation to their use of imagery. He states that film imagery is more "immediate" and vivid compared to the literary imagery (Gallagher, 1978, 159). The film maker ensures that the selected image brings out the desired effect, while the writer manipulates the meaning of the image using words. According to Gallagher, the writer's work is easier, because he can explain in words what his imagery means, whereas the film maker must ensure that his audio-visual images communicate effectively to the viewer without depending on words. Louis Giannetti reviews Siegfried Kracauer's idea that film does not rely on metaphors, but literature does. Kracauer holds the view that the use of metaphors in film is problematic, because literary language creates a mental picture while cinema produces a 'copy' of the real image (Giannetti, 1972, p. 49). He therefore states that "literature is more supple and complex than cinema, because language can symbolize concrete objects and mental states with equal ease." (Giannetti, 1972, p.50) However, Gianetti asserts that Kracauer's "theoretical premises are faulty" (p. 50). Giannetti explores the various ways in which metaphors are developed in film, using specific examples, and concludes that metaphors do exist in film. Gallagher asserts that when it comes to clarity of meaning, a writer is more privileged than a film maker because he has the ability to expound on the meaning of an image using words. (Gallagher, 1978, p.161). Spoken word poets use both words and film, and it is important to examine how this integration helps in the creation of meaning.

3.2. Use of Environmental Images to Enhance Meaning in Spoken Word Film Poems

Environmental images can be used to enhance meaning in spoken word poetry presented in film form. Some poets have made use of these environmental images to pass across important messages. Kennet B. is an ardent advocate of the preservation of the natural environment. This is displayed in some of his spoken word poems like "Silent River" and "Green Talk" in which he discourages people against harmful practices that deplete the natural resources. In some of his spoken word film poems he makes use of audio-visual images that relate to the environment. His poems make use of a variety of images, ranging from those that reflect climatic conditions to those that reflect the flora and fauna in our ecosystem. In the recent years film makers have increasingly made use of environmental images to advocate for environmental conservation (Abdulla, 2014, p. 137). Kennet B. makes use of environmental images to ensure that his message about environmental conservation is understood. These images help to paint a mental picture of the effects of some human actions on the natural environment, hence aiding in the understanding of the poet's message. Use of images and photographs in communicating about environmental issues has been identified as an effective strategy in promoting environmental awareness (Mungai, 2009, quoted in Abdulla, 2014, p. 137). Kennet B. has used this strategy effectively to educate the general public about the need to preserve the natural environment.

Kennet B.'s spoken word film poem, "Silent River," is an ode to Wangari Maathai for her role in protecting the environment in Kenya. The persona in the poem laments the current environmental degradation that seems to be getting worse by the day, especially after the death of Wangari Maathai. The poem begins with a metaphor that compares Wangari Maathai to a hummingbird.

> The hummingbird has flown away
> Far far away,
> Leaving behind the living files,

That will forever hold memories,

In the land where she belonged.

The metaphor of a hummingbird might not be easily interpreted by the audience to mean Wangari Maathai, but the accompanying audio-visual images in the film help in making the connection. Just before this opening line, the film shows an old video recording of Wangari Maathai walking along the Nairobi River. Shortly after, the words "An ode in honour of Hon. Wangari Maathai" (Kennet B. 2015) show up on the screen, with a bird resting on the branch of a tree in the background. Immediately after these audio-visual images disappear from the screen, Kennet B. starts the recitation of the poem, whose opening line contains the metaphor of the hummingbird. As he recites the first line of the poem, there is an image of birds flying away in the dark skies, followed by a video of the former prime minister of Kenya, Raila Odinga, writing a message in a condolence book. Next to the condolence book is a portrait of Wangari Maathai, confirming that indeed she is the hummingbird that has "flown far far away." Hummingbirds are known for the humming noise they make with their wings when in motion. Wangari Maathai is compared to a hummingbird in this poem because of her role in advocating for environmental conservation through tree planting in Kenya and globally. She was the recipient of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize due to her tree planting campaign under the Green Belt Movement. The poem acknowledges her efforts in making the world a better place, but at the same time laments the environmental degradation witnessed after her departure. Wangari Maathai's image in the film is therefore a symbol for environmental conservation that is compared to the hummingbird in Kennet B.'s poem. Her departure seems to have thrown the country back into environmental degradation, that the persona in the poem is lamenting about. The fact that the film is posted on YouTube also helps in its interpretation. The poet uses the "description" section of YouTube to give a further interpretation of his poem. The description section allows content creators on YouTube to give a brief explanation of their work before posting it to the public. This explanation is

visible to the audience as they watch the video on YouTube. In the description, Kennet B. confirms to the audience that he is referring to Wangari Maathai as a symbol for environmental conservation, when he says that the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner endured a lot to protect the environment, but her efforts are being undermined by those doing far worse things than she ever foresaw.

In the poem the symbol of the burning charcoal represents environmental degradation that the poet is lamenting about. To produce charcoal, trees must be cut down. In the film the image of charcoal smoke coming from the peak of a mountain is seen with the subtitles on the screen reading "Charcoal smoke is seen again at the mountain top." The subtitles function as a translation to the audience, since this stanza is recited in Swahili, Kenya's national language. This translation is made possible due to the integration of poetry and film. This helps the non-Swahili speakers to understand what the poet is saying. The visual image shows very dark smoke coming from the peak of the mountain moving to the sky. The image enhances our understanding of how destructive the charcoal smoke is to the environment, that is already depleted due to the cutting down of trees. The image of the charcoal smoke accompanied by the words in the poem give a clear perspective of the poet's view on environmental degradation.

Original Version (Swahili)	Translation - English Version
Moshi ya makaa bado inaonekana milimani, Ni ukweli tusipojihadhari 2030 itafika, Kaa vision bado iko mbali, Si utani juu hata maji ya mother nature, Tayari yakauka duniani, Misitu zinageuzwa viwanja vya mifupa.	Charcoal smoke is still visible in the hills, It's true if we dont take care 2030 will reach, While the vision will still be far, It's not a joke because even the water of mother nature, Is already drying up in the world, The forests are turned into fields of dry bones.

The poet also uses the metaphor of the "skeleton fields" in this stanza when he says "Misitu zinageuzwa viwanja vya mifupa." This is accompanied with a sub-title which reads "The forests are being turned into skeleton fields." An image of a carcass is shown in the film to

heighten the theme of environmental degradation. Due to the depletion of resources, animals are dying of starvation and other natural disasters. The mention of "Viwanja vya mifupa" (skeleton fields) might not be clearly understood by all listeners, but the visual image of a carcass together with the subtitle helps in the interpretation of that line. At the end of the poem, a visual image of Wangari Maathai displayed on a placard brings the poem to a full circle. The persona notes that environmental degradation is worsening after the departure of Wangari Maathai. He acknowledges her efforts in campaigning for environmental conservation by saying:

> Mother nature will always remember you,
> By your name, Hon. Wangari Maathai.

As the poet recites these words, a visual image of Maathai, displayed on a placard, appears on the screen. The inscription on the placard is a reminder to the audience that the protector of the environment is gone, but her legacy will be remembered for generations.

In his spoken word film poem, "Green Talk," Kennet B. addresses environmental degradation which resonates with the theme in "Silent River." In "Green talk" the film begins with a 3D image of the world map on a globe. This image is a shade of blue and green luminous colours upon a black background. The darkness of the background foregrounds the image and makes it to appear suspended in space, hence making it the centre of the viewers' attention. The image of the globe rotates once before cracking up right in the middle. The cracking up of the globe produces a grotesque sight, which prepares the audience for the opening line in the first stanza of the poem.

> The much talked of atmospheric crack,
> Is getting larger,
> And this could be the beginning,
> Of the worst human witnessed natural disaster,

The poem begins with the mention of the "atmospheric crack" that has always been anticipated due to continued environmental degradation. The horrifying image of the earth cracking up in space is effective and helps the poet to put across his message that if human beings continue polluting the environment, soon the earth will be destroyed, and no one will survive the impending disaster. The image of a raging fire, that seems to be coming from the cracked earth is shown, as the poet talks of how the atmospheric crack is getting larger. This helps the audience to understand that things are getting worse, as human beings continue to disregard calls for environmental conservation. It started with a crack, but it has now escalated into a huge fire that is threatening to wipe out the planet earth.

The non-wanted rays are penetrating further,
It is now a standing fact,
That if we do not fill this gap,
Then the pending calamities will have no option,
But to erase us from the face of this earth.

The poet mentions the "non-wanted rays" of the sun "penetrating" the earth causing massive damage. This is accompanied by the image of a huge fire, and of helpless people and wildlife running away from it. The crackling sound of the raging fire, as it burns through the atmosphere, helps to create that sense of destruction that is common when a huge fire engulfs a place. The fact that this kind of destruction is being likened to the destruction of the earth makes this poem a cautionary one. Unless people put in deliberate efforts to save the planet earth from depletion, all life will be destroyed. In the poem, images of people lining up at a water well, and in a supermarket to get water, are used to create the kind of desperation that is likely to occur in the end, when the full impact of environmental degradation will have taken place. Amid all the destruction, the image of Wangari Maathai, alongside that of young children planting trees, is shown as a reminder that all the destruction can be prevented, if only people learn to take care of the environment. The repetition used in the song that acts as

a chorus to this poem helps to emphasize this message. According to the song, it is up to the people to decide whether the planet earth survives or not.

> Can I see for yourself,
> The choice is yours,
> For a living planet
> Or a dying planet
> For a living planet
> Or a dying planet.

The use of social media as a space for this poem makes it possible for the audience to learn about facts surrounding the production of this poem. In the description section of the YouTube post containing Kennet B.'s spoken word film poem, a YouTube content developer by the name pinchez halftime, gives us details about the production of this poem. According to him, Kennet B. observed the "environmental abuse" that was taking place around him and decided to do something about it by initiating an organization called "Art-4-En" which stands for "Art for Environment" that makes use of art to advocate for environmental conservation. The organization also focuses on other social issues. Pinchez halftime informs us that Kennet B. is both the poet and the film producer/director. This means that all the visual images, selected for this poem, are a product of the poet's creativity. Through this content developer we learn that the organization is also working on the production of "Silent River", another poem by Kennet B. that has already been featured in this section. So now we know that "Green Talk" preceded "Silent River." This helps the audience to connect the theme of environmental degradation in both poems and to understand the poet's perspective on the subject matter. He is passionate about environmental conservation, and this is reflected in his poems, as well as his contribution to the "annual tree planting event" in which he invites upcoming poets to his rural home in the Nyanza region, Kenya, to plant trees and participate in poetry sessions (Ekesa, 2016 – p. 28). At the time of this research, the poem had over 2,000 views, indicating the number of times it has been watched on YouTube.

In his spoken word film poem "Amani", Kennet B. uses audio-visual images to deliver his message of peace. The poem begins with an image of brownish-black ominous clouds in the sky, accompanied by a crackling sound associated with wildfires. This is ironical, because the title of the poem seems to suggest peace, but the accompanying audio-visual images indicate lack of it. This creates suspense. The image of the poet then appears amid the raging clouds in a white outfit, which is a contrast to all the chaos in this setting. The poet is suspended in the clouds, and he recites the entire poem from that position looking down towards the earth. This is made possible because this is a film poem. The poet's image takes the place of a supreme being, looking at the people on earth as if to pass judgement. The title of the poem "Amani" appears on the screen, after which the once brownish-black ominous clouds turn into a beautiful blue sky. It is at this point that the poet begins to recite the first stanza of the poem.

Akilini niko na waraka written	In my mind I have a written epistle
In our own urban grammar	In our own urban grammar
But kwanza kabla sijaenda further	But first before I go further
Nawapigia asante kwa kunyamaza	I give you thanks for staying quiet
Kwenye hii chapter nita-deal na amani,	In this chapter I will deal with peace,
Kama chanzo cha usalama,	As the essence of security,
So kama mulikuwa mumekosana,	So if you had personal differences,
Basi chukueni hii nafasi,	Seize this opportunity,
Kuongeleshana pia kuombana msamaha,	To communicate and reconcile,

In this stanza the persona alerts the audience that the poem is going to be recited in Sheng, which he refers to as "urban grammar". He also makes it clear that the theme of the poem is peace and he uses the opportunity to tell the people to reconcile with each other in case of personal differences. The chaotic beginning of the poem, using the image of ominous clouds, begins to make sense at this point. This setting creates a flashback for the audience, to indicate that the people on the earth were at conflict with each other, hence the need for a

supreme being to intervene in order to establish peace and a return to normalcy. This supreme

being becomes the voice of reason that brings back order amidst the chaos. This

interpretation can easily be made when watching the poem as film, where the poet is

suspended in the clouds and faces down to address the people on earth. Most religious groups

in Kenya believe that the place of God's dwelling is in the sky. Therefore, when the poet

chooses to occupy this space when reciting the poem in the film, he is turning the attention of

the audience to the persona in the poem, who is a supernatural being.

The image of the Kenyan flag is used in the film as a symbol of peace. The Kenyan flag has

four colours, each representing a crucial aspect of the people of Kenya and the struggle for

independence. The white colour on the flag represents peace, which is in line with the theme

of peace in the poem. The theme of peace is further heightened by the image of an old news

caption of the historic handshake between the former president Mwai Kibaki and the former

Prime Minister Raila Odinga after the peace talks that ended the 2007/2008 post-election

violence in Kenya. The 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya was characterized by

ethnic clashes between communities that supported the two presidential candidates. In order

to end the clashes that led to the death of many innocent people, the two presidential

candidates had to make peace. A handshake in most Kenyan communities is a sign of peace.

Therefore, through the handshake the two leaders were imploring their supporters to seek

peace with one another. This is the same message that the poem is passing across right from

the title. "Amani" which is the title of the poem, is a Swahili word for peace. In the poem the

persona encourages members of his audience to greet each other first, before revealing their

names. This is important especially when juxtaposed with the image of the historic handshake

between the two former presidential candidates. The post-election violence divided Kenyans

along tribal lines. This was made worse by the fact that most Kenyan names easily reveal

one's ethnic background (Ekesa, 2016). Thus, when the poet implores his audience to shake

each other's hand first before asking for names, he is alluding to the post-election violence

when one's name would determine whether a friendship or an enmity, would ensue when two strangers meet. The Kenyan flag and the video of the two presidential candidates shaking hands is shown when the persona in the poem declares that he will be guided by the peace represented in the flag.

Ni bendera ya amani ndio tutaifuata,	It is the flag of peace that we will follow
Hebu salimia Jirani yako ukimwambi amani,	Now greet your neighbour by saying peace,
Naye pia akujibu amani first,	And let him/her reply peace first,
Before umwulize anaitwa nani.	Before asking for his name.

The presence of the former United Nations secretary, Koffi Annan, in the image containing the news caption, featured in this film poem, helps to contextualize the theme of peace in the poem. Koffi Annan played an important role in negotiating for peace between the two presidential candidates (Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga) in the 2007 general elections in Kenya. His mediation efforts brought an end to the conflict that led to the post-election violence. Therefore, Kennet B. uses the Kenyan flag, the handshake and the former UN secretary, Koffi Annan, as symbols of peace to emphasize the message in his poem, "Amani." He further uses the image of a watermelon to emphasize the need for peace, when he says that our differences should not separate us, but rather bring out the best of us.

Mi sipendangi kuwa na marival,	Personally I don't like having rivals,
Hata watermelon iko na many colours,	Even watermelon has many colours,
But they all combine in their different forms,	But they all combine in their different forms,
To make one big sweet ital,	To make one big ital
So sioni why our different tribe set,	So I don't see why our different tribe set,
Should stop us from building,	Should stop us from building,
One clean rich nation.	One clean nation.

The persona in the poem believes that just like the watermelon draws its sweetness from the different colours that form it, Kenyans from different ethnic groups can also draw strengths from each other by embracing their differences and using them to create a beautiful nation

that is driven by unity of purpose. This poem has over three thousand seven hundred views on YouTube, and Kennet B. once again uses the description section of YouTube to give a brief explanation about the poem to the audience. According to Kennet B. "Embracing peace means being free from violent imaginations that translate into physical divisions." Animosity within communities begin from the mind. If people can tame their hatred for each other, violence can never be considered as a solution to any problem in society. This is in line with the message in the poem, which puts emphasis in acknowledging people first, before asking for their names, which might reveal their ethnic background. In the description Kennet B. also reveals to us that he is the director and producer of this film poem too, just like all the others discussed in this section. This means that all the audio-visual images have been intentionally selected to reinforce the meaning in the poem.

In all the three poems by Kennet B. one thing that stands out is his use of environmental images and/or photographs of important personalities from old news items. Images of ominous clouds, landslides, tornados, lightning and thunder are used in his spoken word poems, "Silent River", "Green Talk" and "Amani." While "Silent River" and "Green Talk" address environmental issues, "Amani" addresses a totally different topic, yet he still uses environmental images. In an interview with Kennet B., he revealed his love for the environment and said that he integrates environmental issues into his daily life. This explains the use of environmental images in his poetry. These images help in creating different moods in these poems, which in turn enhances the understanding of the meaning in the poems. The poems also make use of old news pictures and videos of historical figures to talk about issues that are associated with those personalities. This helps to emphasize the message in each of the poems.

3.3. Use of Images of Historical Figures to Create Meaning in Spoken Word Film Poetry

History is a very important resource in creating meaning in spoken word poetry. Some spoken word poets derive their topics from history and relate it to what is happening in the contemporary world. Dorphan is a spoken word film poet in Kenya, who uses images of historical figures to pass across his message. In his poem, "Mashujaa," Dorphan uses the image of Dedan Kimathi as a symbol of the struggle for independence. Dedan Kimathi is known for his role in the Mau Mau rebellion, a movement that led to the struggle for independence in Kenya during the colonial period in the 1950s. He was later captured and executed for leading a revolution against the British colonial powers. In the poem the persona laments that the ordinary citizens are still under bondage, many years after the country gained independence. He feels that those that fought for our independence have not been honoured in the right way, hence the many problems afflicting the country.

Original Version (Swahili)	Translation (English)
Hakuna nuru after walishapigana uhuru	There is no light after they fought for independence,
Afrika taa ilishazimwa	In Africa the lantern is already extinguished,
Wajukuu wao bado ni watumwa	Their grandchildren are still slaves,
Hilo kunukuu usisahau	Do not forget to quote that,
No wonder wengine wetu kupata chakula	No wonder some of us to get food
Ni kuchakura maganda kwa takataka	We look for peels in dirt

According to Dorphan, those in power continue to grab everything, leaving their subjects in abject poverty, yet the freedom fighters sacrificed their lives to liberate everyone from colonialism. As these lines are recited, an old video of captured freedom fighters during Kenya's colonial period plays on the screen. In the video we see a man walking while lifting his hands in total surrender, as two men holding one huge gun follow him at close range. The image is meant to remind the audience that independence came at a price, but the current breed of leadership has quickly forgotten and even failed to recognize the real heroes.

> Kimathi Niwie radhi bado naishi kwa magoti
>
> (Kimathi pardon me I am still on my knees)
>
> Kimathi niwie radhi juu ya uwoga hata kama unadai mimi ni mnaughty
>
> (Kimathi pardon me because of cowardice even if you claim I am naughty)
>
> Kimathi niwie radhi bado nalamba miguu ndio nidishi, ndio nipate noti
>
> (Kimathi pardon me I am still licking legs to eat, to get some money)

In these lines, the persona is asking for a pardon from Dedan Kimathi for accepting to live in dehumanizing conditions, yet his freedom was paid for during the struggle for independence. These lines are said with the famous image of Dedan Kimathi lying down displayed on the screen. This is a picture of Dedan Kimathi at his most vulnerable, after he was captured by the colonial government in Kenya and before he was finally executed for his role in the fight for independence, as the leader of the Mau Mau rebellion. In another stanza the persona ridicules the idea of a "Mashujaa" day in Kenya, which is celebrated yearly to honour those who have done great things for our country. He feels that the real heroes should be those that fought for the country's independence, yet, they are the most neglected. According to the poet, some like Mr. Lawi, a freedom fighter, are living in abject poverty with no recognition at all.

> And they tell me there is a Mashujaa day
>
> But what do the "mashujaa" say?
>
> You might as well go and ask
>
> the landless, toothless, freedom veteran, Mr Lawi.

The film poem ends with the image of Dedan Kimathi displayed on a painted graffiti with the words "DEDAN KIMATHI #MASHUJA. The poem is a lament of the struggles of the ordinary people in Kenya, even after the freedom fighters risked their lives to end human suffering. Just like Kennet B., Dorphan uses the description section of YouTube to give further highlights to the poem. He states that the poem is a reflective piece that captures the beauty of the past while exploring the present and its effect on the future (Dorphan, 2016).

This description serves as a highlight to the issues raised in the poem, which has thousands of viewers. In the poem the persona looks back at the past heroes, and reflects upon the current situation in the country, and feels that we have failed those who worked so hard to ensure freedom for their people. In the comment section the members of the audience agree with Dorphan's reflection through their responses. Nhjihi Waruru quotes one of the lines in the poem in the comment section. The line can be translated as "And their descendants are still slaves." Waruru states that it is painful for the descendants of those who fought so hard for freedom to continue living in bondage. Dorphan responds to this comment by giving an example of what is being done to the children of one Johnny Boy. This helps the audience to understand that he is talking about real issues happening in the society today. In fact, in the poem he mentions Johnny Boy, and this comment helps us understand what he was talking about. Irene Asuwa uses the poem to reflect upon the dangers of not documenting history, hence denying future generations a chance to learn about the real heroes. She says that the people who made great sacrifices have been relegated to the periphery, while those who have plundered our economy are the ones that are being celebrated the most. Israel Bimpe celebrates Dorphan's poetry, and feels that is relates to most countries in Africa, and not just Kenya. He reveals that he is Rwandese but can relate to what the poet is saying. Rafael Mwega responds to the poem by creating a poetic response which echoes Dorphan's poem. He hails the poet for touching on this important topic of forgotten heroes, and wishes that the poet's target audience, most likely the leaders, will get the message and do something about it. Below are some of the comments.

Njihi Waruru

6 months ago

Wajukuu wao bado watumwa inauma Mutuma!

Dorphanage Bloc

6 months ago

Kwanza mtu akiona michezo inachezwa na watoto wa Johnny boy huku inawasha zaidi.
irene asuwa

3 years ago
Real heroes have not been documented for the future and present generations to draw lessons from them.We are growing up in a toxic environment where oppressors and looters are celebrated.
Israel Bimpe

4 years ago (edited)
As a non-kenyan... this should be addressed to all africans! Mind-blowing and so real!! Keep it up! Asante sana! (From a Rwandan who speaks Swahili)
Rafael Mwega

4 years ago
word up,natumai watastand up wakiskia hii,ni mob mawazo ,tumeyarisha toka mwanzo. At some point tumepoteza defination true ya wetu mashujaa. Time imewadia kila insi astandout na ku reckon kuhusu where we came from. Tunaenjoy kile hatuna idea wala history kilipotoka. Heko sana Dorphan ,kazi bora . Zidi kutupasha....

Dorphanage Bloc
4 years ago
Bila shaka kaka. Lazima iandikwe vile inafaa. Neno lisamabae hivo hivo. Shukran sana.

There is a close relationship between Dorphan's and Kennet B.'s use of historical figures in their spoken word film poems. Both poets use the images of historical figures to show the failure of current generations to live the dreams of their forefathers and foremothers. Wangari Maathai's vision of a cleaner environment is thwarted by those who are still cutting down trees for their own selfish gains, hence leading to environmental degradation. Dedan Kimathi's vision of an independent Kenya is marred by those who are busy oppressing the masses by denying them access to equal opportunities. These historical figures are used in these poems to serve as a reminder to the audience, that all the problems facing our society today can be stopped, if people pay attention to the legacy of their forefathers and foremothers. Both poets use the description feature on YouTube to give a brief overview of their poems. Dorphan further makes good use of the comment section to lay more emphasis on his intended message.

3.4. Use of Captions and Background Voices as Images in Spoken Word film Poetry

Captions and background voices have been used to enhance meaning in spoken word film poems presented in new media spaces. Namatsi Lukoye makes use of captions and background voices and music to pass across the message in her spoken word poetry on YouTube. These captions and background voices serve as a hint to the audience as to what the poem is about. Her spoken word poem entitled "Insanity" begins with a caption, that gives us a clue that the poet is going to handle the issue of troubled love relationships, as a result of the experiences that each party comes into the relationship with. She calls these past experiences "demons," which affect a lot of relationships, leading to new heart aches and heart breaks. In the caption Namatsi explains that most people walk into marriages with unresolved conflicts from previous relationships. These unresolved conflicts combine with the everyday pressure in marriages to create an even bigger problem that keeps couples in a viscous circle of never-ending conflicts. She states that the poem she is about to recite is a reflection of how such unresolved conflicts can ruin a relationship. To match the poetic genre, the caption is written in poetic form, with short lines, which makes it easy for the audience to take in all the words as the film rolls on. The caption stays on the screen long enough to enable the audience to read all the lines. This helps in setting the mood of the poem.

Once the caption disappears from the screen, the recitation of the poem begins. In the first stanza the persona expresses bitterness at the turn of events in her marriage, where vows had been made. She feels disappointed that things turned out differently, and heart breaks have been the norm in that relationship. The poet uses the image of a corpse to show how the promises made on the persona's wedding day have been long dead and buried. Promises have been broken, even though on her part she had intended to fulfil them all. She uses the image

of the Bible pages to talk about the vows made on the persona's wedding day, when couples declare "Until death do us part," to indicate the seriousness of the relationship she is talking about in this poem. She even says that all these vows took place in a church, before another caption appears on the screen stating that the marriage turned into a place of heartbreak and callousness, due to unfaithfulness. This caption helps to reveal incidents that occurred in that marriage that led to the persona's misery. With the caption still showing on the screen, we begin to hear voices from the background.

"Huyu nin nani?" (Who is this?) Inquires a female voice from the background.
"Unaonaje?" (What do you see?) Another female voice retorts.
"Takataka ya mwanamke. Huyu ni nani?" (Rubbish of a woman. Who is this?) The first voice inquires again.
"Unaita nani takataka?" (Who are you calling rubbish?) The second voice responds while laughing sarcastically.
"Huyu ni nani?" The first voice asks.
"Wait wait wait, Celine!" A male voice interrupts.

It turns out that the voices in the background involve a love triangle, in which two women are in a confrontation with each other over a man they both have a relationship with. The man tries to calm the situation down, and when things appear to be getting out of control, he breaks out into a song, which is addressed to the first woman. In the song the man states that what the first woman has witnessed is a little misunderstanding that should not interfere with their relationship, because he loves her. It should be noted that the entire conversation and the accompanying song is played in the background. The audience does not get to see the characters involved. While the conversation is taking place in the background, all we can see on the screen is the poet lying on a wooden bench, with her head on the lap of a man. It is therefore evident that the voices are part of the poet's dreams. At some point the man appears to be making a secret phone call, while checking on the poet to make sure that she is still asleep. After that interlude, the poet continues with the recitation once again.

Sometimes my insanity takes over once in a while,

And I find pieces of me when the wind starts to whirl,

When it lifts me up with might and crashes me to the ground,

When the air starts to choke the tears blind my eyes,

You have turned me into a monster and I am never coming back,

Before the last line in this stanza, a drawing appears on the screen with the words "I DON'T WANNA PLAY THIS GAME ANYMORE", written in capital letters. In the drawing there is a tall man, holding up a love sign in his hands, and a shorter woman is trying to catch that love sign, but it is beyond her reach. This drawing helps to supplement the meaning in the words of the poet. The poet seems to be saying that it is agonizing to yearn for love that is beyond your reach, and the only remedy is to walk away. Immediately after this stanza we hear a male voice rapping in the background. This rap is like a response to this stanza, which ends with the persona saying that she has had enough, and she is leaving. In the rap the man is pleading with the persona not to leave him, because he loves her deeply. He says that he does not even value the other woman the way he values the persona, and that should be reason enough for her to stay. While the man continues to rap, another caption shows up on the screen, with the words "Skinned knees are easier to fix than a broken heart." This caption helps us to understand the persona's internal turmoil. It is very painful to have skinned knees, but that is not as painful as having a broken heart. This helps the audience to understand the intensity of the persona's heart break. After the rap, the voices of the two women are heard in the background again. This time their conflict has escalated, and they are going back and forth trying to assert themselves, while the man attempts to calm them down. As the voices in the background continue in the argument, the poet is shown seated on a bench and in deep thought with a "panga" by her side. It is as if she is replaying the incident in her mind, while thinking of what to do next. This part leads us to the next stanza of the poem, in which the persona talks of living with a "a weeping heart" because of love gone sour, to the extent that she contemplates committing the crime of murder.

I live in a lonely house…filled with ghosts and bats

Everything long fell apart

I dine with spiders and bats

I live with a weeping heart…

I am addicted to this pain of loving you more than I am loving me

I got sin on my mind a Bible on my desk a rosary on my neck

But my soul wants you dead

Love is a battlefield that only fools win

This must be the beautiful tragedy.

After this stanza the male voice from previous conversations is heard singing in the background. The song acts as a continuation of the events expressed in the poem. In the song the man expresses his agony for losing the persona, and says that life is useless without her. The song leads us to the last stanza of the poem, in which the persona seems to have made up her mind that death is the only way the pain she feels can be resolved. The last stanza involves a corruption of the marriage vows. Instead of the persona saying "Till death do us part" as quoted in stanza one, the persona instead says "Let death do us part" which brings this poem to a full circle. The persona seems to be saying that since vows had already been made, they have to be upheld, but since the relationship cannot be salvaged, only death can separate them. By juxtaposing the words said during burial rites ("Ash to ash dust to dust") with a variation of those said during wedding rites ("Let death do us part"), the persona is laying emphasis on the absurdity of life, where there is a thin line between pain and happiness.

This pain is spreading

Of the new wound and old,

Where my wound forms and heals,

The smell of blood is exciting

It's calling me

Ash to ash dust to dust

Let death do us part.

In this poem Namatsi Lukoye uses a lot of imagery. As a result, she combines poetry, captions and background voices and music to help the audience to easily decipher the intended meaning. These captions and background voices and music are also used to signal the transition from one stanza to the next, hence helping in the smooth flow of the poem. The poem is very emotive, and these transitions during the recitation helps the audience to release the pent-up emotions, created due to the poem's subject matter. Just like Kennet B. and Dorphan, Namatsi Lukoye uses the description section of YouTube to expand the meaning of her poem. She says that "Sometimes you think it is love when it is an obsession! Sometimes I think I understand love…when I really don't." These words help us to understand, that the poet was talking about the dilemma that love causes to those who are in love. Just like the persona in the poem, Namatsi Lukoye's words show the uncertainty of falling in love with another.

3.5. Images of strife and police brutality in Spoken Word Film Poems

Social justice is one of the major themes covered in most spoken word poems. To achieve this, most poets use images of strife and police brutality to present the plight of the people. In his poems "Mheshimiwa" and "Story Zake", Brigeddia Poet uses images of strife and police brutality to point out the ills in our society. His focus is on leaders who oppress the masses through corruption and misuse of power. The images of strife and police brutality in the film version of this poems are presented in the form of placards and graphic images, which make it easy for the audience to understand the underlying message.

In his poem "Mheshimiwa", Brigeddia Poet uses a skit to present images of strife. The skit shows a group of people, holding a demonstration against their leaders, with placards in their hands. The persona in the poem expresses his disgust for corrupt leaders, who use empty

promises to keep the ordinary citizens in subjugation. He feels it is time those leaders realized that the masses are fed up with their lies, and are ready to call them out. The poem opens with a skit in which a political leader is heard making promises to the masses. He promises to improve the road network in his area of his jurisdiction. However, he is met by resistance through a peaceful demonstration from the members of the audience, who are wielding placards and leaves to reject that kind of manipulation, that is meant to keep them under control. As the skit plays on the screen, the poet begins the recitation of the first stanza, in which he highlights the plight of the youth in the society.

In depth ya reality imekuwa so deep,	The depth of reality has become so deep
Death ya vijana mtaani,	The death of young people in the streets
Imekuwa kibao na mashida zimesababishwa na wao…	And the problems have been created by them
Wanapigania bendera iwekwe mbele ya magari yao,	They are fighting to have flags placed on the cars
Ndio wapate freeway kwa highway,	So as to get a freeway on the highway
But kuna mtoi Dandora, Kibera,	But there is a child in Dandora, Kibera
Anasurvive lunch na mapera	Is surviving lunch with guavas.

In this stanza the persona ridicules political leaders for their self-centredness in the face of a major crisis in the society. He blames the leaders for being the cause of many deaths among the young people. He feels that instead of these leaders paying attention to petty things, like having flags on their vehicles to guarantee them a right of way on highways, they should be helping to solve serious issues in society, like starvation in low-income areas, where most families cannot afford a proper meal.

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The placards used in the skit display all sorts of ills associated with political leaders. The placards reflect the various cases of corruption and misuse of power by the leaders. One of the placards reads: "Who are involved in the Anglo-Leasing" while another one reads: "Ulinivuta jili sikulala na wewe" (You fired me from my job because I rejected your sexual advances). Yet another one reads: "What is Chicken Gate?". All these placards show how the leaders have failed their people by engaging in corrupt deals and misusing their power, hence subjecting them to abject poverty. The Anglo-Leasing scandal in Kenya involved the awarding of contracts to ghost companies. According to BBC news, the Anglo-Leasing Finance was awarded $33 million to fund the processing of the new generation passports in Kenya, as well as provide naval ships and laboratories for investigating criminal activities, but none of these projects was ever accomplished even though the money was used. This scandal involved top government officials in the ministries of finance and internal security in Kenya ("Kenyan Officials Charged Over Anglo-Leasing Scandal" BBC News, 2015 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31733052). According to Citizen News, the "Chickengate" scandal involved "Kenyan election and examination officials who were bribed by UK-based printing firm Smith and Ouzman," to award them "printing contracts worth billions of shillings for ballot papers and examination materials" (Murimi, 2016 https://citizentv.co.ke/news/kenya-recovers-ksh-52-million-from-chickengate-scandal-120362/). All these corrupt deals plus many others have caused ordinary citizens to suffer, as the country recovered from the loss of billions in Kenyan shillings that could have been used to improve their livelihood. This is captured in the last stanza of Brigeddia's poem.

Original Version (sheng)
It is true that behind every wealthy politician,
Kuna mkidi anang'ang'ana na koroboi

Na hana mafuta taa,

Kuna mkidi analia,
Na nyuma ya kila politician ana kitambi,
Translation (English)
It is true that behind every wealthy politician,
There is a kid struggling with a paraffin lamp,

And he has no paraffin,   And behind every potbellied politician,

There is a kid that is crying,

In this stanza Brigeddia Poet highlights the suffering of ordinary citizens at the expense of

corrupt leaders. The persona feels that the political leaders are amassing wealth through

corrupt deals, hence disenfranchising the ordinary citizens, that are left languishing in poverty

due to lack of basic resources. Using the placards in the skit is therefore effective in helping

with the understanding of the underlying message in this poem, especially to most Kenyans,

who are familiar with the Anglo Leasing and "Chickengate" scandals that resulted in misuse

of public funds. One of the placards addresses the issue of sexual harassment at places of

work, that has led many people to be unfairly kicked out of their jobs, hence losing a source

of income for their families. The persona wants the leaders to know that the ordinary citizens

are aware of their corrupt deals, and that is why in the last stanza he says "So Mheshimiwa

please/Don't dare carry me childish." This message is also written on one of the placards in

the skit, which reads: "Mheshimiwa don't carry me childish." This is a statement that is

directly translated from Sheng ("usinibebe utoto"), which is mostly used when you want to

tell someone that you are aware of what they have been doing, and they should not think you

are ignorant. This blends in with the intended message in the poem, where the persona wants

the leaders to know that the people are aware of their corrupt deals, and they know that is the

reason why they are deprived of their basic needs. In addition, the poet uses sub-titles to help

non-Swahili speakers to understand what the poem is talking about, since it recited in Swahili

and/or Sheng. Just like Kennet B., Dorphan, and Namatsi Lukoye, the "Creative Garage", the

organization that posts this poem on their YouTube channel, uses the description feature of

YouTube to give us more insights into this poem. The description section is written by the

Creative Garage, and it reveals that Brigeddia Poet is aimed at exposing the rot in the

political class and invoking the feelings of ordinary Kenyans about the integrity of their

leaders (Creative Garage, 2015).

This commentary summarizes Brigeddia poet's perspective into the kind of leaders that are controlling the country's affairs. Just like the poem, the commentary touches on the callousness of political leaders, who have forgotten their role to serve the people and have become the very reason why the masses feel oppressed.

Original Version (Sheng)	Translation (English)
Alikuwa mtoi wa kwanza kuzaliwa mweusi Si wachawi, si waganga, Wote wali'interpret the same, Freedom freedom Uhuru ilikuwa imegonga Ikabisha hodi Doors ziliopen windows na gate zikashake Mau Mau ikachipuka mission accomplished Mlami potea mwafrika tokea ikawa slogan Bendera ikapanda salute	He was the first child to be born black, Not witches, not magicians, All of them interpreted the same, Freedom freedom, Independence had arrived, And knocked on doors Doors opened windows and gates shook, Mau Mau emerged mission accomplished, White man get lost African emerge became the slogan, The flag rose in salute.

In his spoken word poem entitled "Story Zake", Brigeddia Poet takes us through Kenya's history. He begins right from the birth of the nation called Kenya in 1963 using figurative language. He compares Kenya's independence to the birth of a child. He uses an old black and white video of traditional dancers adorned in traditional regalia, dancing to a drumbeat, to talk about how the nation was, at independence.

In this stanza the persona takes us through the jubilation that came with attaining independence. Everyone was happy to be free of the oppressive colonial power, and a brighter future was expected. Doors of opportunity were open for Kenyans then, as the white man disappeared from their midst to pave way for the African breed of leaders, as the independent Kenya's flag was raised for the first time. The poem then takes us back to the

disappearance of the leader of the Mau Mau Movement, Dedan Kimathi, to remind us of those who struggled for independence, but never lived long enough to enjoy it. The image of Dedan Kimathi after he was captured by the British colonial government for his role as a leader in the Mau Mau rebellion is shown, before the poet moves the audience in the post-colonial era in Kenya, that was characterized by assassinations. He talks of Robert Ouko who was assassinated in 1990, and thanks him for setting the pace that people have since maintained. An image of Robert Ouko is displayed on the screen, as the poet recites these lines.

Original version (Sheng)

February 1990 tukapoteza
Robert Ouko,

Akaangushwa,

Uliset hiyo pace but sisi
tumeimaintain so bless.

Translation (English)

In February 1990 we lost
Robert Ouko

He was killed,

You set the pace, but we have
maintained it

The poet then takes us back to the day of independence with a video of the first president of Kenya signing documents to take office as the new president of the independent Kenya. The ceremony is presided over by a judge from the colonial government. While this video is playing, the poet talks of how Kenyans were happy to have made this major achievement in history. He contrasts the jubilation and the sense of accomplishment felt at independence with the moments of political unrest and oppression that later became part of Kenya's political scene.

Hiyo date ilifika tukajipiga vifua,	When that date came we thumped our chests
Uhuru ikawa topic tukadhani tumepenya,	Freedom was the topic we thought we had achieved
But sahi kuna maswali zinachipuka,	But now there are emerging questions,
Ilikuwa ni uhuru ama ilikuwa ni nduru tu,	Was it freedom or were they just romours?
Na mbona siezi bonga kwa public,	And why can't I speak in public
Nikikashifu makosa ya mheshimiwa hadharani?	While calling out the ills of a leader openly?
Nikijaribu kuinua matawi,	If I try carrying leaves,
Maafande ndio hao kwangu,	The police are on my case,
Na mapingu kisha naozea ndani .	With chains then I rot in prison.

As the poet recites these words, images of strife and police brutality are displayed on the screen. A still picture of protesters, running away from a police truck carrying water cannons to be used to disperse the crowd, is shown. These images are common in Kenya, especially after elections, where the opposition party feels that the process was flawed. Another image shows a police officer kicking a man who is lying by the roadside with a head injury. Another police officer appears to be coming in to join in the beating. These images show the excessive force, used by the police when dispersing protesters, and it is in line with the poet's message of a failed independence, where the people still feel oppressed, and when they raise their voices, they are met with police brutality.

Therefore, in his spoken word film poem Brigeddia Poet effectively uses audio-visual images to reinforce the meaning in his poetry. He combines dramatization, still pictures and old videos to help create meaning in the poems. Using placards, he helps to reinforce his message of corruption, embezzlement of public funds and misuse of power. He also uses still images to show the use of excessive force by police when dispersing protesters.

3.6. Conclusion

Indeed, the merger between literature and film helps in reinforcing the message in spoken word poetry on social media. Poetry by nature makes use of elevated language, and incorporating audio-visual images helps in making sure that the intended message is effectively relayed to the audience. Kennet B. makes use of environmental images in his film poems to communicate about environmental conservation, as well as other related topics. The audio-visual images in his poetry help the audience to understand the effects of human activities on the environment. Brideddia Poet and Dorphan make use of images to talk about a failed independence. They use images of historical figures, that sacrificed their lives for the liberation of their people, to show how the current breed of leaders has failed by using the same oppressive methods employed by the colonial government to control the masses. Brigeddia Poet further uses images of police brutality to aid in the understanding of his message of oppression. Namatsi Lukoye makes use of background voices and music to help the audience to understand her poetry. In general, all the spoken word poets, who make use of audio-visual images in their poetry, have done so effectively to communicate specific messages in their poems, and to make it easy for their audience to interpret their poems. Furthermore, the poets have also made good use of social media features to reinforce meaning in their poems. All the four poets have made use of the description section of YouTube to ensure that their intended message has been relayed to the

audience. Dorphan has gone a step further to use the comment section to interact with his audience and give more insights into his poetry. The number of views for all the poems by the four artists is an indication that they have reached a wider audience, meaning that they have effectively used audio-visual images to help create meaning in their poems, as well as to create a unique aesthetic appeal that captures the attention of the audience on social media. Therefore, this emerging genre combines literary techniques with the digital media techniques of audio-visual images to create a new form of literary expression.

CHAPTER FOUR: REDEFINING THE CONCEPT OF A LIVE AUDIENCE IN NEW MEDIA PERFORMANCES

4.1. Introduction

In chapter 2 we analyzed the different forms of spoken word poems in new media. In this chapter we focus on spoken word poetry as a recorded live performance which is a combination of a real theatrical performance and a recorded performance. In this type of performance, there is physical and virtual co-presence between the poet and members of his/her audience. In the theatrical space, the poet and members of the audience are physically present to each other since they share the same geographical location. The recorded live performance occurs when the theatrical performance is recorded and posted in social media spaces like Facebook and YouTube, where the poet enjoys virtual co-presence with the members of the audience. The virtual co-presence is experienced through the interactions that take place between the poet and members of his/her social media audience, where communication takes the form of comments, shares, likes and emojis. While the poet is physically removed from the audience, he/she still enjoys the virtual presence due to the interactions that take place between the poet and members of the virtual audience. The recording of a live event which is then posted on social media creates two types of audiences: the physical audience and the virtual audience. In this chapter we explore the physical audience as part of the performance to be viewed by the virtual audience. Thus, this chapter explores the intersection between the physical and the virtual audience.

Russell Vandenbroucke states that theatre involves "At least one actor and one audience member sharing a common space" and he goes ahead to question the possibility of virtual performances

meeting some of the characteristics of real theatrical performances, given the absence of "togetherness" as was witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented mass gatherings (Vandenbroucke,2021, p. 17). Virtual performances of spoken word poetry in new media exhibit features of theatrical performances to some extent, as highlighted in chapter 2. The virtual space becomes a shared space between the performer and the audience where interactions take place. When reflecting upon the limitations of a "Zoom performance," Alex Roe states that physical presence is critical for the "theatrical experience" and that it is pointless trying to compare it with the virtual performance. He further examines the characteristics of Zoom performances and concludes that for an actor to create a connection with the audience he/she must treat the camera as the audience by addressing every line to it. He describes the "virtual stage" as a "Conceptual space into which the audience enters, perceiving themselves within the scene being acted out, partly as silent scene-partner, partly as witness." (Roe, 2021, p. 57) Roe is using the word "audience" here to include the other actors in the same play which is being staged on Zoom with each actor saying their lines from a separate physical location. He views the other members of the cast as the audience because during rehearsals on Zoom the other cast members are viewing those that are reading their lines to each other. They therefore acquire the status of the audience at that moment.

In this section of my research, I am focusing on the occasion when all the actors (poet and his crew and the physical audience) are in the same physical space, but all the members of their virtual audience are watching from separate physical locations. The camera is the connection point between the actors and the virtual audience. While the actors are visible to the virtual audience through the camera, the members of the virtual audience are invisible and their presence is only felt through the views, comments, likes, loves and emojis they leave on the

social media posts. It is these written reactions that will be used in this chapter to anlyze the interactions between the actor(s) and the virtual audience. According to Roe, "Embracing technological opportunities and challenges spotlighted the central importance of theatre's inclusion of audience and artists in the same (imaginary or virtual) space" (Roe, 2021, p.59).

Gracyk defines a musical performance as a "Public situation in which an audience attends to the actions of one or more performers, during which specified sounds are intentionally generated for the express purpose of being attended to as music by the audience" (Gracyk, 1997, p. 139). While Gracyk's definition of a performance is related to music, it still applies to spoken word poetry since the two genres share similar characteristics. Gracyk emphasizes the role the audience in a performance. For a performance to take place there must be an audience. The performer is fully aware that his actions are being evaluated by the audience. When the spoken word poets have their performances posted in new media spaces, they are aware that their virtual audience will react to their words and actions. Therefore, members of the virtual audience are an important part of virtual performances. In this chapter the role of the virtual audience in new media spaces takes precedence since it is their reactions in words and actions such as clicking on the like, love, share and/or emoji button that constitute the virtual performances. Members of the physical audience in this research are considered as part of the performance to be viewed by the virtual audience.

Paul Thom lists six things that the audience reacts to during a live performance. Gracyk refers to them as "six types of active, playful attention". According to Thom, the audience pays attention to six things in a performance which include: 1) the main performer's actions; 2) the presence of

other performers alongside the main performer; 3) the subject matter and the medium through which it is presented; 4) the current performance and other performances of the same kind; 5) the relationship between a performance and audience's experiences in life; 6) the events taking place within and without the performance space (Quoted in Gracyk, 1997, p. 143). Gracyk states that these six types of reactions in a live performance also apply to a recorded performance. Howard Niblock agrees with Gracyk's observation that a live performance should not be considered superior to a recorded one. He says, "If a musical work is involved a good recording can acquaint us with it just as well (and perhaps even better than) a live performance." He does not believe that the "visual data' and "social event" as expounded by Gracyk should be considered as aesthetically essential, but states that even if they are, Gracyk's idea that technology can be used to overcome such "deficiencies of recording" is convincing (Niblock, 1999, p. 366). However, Niblock points out that live performances should not be completely ignored, as they ensure "aesthetic diversity" is maintained." He states that the "fatal flaw" of recording is its "repeatability". Recordings will always contain the same content delivered in the same exact way, while live performances of the same work will have some variations (Niblock, 1999, p. 367). While recording through other mediums might display the repeatability of the entire performance, recording in social media spaces displays "aesthetic diversity" in relation to the reactions of the virtual audience, who will watch and react to the same performance differently for as long as it remains in the public domain. The poet's response to such reactions is still some form of performance, even if it happens long after the physical stage performance has been concluded. The end of the poet's recorded performance in social media spaces is not the end of the audience's reaction to the performance, as is the case with the other forms of recording. These reactions keep coming in years after the original performance is done, and both the poet

and the virtual audience remain present to each other years later, reacting to the poem and displaying the six types of "active playful attention."

Live performances posted on YouTube exhibit some of the characteristics of a theatrical performance while maintaining a unique aesthetic that can only be realized in the virtual spaces. The six types of reactions that members of the audience in a live performance are likely to experience, as advanced by Paul Thom, will be referred to closely in this chapter. The members of the virtual audience are not restricted by the time factor, as the members of the physical audience, but they still go through the same experiences when watching a recorded live performance or a virtual live performance, just like the physical audience. Recorded live performances of spoken word poetry posted on YouTube channels such as "Churchill Show", "Groove Awards" on BTv Visual Creations and TEDxTalks have been used to help us examine the reactions of the virtual audience. The spoken word poems of Brigeddia Poet, Teardrops and Mufasa have been used to explore the concept of a live audience.

4.2. The use of YouTube Comedy Shows as a Space for Spoken Word Poetry Performances

Churchill Show is one of the most popular spoken word poetry platforms on YouTube. It is a comedy show recorded live mostly at the Carnivore grounds and aired on NTV (Kenya). The show is hosted by Daniel Ndambuki, who goes by the stage name "Churchill", hence the name of the show. While the Churchill Show is meant to entertain viewers with comedy, the spoken word poets provide a voice of reason amid the humour. Theirs is a call to expose the ills in the society, and by invading the comedy spaces they reach a wider audience, both physically and virtually.

4.2.1. The Virtual and Physical Audience in Spoken Word Poetry Performances in YouTube Comedy Shows

Brigeddia Poet interacts both with his physical and virtual audience in his performances. In most of his spoken word poems on Churchill Show he usually engages his physical audience by using them either as a point of reference in his poems, or to pass across a serious message. In the performance of his spoken word poem entitled "Special Dedication to Ladies" posted on YouTube, Brigeddia Poet marches to the stage dressed in his military uniform, and immediately after he recites his usual opening formula in which he acknowledges his position as a member of the disciplined forces.

Original Version (Swahili)

Ni kawaida kamanda anaposimama

kwenye jukwaa,

Sheria na masharti hutumika

Saluti ishara ya heshima na salamu.

Translation (English)

It is usual that every time the commander stands,

On the platform,

Rules and regulations must be applied,

Salute, a sign of respect and greetings.

Brigeddia uses this opening formula in most of his performances on Churchill Show. After this, a member of the audience shouts, "Mark time!", causing an uproar of laughter. The poet too is amused by that unexpected turn of events. Before he starts performing his poem, he challenges any beautiful lady to join him on stage. When none of the ladies take up the challenge, he points

to one lady in the audience and commands her to join him on stage. He then proceeds with his performance and addresses the words of the poem directly to this lady. In the absence of this lady on stage the poet would have used the apostrophe as a technique to directly address the poem to the audience. Apostrophe is a literary device used by oral artists to address their subject. In poetry the persona directly addresses his subject who is usually not in the audience. However, Brigeddia Poet in this poem improvises a situation in which the persona is directly addressing a specific subject that is present at the time of presentation. The lady from the audience acts as a representation of any lady that such a poem would be dedicated to. The poem is a light-hearted one, in which the persona expresses his deep affection for a woman he is in love with. A member of the virtual audience takes note of the fact that most ladies in the physical audience were reluctant to come forward, when the poet asked if there was any one of them who felt that she was beautiful to step forward.

Faith Keani

2 years ago

Najuwa kuna madem wanasema kwa roho zao i wish nigesimama😄😄😄😄

7

REPLY

This member of the virtual audience states, that she knows that there are ladies wishing that they could have seized the opportunity to join the poet on the stage and be showered with all those words of affection. She adds the laughing emoji to show how amused she is with her own musings. Even though this comment was written more than four years after the performance was posted on YouTube, seven members of the virtual audience have since liked the comment by clicking on the "like" button, as indicated above.

In this type of a performance the poet involves members of the physical audience in the real theatrical performance. When such a performance is viewed by the virtual audience members of

the physical audience become part of the performance to be watched. Their words and actions are observed by members of the virtual audience just like the words and actions of the poet. This involvement of the physical audience in the real theatrical performance contributes to the general aesthetic appeal, which captures the interest of the virtual audience, causing them to react to it. The lady who was invited on stage with the poet allowed him to shower her with all the affectionate words contained in the poem. When the virtual audience takes note of this particular scene, then there is that sense of timeless connection between the poet, the physical audience and the virtual audience. Through this comment and the likes it receives we experience some form of presence between the two types of audiences and the poet, even though they are not in the same physical space and time. The fact that this comment appears years after the initial posting displays the timelessness of mediatized performances in new media spaces. Another member of the audience comments about this scene too. He feels that the lady called on stage by the poet was smitten by his words.

OJ ODIDA

6 years ago

That was awesome dude,..you nyosod that chic with your art hadi akaget weak in the knees....kudos!!

8

 He congratulates the poet for a job well done in using his poetic skill to appeal to the lady's emotions. His comment is also liked 8 times. The fact that other members of the virtual audience are reading the comments left on the post is what keeps the performance alive years after it was originally performed and posted on YouTube. Another member of the audience, watching the show on YouTube from Ghana, a West Africa country, shows his interest in the show by

identifying himself as a poet from Ghana, and requesting to know how he can be part of this

programme.

Issmuk the Gigantic

9 months ago

Am a poet from Ghana, please how do I pass through this program?

This comment helps us to identify how this poem has a wide viewership, extending beyond

the Kenyan borders where it was originally staged. The diversity in the kind of audience is

hence displayed. Brigeddia Poet not only entertains his audience through this performance,

but he also provides vital information to other poets on other platforms that hosts poetry

performances. While no member of the audience responds to the question posed by this

member, its presence on the post almost five years after the original performance is an

indication that the performance is still gaining new audiences, and that it provides a source of

information to many viewers. Some members of the virtual audience, however, extend the

comic effect arising from the poem in the comment section by declaring their love for the

poet. This creates another layer of conversation amongst the members of the virtual

audience, which adds to the general humour in this poetry performance.

mary ngugi

5 years ago

i love the sound mmmh

1

REPLY

Hide 2 replies

Marshal Jackson Kithokilo

2 years ago

Say u love him too..

REPLY

Diana Awuor

1 year ago

Enyewe,,, running buuum of words

The fact that the conversation amongst the members of the virtual audience happens years apart but still connects with both the performance and what the first commenter said, is what makes virtual performances acquire their own unique aesthetic that cannot be compared to any other type of performance. Another member of the audience addresses the poet directly by using a hashtag and requests him to marry her. The hashtag is a hyperlink that connects to Brigeddia Poet's home page, which connects the virtual audience with the updates of other engagements that the poet is currently pursuing.

Shirks Aggie

5 years ago

#Brigeddia marry me 😊😊😝😝😝

5

REPLY

Hide 2 replies

Ahmed yussuf

2 years ago

Text me @alfaturan__

REPLY

REPLY

In her comment the lady uses a Smiling Face emoji with Heart-Shaped Eyes to emphasize her love for the poet. This is accompanied with a Winking Face with Tongue Stuck out emoji to communicate that she is just being cheeky, which makes her comment even more humorous. While Brigeddia Poet does not respond to her request, other members of the audience do, years later. One of them offers the lady their other social media link, so that she can get in touch with him, perhaps to fulfill her wish to get married. Another member of the audience makes a follow up on whether the lady is still interested in the poet. The lady does not respond, and we have no means of finding out whether she has read the comments or not. This kind of interaction that defies time is another trait that makes spoken word performances on social media appealing. One can get entertained just by reading the comments, which become part of the overall performance, just like the conversations that go on amongst members of the physical audience. Besides, the use of hashtags and emojis to communicate is a unique mode of expression only possible on social media platforms. The hashtag helps us to connect to the poet's home page and update us on new performances he is currently engaged in, while the emojis bring forth a visual display of emotions which the virtual audience uses as a display of their real emotions.

The poet is a product of the society and sometimes what he does in real life can be traced in his/her performances. Social media makes it easy for members of the virtual audience to access

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information relating to the poet's real life. Gracyk talks about events that take place inside and outside a performance as one of the things that members of the audience react to (Gracyk, 1997, p. 143). In the comment section of social media posts, it is easy to come across someone who knows the performer in real life, and whose comment could lead other members of the virtual audience to access more information about a performer or his /her performance. Brigeddia Poet is one of those poets whose performances reflect his personal life. Those who do not know him in real life might assume that his poetry about members of the armed forces is solely based on his creativity, but some of his social media followers reveal information that points to the fact that he composes some of his poetry from his own personal experiences. In one of his spoken word poetry performances on Chruchill Show entitled "If I Die in the Battlefield," Brigeddia Poet walks to the stage in a military uniform, dancing to the beat of a Swahili rap song that is playing in the background. He lifts his right hand up, and immediately the music stops playing, which causes the audience to laugh. He then breaks into a song.

> Soldier soldier wake up now,
>
> Take your rifle and follow me,
>
> And if i die in the battlefield,
>
> Tell my mama I did my best.

The poet then repeats these words of this poem, by reciting them before he begins the first stanza, in which he points out the civilians' lack of respect for military men and women. He mentions the demeaning nicknames that are associated with the military profession, and the media's readiness to publicize all the negative deeds committed by the members of the armed forces, yet ignore the many crimes committed by the civilians. He declares his service to the people, and states that he will not hesitate to arrest anyone who engages in criminal activities. The poem is about all members of the disciplined forces including the police. He ends the poem

on a light note, by telling those who have never experienced handcuffs to try it, using the

handcuffs he carried as realia for this performance. Several members of the audience present

their arms to be handcuffed, but the poet warns them that if that happens, they will have to

accompany him to the police station to have them removed, because he does not have the keys to

open them. At that point the host comes in to debrief the audience by informing them that

Brigeddia Poet is in fact a real soldier, and that he is not just acting out the role. The audience is

elated by this revelation, and they clap for the poet. A conversation ensues between the poet and

the host, in which the poet reveals some of the challenges experienced by soldiers in the field In

the end the host tries out some routine exercises that soldiers usually undertake in a very

humorous twist of events. The main host, Daniel Ndambuki, uses the description section of

YouTube to ask the virtual audience how many days the host of the show would last in a military

camp, hence connecting the virtual audience to the actual performance in the show. Some

members of the audience respond to this question from the host by addressing Mc Jessy directly.

Najmah Baby

3 years ago

😂😂😂😂😂jessy you always kill the show 🖐🖐🖐🖐

5

REPLY

Winnie Ngesa

2 years ago

Hahaaaaa.....niokotwe manama ...Bahrain!!!!! Auuuuuuuwiii Jessy.......

1

REPLY

Anna maria

114

Although the members of the virtual audience miss this theatrical experience of having that physical contact with the poet, they still experience that presence through the host's question in the description section and the comments. By the time of this research the show had over 200,000 views, indicating its popularity in the virtual spaces. Definitely , there would be no way a physical space would accommodate such a huge number all at once. Most members of the virtual audience show their solidarity with the members of the armed forces in the comment section. Some even agree with him that indeed most criminals do not get arrested due to lack of sufficient evidence.

I celebrate you and your troop keep going till you can't move anymore

2

REPLY

Pamela Konya

2 years ago

   I wanted to be a soldier but hii mchezo ya kukauka kama mti siwezani, I salute all soldiers and thank you for the sacrifice for your land

12

REPLY

Hide reply

Micah Kalu

1 year ago

Kuja wewe

One member of the virtual audience even creates a light moment in the comment section by

stating how she always wanted to join the military, but the thought of standing stiff like a tree

made her change her mind. She uses the Rolling on the Floor Laughing emoji to show how

hilarious the thought of standing stiff as a tree is. Her comment receives 12 likes and one reply

from another member of the audience, who tells her to join them in the military. We are not sure

whether this person is in the military or not, but his words make us suggest that he is. The

member of the audience who made the first comment however shows her respect for those

serving in the armed forces and appreciates their sacrifices.

The attention of the audience may be drawn to other people involved in the performance other

than the key performer. These people may include other artists, members of the crew or hosts.

This is in line with Gracyk's observation that one of the things that the audience react to is the

presence of other performers on the stage alongside the main performer (Gracy, 1997, p. 143).

For example, in Brigeddia Poet's performance some members of the virtual audience are keen on

the host whose stage name is Mc Jessy. He usually hosts a section of the Churchill Show dubbed

"Churchill Raw" while Daniel Ndambuki, who is the main host, usually hosts "Churchill Live."

Magda Njery

2 years ago

That respect in Jesse's voice when saying his name..... BRIGADIA!!! 😊😊

6

REPLY

Shiko Anne

3 years ago

😊😊😊😊😊😊 of Jesse... This guy looks strict 😊 kifua mbele tumbo ndani

3

REPLY

clemmy amani

3 years ago

Hahahaa MC Jessy unakaa chief 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊

22

REPLY

One member of the virtual audience notes Mc Jessy's voice when calling out the poet's name,

while another notices the strictness in the poet when instructing Mc Jessy on how to acquire a

military posture when making the salute. Yet another member is amused by Mc Jessy's appearance in the military uniform, which makes him look like a chief. To display their amusement, all these members of the audience use the Face With Tears of Joy emoji, which is normally used to show that one is laughing so hard to the point of having tears stream down their face. Each of these comments receive several likes, to show that a number of people in the virtual audience are either in agreement with what is written or they are amused by the remarks. Other members of the audience use this performance to relate with what is happening in the community, while others use it as an opportunity to reflect upon the lives of the uniformed men and women.

Samson Murimi

2 years ago

True, RAIA huachiliwa tu hivo afta kukosa witness

2

REPLY

Stella Onyango

1 month ago

We appreciate what you guys do. Always on the fore-front to save our lives. You have changed my mind about how I view the police. Too bad the good ones like you always leave.   My kifua, tumbo na macho at work!

One member of the audience agrees with the poet that indeed criminals are usually released because of lack of witnesses to testify against them. Another member reflects upon the poet's words and says that he has changed his perspective about how he views the police and feels sorry that good ones like the poet always leave the service. This gives us a hint that perhaps the poet is no longer in the service. In fact, by reading through the comments of the other members of the virtual audience it becomes clear that the poet left. The comments tell us exactly where he is at the time of this research.

Rose Monica

2 months ago

We trained with him in NYS Gilgil. am here after his graduation at US Army

14

REPLY

Hide reply

my albamu Musyoki

2 months ago

Dada kube tulikuanawewe 2011big up bt hayuko gambo

REPLY

Batesh media

2 months ago

Who is here after his graduation from US Army..

4

REPLY

Hide reply

charles chalx

2 months ago

Here after the story

Boniface Machogu

We learn from the audience that the Poet left his home country, Kenya, to join the US Army.

Through one of the members of the virtual audience we learn that before relocating to the United

States of America the poet and this member of the audience had attended the National Youth

Service (NYS) in Kenya together. Another member of the audience responds by stating that he

was also in the same institution at the time but refutes claims that the poet went overseas. He

seems to be misinformed, because other members of the audience acknowledge the fact that the

poet is currently in the US Army. It is an established fact that Brigeddia Poet is currently in the

US Army as he made this information public on his Facebook page. I have also interacted with

him personally and confirmed that he has indeed joined the US Army. Most members of the

virtual audience say that they have visited his post on YouTube after they received news that the

poet had joined the US Army. This performance space serves the same function that a real

theatrical space would. It connects people that have been separated from each other for a long

time. Through this performance space the poet's classmates reconnect with him and with each

other. Even though the poet does not respond to that comment, it is assumed that he will read the

comments. This space also connects the members of the virtual

audience with each other. Some long-lost friends and acquaintances reconnect. Other members of the audience are also served with updates on what the poet is currently engaged in. Therefore, the virtual performance space creates a unique community of viewers comprised of new and old friends and acquaintances that are drawn from separate geographical locations and can interact with each other both in real time and asynchronously. This is one of those traits of virtual performances that cannot be realized in a real theatrical space.

The interactive nature of social media also allows the performer to interact with his/her virtual audience. In some of his recorded live performances on the Churchill Show posted on YouTube, Brigeddia Poet responds to comments from members of the audience. In one of his poems entitled "Time Imefika", the poet responds with "Helloo" when a member of the virtual audience expresses her admiration for him. This response from the poet gets her excited, and she responds by saying "hi" to him. Another member of the virtual audience asks why the poet has not yet tried joining the army, to which he responds that he is a "cop".

> Natasha Gitau
> 5 years ago
> love this guy hes cute
> REPLY
> Hide 2 replies
> Brigeddia General
> 4 years ago
> Helloo
> REPLY
> Natasha Gitau
> 4 years ago

+Brigeddia Poet hi

REPLY

Mary Gerald

6 years ago

Brigedia y didn't he try it in army.he fits in

REPLY

Hide reply

Brigeddia General

4 years ago

I am a cop

This comment section is an indication that the poet usually reads comments from the audience after his performances. These responses become part of the virtual performance that transcend time and space, hence creating a whole new aesthetic in performance poetry. In spoken word poetry performed in a physical space a, once the performance comes to an end and everyone leaves the theatre house the poet has no way of retrieving the reactions from the audience. However, the virtual space provides the poet with the reactions from the audience which can be used as an opportunity for interaction even after the performance has been concluded. This can provide room for improvement and adjustment in the poet's future performances. Social media makes it easy for members of the audience to communicate with a performer, and a few poets take advantage of that to interact with the audience.

4.2.2. The Interactive Audience in Spoken Word Poetry Performed in YouTube Comedy Shows

Teardrops has mastered the art of capturing his audience by giving them punchline after punchline. His spoken word poems on the Churchill Show, posted on YouTube, also provide both humour and reflections into the ills in the society today. During the performance of his spoken word poem entitled "Hello Corruption" the host announces the entry of Teardrops by telling the audience to give an applause to the poet. He says "Wapi nduru ya Teardrops!" (Where is the applause for Teardrops?) This is a common phrase in the entertainment circles in Kenya whenever a famous artist is introduced to the audience. It is meant to show the artist that the members of the audience are excited to have him/her and are eager to experience his/her artistic skills. After this announcement from the host, Teardrops walks into a stage that is beaming with theatre lights, both from the floor and the ceiling. He is wearing a suit and a stylish round hat and carrying a landline telephone in his left hand. His right hand is holding the microphone. Once he gets to the centre of the stage, he engages the audience in a brief conversation which begins with greeting.

> He asks, "Niaje Wakenya?" (How are you Kenyans?"
>
> The audience responds, "Poa." (Fine)
>
> He asks, "How is corruption taking you guys?"
>
> Several voices from the physical audience respond "Bad!"
>
> He says, "So nataka tupigie corruption simu, au sio?"
>
> ("So I want us to give corruption a call. Don't you think so?")
>
> "Tuwaambie … zetu, au sio?"
>
> ("So that we tell them our issues. Don't you think so?"

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After this short engagement with the audience, Teardrops begins the performance of his spoken word poem, "Hello Corruption", in which the persona is holding a telephone conversation with corruption. He lifts the telephone he is carrying in his hands to his ear and says "Hello, Hello Corruption. Pole kwa kuamusha." This causes the audience to break into laughter. He takes the telephone off his ear and asks the audience whether he should continue with the telephone conversation or not. The audience tells him to continue. He then playfully tells them to allow him to hold the telephone conversation with corruption in peace, unless they are friends with corruption. This causes a round of applause from the audience. He then proceeds with the performance of this poem. The poem highlights several sectors in the country that have been riddled with corruption, such as the road network, education and health. He ends his poem by asking corruption to say how much money he wants in order to disappear from the country completely. The audience claps for him as he exits the stage.

Throughout the performance of this spoken word poem, Teardrops keeps his physical audience engaged by pausing several questions that require their response. He also makes use of humour to ensure that he remains relevant in this space, that is mainly concerned with comedy. While the physical audience enjoys the in-person interaction with the poet, responding promptly to the poet's questions and prompts, the virtual audience watches the poet and the entire physical audience as one. They are all part of the spectacle to be viewed by the virtual audience. The response from the virtual audience is only felt through the comments, likes, and views. By the time of this research the poem had over 94,000 views and had many likes and comments. While the views and the likes do not reveal exactly what the virtual audience feels about the performance, the comments do.

Tome Makwae

3 years ago

Some people in the crowd cheering will still tell you "tuko kwa serikali tunakula nyama nyinyi meza mate"

9

Sora Hassan

3 years ago

This is deep manze..corruption sio mchezo manze

4

Mohaa Amiin

2 years ago

Hongo mbali rushwa mbali TuanGamizE UFISADI 🙇

2

abdura dasilva

2 years ago

Coruption Nko na proposal 'Utachukua ngapi uishie?'

6

REPLY

Hide reply

Tanu Mzalendo

1 year ago

abdura dasilva

Hahahaaaa hawa mafisi hawaishii bure wamezoea vya bure😆😆😆😆

s

5

Most members of the virtual audience react to the message in the poem. Most of the comments indicate that corruption should be dealt with in order to ensure equitable distribution of resources. These comments are written in English, Sheng and/or Swahili, which echoes the poet's use of language in this performance. Teardrops is known for his use of Sheng in his poetry, which reflects his cultural background, as earlier observed in chapter 2, when talking about his recorded live performances. One member of the virtual audience reacts to the performance by observing that some members of the physical audience, listening and cheering to the poet's message on corruption, will still pride themselves in the fact that they are working in the same corrupt government and gaining all the benefits they can get from it. The phrase "Tuko kwa serikali tunakula nyama nyinyi meza mate," which is translated as "We are in government. We are eating meat. You continue salivating," can be better understood by a Kenyan audience that is well versed with the politicians' way of saying that they are enjoying the benefits of being in government, with total disregard of the suffering that the rest of the country is going through due to inequitable distribution of resources. The fact that this member of the virtual audience sees the physical audience as another spectacle to behold is what makes the virtual audience a unique aesthetic aspect in the field of performance studies.

Another member of the virtual audience agrees with the poet on his wish to end corruption completely by stating that corruption is not a joke ("Corruption sio mchezo manze"). Another member of the virtual audience calls for action against corruption. In his comment he writes, "Hongo mbali, rushwa mbali, tuangamize ufisadi," which can be translated as "Bribes aside, corruption aside, let us exterminate corruption." This call to action is similar to what the persona in the poem says in the last stanza. He asks corruption how much should be paid to him

(corruption) so that he may disappear forever. In fact, one member of the virtual audience repeats that line in the poem by writing it out as a comment which reads "Corruption Niko na proposal 'utachukua ngapi uishie?" This line is recited by the poet, and it can be translated to mean "Corruption, i have a proposal. How much (money) will you take so that you can leave?" There is a response to this comment from another member of the virtual audience, who compares the corrupt leaders to hyenas who survive on free things. His comment is liked by six other members of the virtual audience to show that they are in agreement with his observation. Other members of the virtual audience react to various aspects of the performance too other than the message.

George Benson

3 years ago

ayeeee..first commenter apewe gift😄😄😄

11

REPLY

Hide 2 replies

Gathogo Ann

3 years ago

George Benson mwaaa mwah congrats

REPLY

Susan Wangui

3 years ago

George Benson take it

Betty betie

3 years ago

U always talk the reality n u av a sense of humour,nakupenda tu saana

6

REPLY

INVERSION MUSIC

1 year ago

How does he cram all those sensible lines???

3

REPLY

Hide 2 replies

Tecla Mumbi

8 months ago

He doesn't cram because they come from him

REPLY

INVERSION MUSIC

8 months ago

 @Tecla Mumbi ooliskia wapi?

One member of the virtual audience suggests that the first person to leave their comment on this YouTube post containing Teardrops' performance should be awarded a gift. Other members of the audience concur with this suggestion, and it turns out that the person who made the suggestion was in fact the first to comment. One member of the audience congratulates her for being the first commenter by writing out his name and congratulating him. "George Benson, Mwaaa mwah congrats." Another member of the virtual audience supports the suggestion by stating, "George Benson take it," to show that he is the first commenter. This interaction amongst the members of the audience creates a form of entertainment, where the virtual audience engages in a little competition with each other in relation to the performance by shifting the focus on themselves. Another member of the virtual audience rates the poet's overall performance in all

his poems, and observes that he always talks the truth, and his sense of humour is appealing. Yet another member of the virtual audience is curious about the poet's ability to "cram" all those things he recites in his poems. This inquiry receives a response from another member of the virtual audience, who states that the poet does not really have to cram the words, because they are coming from him. The member of the virtual audience who paused the question humorously responds by asking where the respondent heard that from.

In his spoken word poem entitled "Vijana Simameni" translated as "Young People Wake Up", performed on the Churchill Show, Teardrops incorporates music. There is a singer, two guitarists, a pianist and drummers. The poem is a clarion call to the youth to vote wisely, because the elected leaders have a great impact on their lives. He believes that if the youths are not empowered, they will end up vandalizing public resources, leading to great losses in the community. He is critical of the misuse of public funds by the political leaders, as they spend a lot of money on meaningless foreign visits, that do not help in solving the problems facing the young people. He also cautions young people against the use of drugs, which have seen many of them perish and lose focus in life. He asserts that if the youth make the right choices when voting, they will change the society for the better, since they account for the highest stratum of population in Kenya. The performance begins with the music. The singer emotionally urges young people to be responsible, understandable and to avoid being used. The poet then takes over from the singer and begins by engaging the audience in a call and response moment, in which he poses a number of questions.

    Poet: Wasee wasee! (Guys guys!)

Audience: Eeeh!

Poet: Wasee wasee! (Guys guys!)

Audience: Eeeh!

Poet: Nina swali. (I have a question.)

Audience: Uliza. (Ask.)

Poet: Ni wakina nani hufanya kazi kwa bidii halafu mshahara wao unapewa wazee kwa bidii? (Who are those who work very hard then their salary is given to the old?)

Singer & Audience: Vijana! (The young people.)

Poet: Na ni wakina nani wako na potential ya kuongoza leo lakine waliambiwa wangoje hadi kesho? (Who are those with the potential of leading today, but have been told to wait until tomorrow?)

Singer & Audience): Vijana.

Poet: Ni wakina nani wanaeza ishi na amani na demokrasia lakini kwa sababu Wamekosa kazi ni hao hutumika kuzusha demo na ghasia? (Who are those who can live in peace and democracy, but due to lack of jobs they are being used to start demonstrations and violence?)

Singer & Audience: Vijana! (Young people.)

Poet: Ni wakina nani walitoka ushago wakiwa na business plan moja classic wakaambiwa wakuje Nairobi coz huko ndio kuko na capital halafu wakajikuta wakiishi gheto?)

Singer & Audience: Vijana! (Young people.)

Some members of the virtual audience join in the call and response session by responding with "Vijana" (young people), just like the singer and the physical audience. One member of the virtual audience goes ahead to encourage young people online to watch the show on YouTube and get it to 100 million views. This is an exaggeration, but indeed this performance gets a lot of views on YouTube. At the time of this research, the post had been viewed by over 103,000 virtual members of the audience. This flexibility of the virtual performances that allows members of the audience to watch at their convenience allows for a performance to receive more views. Although the two types of audiences (physical and virtual) are separated by space, they still react to the poetry performance in the same way. While members of the physical audience react to the performance orally, the members of the virtual audience respond to it through the comments, views, likes and loves. The same kind of appreciation experienced among the members of the physical audience is also reflected in the virtual audience.

Opunga Khalifa

3 years ago

noma sana

REPLY

Rael Kiarie

4 years ago

Teardrops uko juu sana

REPLY

Gift Kimorey

3 years ago

moto sana tear drop

REPLY

Steven Pesa

The virtual audience applauds the poet mostly using Sheng, which is the language variety that the poet uses in all his poems. Phrases such as "Noma sana", "Uko juu sana" and "Moto sana" are Sheng words used to mean that the poet has done an exemplary work in his performance by going above and beyond their expectations. One member of the virtual audience writes, "ctaki kukuita murderer adi kama umeua show wewe huniinspire kama poet juu ukweli wewe kio cha jamii." This can be translated to mean "I do not want to call you a murderer, but you have killed the show. You inspire me as a poet because you are the mirror of society." This commenter summarizes all the other comments in praise of the poet's skillful rendition of the poem. This appreciation, experienced in the virtual audience, is also witnessed in the physical audience, when the poet makes certain observations about the youth. The physical audience applauds the poet, when he criticizes young artists, who have resorted to changing their physical appearance instead of enlightening other youths. They also applaud when the poet criticizes politicians for misusing public funds on foreign trips that have no benefits to the ordinary citizens. There is a connection between the two types of audiences in applauding the poet, as if they are all in the same place, which creates an exceptional performance that can only be realized in the new media spaces. Members of both audiences reap the benefits of attending the performance, either physically or virtually, because in each setting up, they still exploit all the benefits of a live

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audience, that is able to connect with the poet and his crew, as well as the other members of the audience. The members of the virtual audience react to the poet's message by repeating some of the most captivating quotes from the poem, which is an indication that they are paying attention to the words of the poem.

Robert Gitau

1 year ago

Consequences za fegii ni HEAVY msi ndanganye na LIGHTER

1

REPLY

westgate pcs

1 year ago

ati watoi wa ma-RASTA wangezaliwa na nini Blessed drop???????????????????????????

Samal Losike

3 months ago

ujana nui moshi ukesho ni moto, ujusi ndo tulisema tuweze kujikimu nyakati za usoni.......

1

REPLY

One member of the virtual audience quotes *Consequences za fegi ni heavy msidanganywe na lighter.* This can be translated as "The consequences of cigarettes are heavy, do not be deceived by the lighter." This line is cautioning the young people against cigarette smoking as it is detrimental to their health. By quoting this line, the member of the audience has pointed out one of the key points in the poem, which can help inform other members of the virtual audience who might have missed that message. The commenter nicknamed Westgate pcs brings attention to

one of the poet's lines by formulating a question about it. He writes "*ati watoi wa ma-RASTA*

wangezaliwa na nini...?" (Translation: What did you say the Rasta's children will be born with?"

This question is a rhetorical one, because the poet has already given the answer in the poem, but

this member of the audience just wants to bring attention to that particular point. In the poem

Teardrops is talking about the effects of drugs, and he uses sarcasm to talk about those who

glorify the use of bhang as being part of the Rastafari culture. He humorously states that if bhang

was part of the human culture, then the children born to Rastafaran parents would have been

born with dreadlocks. When he recites this line, the physical audience applauds him. The fact

that the same line is quoted by a member of the virtual audience shows its importance in how the

two types of audiences perceive the message in the poem. They are captivated by the same

words.

Questions zina'luck answers,

(Questions lack answers)

Coz filter za sigara haziezi filter cancers,

(Because cigarette filters cannot filter cancers)

Consequences za fegi ni heavier msidanganywe na lighter,

(The consequences of cigarettes are heavier, do not be deceived with the lighter)

Wengi wao wako loose sio kila mtu anaishi Taveta ni Mtaita,

(Most of them are loose. Not everyone who lives in Taveta is a Mtatita)

Coz kama kusmoke weed ingekuwa part of human culture,

(Because if smoking bhang would have been part of human culture)

Si watoi wa marasta wangezaliwa na dready? (laughter, applause)

(The children of Rastafarans would have been born with dreadlocks)

But after overdose za madawa alizaa watoi wenye

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(But after an overdose of drugs she gave birth to children with)

Lip zao zimeparara wanafanana na mapeddy,

(Lips that are ragged they look like peddlers)

Most members of the virtual audience agree with the poet that young people have to stand up and vote for the right people, who will advocate for their rights. This is reflected in their comments, in which a section of them are calling out to the youth to wake up and defend themselves. This poem was posted on YouTube in 2017, which was an election year in Kenya, hence the topic was very relevant at the time. The poem will still move masses during many more elections to come, because the message remains fresh and does not apply to just one historic period. The youth are a forgotten lot in decision making in most African countries, yet they form a larger percentage of the voters. To make a difference, they need to join hands and vote for the right leaders who have their interest at heart.

Some members of the virtual audience appreciate the poet, the vocalist and the instrumentalists. Some members of the virtual audience appear to know the vocalist and one of the guitarists in person. Ali Ali 254 comments "teardrop always killing the show,,, phil on the vocals,,, total 🔥🔥🔥". The Fire Flame emoji is used to indicate that the show is exciting due to the collaboration between the poet and the singer, whose name is Phil, according to this commenter. This shows that the virtual audience is not only paying attention to the poet, but also to the other crew members. This comment is liked 19 times to show that this member's observation is supported by many others. Nazrite Eyasu, on his part, appears to know one of the guitarists in person, as he refers to him by name when he comments, "Kenty nakuona kwa guitar," which can be translated as "Kenty I see you on the guitar." Two other members of the virtual audience like

his comment, which means they too know this guitarist. This is a very important attribute of spoken word performances in new media. Members of the virtual audience meet people that are known to them in the real world and acknowledge them. This is similar to what happens in a real theatrical performance, where people meet long lost friends, as well as new ones, and they interact because of the social event that brought them together.

4.3. The Virtual vs The Physical Audience in the Performance of Spoken Word Poetry in New Media Spaces

The members of the audience are a crucial part of any performance. Their interactive nature can help determine the success of a performance or lack of it. Exposing a performance to a virtual audience is a great way of increasing the viewership and engagement in a performance. In the previous sections we examined the interactive nature of both the physical and virtual audience in spoken word poetry performances in the Churchill Show posted on YouTube. In this section we explore other platforms for the performance of spoken word poetry posted on YouTube. During the performance of spoken word poetry at the 2017 Groove awards posted on YouTube, Teardrops presents a poem about discrimination and ethnicity before a physical audience that appears very passive. This is a deviation from other performances by Teardrops on the Churchill Show, where his audience is usually very lively. When this performance is posted on YouTube, it gains a new kind of audience, which views the physical audience at the Groove awards as a spectacle to be watched alongside the poet. The virtual audience feels that the physical audience has not given the poet the attention he deserves for his performance.

shulestuff

4 years ago

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Teardrop is killing it but hiyo audience is way too fake...i like ile ya churchill

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<u>Willy Bounce</u>

<u>2 years ago</u>

The audience is very fake

The virtual members of the audience praise the poet for the work well done but express their disappointment at the physical audience whom they describe as "fake" due to their passiveness. Shulestuff compares this physical audience at the Groove Awards to the one at Churchill Show and states that he prefers the latter. The other members of the virtual audience comment by quoting parts of the poet's words that captivated them. Through the quotes the key points in the poem can be identified. One member of the virtual audience referred to as Shadrach Juma appreciates the poet's word play and quotes the line "....Tuwe na udugu na si U kaa bila... " from the poem, which can be translated as "We should have brotherhood and not tribalism." In the poem Teardrops is talking about the effects of ethnicity, and that quote is key in that poem. By quoting it in the comment section, this member of the audience helps the other members of the audience to focus on it to enhance their understanding of the poem.

Conclusion

Spoken Word performances in new media create interactions that are not dependent on time and remain active for as long as the post remains in the public domain. While the poet cannot see the members of the virtual audience, he feels their presence through the views, likes, dislikes, loves, emojis and comments left on their performances posted in new media. The members of the virtual audience in turn feel the presence of the poet through his/her responses to the comments

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and through the likes, loves and emojis he leaves on each comment. The number of views reveal to the poet the number of times his performance was watched in a particular social media channel. The "like" feature on YouTube is not only used by members of the virtual audience to show their support for the poet, but also to show their support of the views raised by other members of the virtual audience. The number of likes on a comment by a virtual member of the audience indicates how well their idea has been received. The likes are even more timeless because there is no way of telling when a post or comment was liked. The comments left by members of the virtual audience help connect them to the poet as well as give the poet some feedback on his/her performance. Most commenters make use of the apostrophe to address the poet and other members of the virtual audience. It is this apostrophe that makes the virtual audience establish some sort of presence in the performance. They directly address the poet and tell him/her what they like about his performance and sometimes the performer responds by either liking the comment or responding to it in the comment section. While members of the virtual audience cannot tell when a post or a comment was liked they can tell when a response to a post or comment was made. YouTube indicates how long ago the comment was posted. However, the exact date when a comment was left is never given. Instead, YouTube only indicates how long ago a comment was posted. It is only the post containing the performance that gives the exact date it was uploaded on YouTube which can help to tell whether the comments were made within the time the performance was uploaded on YouTube or not. In most of the spoken word performances on YouTube, members of the virtual audience continue interacting over a prolonged period of time, sometimes spanning to five or more years. This is one feature that is unique to performances posted in new media. They are timeless. A virtual

member of the audience can join in the performance at any time and still he/she can interact with the poet and other members of the virtual audience.

The intersection between the physical and the virtual audience has been the concern of this chapter. Spoken word poetry performances in new media spaces comprise of two layers of audiences: the physical audience and the virtual audience. In such performances the physical audience becomes part of the spectacle to be viewed by the virtual audience. The actions of the physical audience during the performance affect the reactions of the virtual audience and this is reflected in some of the comments made in social media spaces such as YouTube. In the comment section members of the virtual audience appreciate the work of the poet as well as make remarks about the actions of the physical audience. Thus, the physical audience plays a significant role in the appreciation of a virtual performance. Through the comments made in new media spaces we observe the six aspects that an audience appreciates in a performance as advanced by Gracyk. These six aspects include 1) the main performer's actions; 2) the presence of other performers alongside the main performer; 3) the subject matter and the medium through which it is presented; 4) the current performance and other performances of the same kind; 5) the relationship between a performance and audience's experiences in life; 6) the events taking place within and without the performance space.

Firstly, Both the physical and the virtual audience appreciate the performer's main actions. If the poet requires members of the audience to respond to a question or to join him/her in a certain action on stage, members of the physical audience will participate while members of the virtual audience will observe the participation of the physical audience and react to it through

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comments, likes, loves and emojis. Secondly, some spoken word poets incorporate music in their

performances and both their physical and virtual audience appreciate the vocalists and

instrumentalists who perform alongside the poet. Since music is used as a chorus in spoken word

poems of this nature, the members of the physical audience often join in the singing. They also

clap and cheer when the vocalists and instrumentalists display unique techniques in their

delivery. Members of the virtual audience show their appreciation of the vocalists and the

instrumentalists by writing part of the chorus in the comment section of new media since most of

the time it carries the dominant theme of the poem. They also appreciate by making positive

remarks about the vocalists and the instrumentalists in the comment section. These remarks are

sometimes accompanied by emojis and likes from other members of the virtual audience who are

of the same view. Thirdly, both the physical and virtual audience appreciate the subject matter of

the poem. Members of the physical audience show their appreciation by clapping and cheering

whenever the poet says something interesting or relevant to their situation. Members of the

virtual audience react to interesting and relevant messages in the poem by making remarks in the

comment section and sometimes even quoting the interesting fact that the poet is trying to pass

across. Fourthly, while we might never know whether the physical audience has appreciated a

current performance in relation to other performances, it is easy to tell with the virtual audience.

In the comment section the virtual audience will draw those comparisons. The virtual audience

will compare the reaction of the physical audience to a performance staged in different physical

spaces. They will take note of which type of audience is better at motivating the poet than the

other in their comments. Sometimes the members of the virtual audience may even compare two

or more spoken word poets in terms of the content and style of their spoken word poems in the

comment section. This is done by adding a link or a hashtag that redirects other members of the

virtual audience to performances by the other poets that are a subject of comparison. Fifthly, it is easy to tell the relationship between a performance and the audience's experiences in life with the virtual audience than with the physical audience. With the physical audience we might get this information only if the poet poses a question to them regarding their situation. Members of the virtual audience will write comments about how the poet's message is relevant to their own experiences in life. Other members of the virtual audience with similar experiences will like and reply to the comment too. Lastly, members of the physical and virtual audience may also talk about events taking place within and outside the performance space. However, while we might never find out the contents of this conversations in a physical audience it is easy to observe this in a virtual audience through the comment section of new media. Members of the virtual audience may write about the poet's personal life or their encounter with the poet outside the performance space. They may relate these things to the words of the poem or to what is happening in their community at the time. Therefore, spoken word performances in the virtual spaces meet the requirements of a performance and can be used by artists to reach a wider audience beyond their physical spaces. While both the physical and the virtual audience appreciate the performance in all the six aspects expounded by Gracyk, each one of them has their own unique attributes that add to the general aesthetic appeal of virtual performances.

CHAPTER FIVE: SPOKEN WORD POETRY IN NEW MEDIA AS A COLLABORATIVE

5.1. Introduction

Spoken word poetry in Kenya is evolving, as poets adapt to the new technological advancements, especially in the age of social media. In this chapter we explore the significance of the new media in promoting collaborative spoken word poetry. In spoken word poetry performances, the poet is always given more prominence in relation to the other participants involved, since it is assumed that the poet is the "creator" of the artistic work, without whom the performance will be non-existent. However, in the age where authors take credit for published work, it is important for all collaborators in a work of art to be acknowledged for their contribution. This happens with some spoken word poets on YouTube, but others do not which pauses the danger of copyright issues in future. Besides, most social media platforms are now paying artists for their content. When collaboration takes place it becomes problematic to decide on how the payment is to be conducted. Performance is a collaborative art in nature. Seth Widden defines collaboration as the association that is formed amongst artists in the process of their making creative works (Whidden, 2007, 77). Whidden privileges the writer in the process of literary creation involving collaboration. He reviews Wayne Koestenbaum's work on collaborative literature and proposes a "new model" for contemporary poetry. He asserts that his research centres on the essence of collaboration. He explores the idea of multiple authors existing in a single text and classifies collaboration into two categories: "collaboration in *praesentia* and collaboration in *absentia*" (Whidden, 2007, p. 76). Collaboration in *praesentia* is the "traditional collaborative model" where two or more authors meet physically and contribute towards the writing of a single text. This involves literary texts in which the co-authors are clearly mentioned, as well as literary texts in which the co-authors are not revealed. Collaboration in *absentia* involves the creation of a text

when one of the co-authors is not present. This kind of collaboration happens either consciously or unconsciously, depending on the author's intentions (Whidden, 2007, p. 80). Using Whidden's model we can therefore say that spoken word poets collaborate both in *praesentia* and *absentia.* There are spoken word poems in which many poets come together to compose one piece (*praesentia*), and those in which only one poet composes the poem while including the ideas of others, either consciously and unconsciously, through such artistic techniques as pastiche, parody and intertextuality. Spoken word poets in Kenya blend their poems with "songs, proverbs and oral narratives" (Ekesa, 2016, p. 31), as well as prose. They also incorporate other forms of oral poetry in their work (Ekesa, 2016, p. 31). While Whidden's article focuses only on collaboration in relation to the text, my research explores collaboration beyond the text, to include the audience, and other artists involved in the performance of spoken word poetry in new media spaces.

In examining the relationship between actresses and playwrights, Maria Delgado observes that creativity in theatrical performances has always been attributed to the author. She argues that placing a sole author at the heart of a theatrical event is debatable. She asserts that privileging the author in theatrical performances undermines the place of other people involved in a performance, even though the author remains the brain behind the entire process. (Delgado, 2007, p.26). Although the spoken word poet in new media spaces single-handedly weaves the poem into a creative piece, he collaborates with directors, producers, designers and other artists to create a performance that transcends the text. It is this kind of collaboration that we explore in this research. Collaboration in this research is analyzed at four different levels: the creative level, the technical level, the performance level and the production level. The creative level involves

collaboration between the poet and other artists when composing the words of the poem. The technical level involves collaboration between the poet and the technical crew responsible for lighting, sound, design and cinematography. The performance level involves collaboration between the poet and the instrumentalists as well as members of the audience in co-creation. The production level involves the collaboration between the poet and the producers who offer financial support as well as influence the thematic concerns in the poem.

Originally, spoken word poetry in Kenya was written and performed solely by the poet before a physical audience in a physical space. Thus, collaboration at the composition stage was non-existent. In fact, most poets could perform their self-edited manuscripts to their audience. Whidden considers editing as a form of collaboration in which the editor "shapes, redefines, and certainly collaborates on an early version, leading up to a final published work" (Whidden, 2007, p. 74). However, over time the spoken word poets in Kenya have realized the power of collaborating with others to enhance their performances, especially in new media platforms that thrive with audio-visual display of content. This has seen spoken word poets collaborate with other spoken word poets/musicians/vocalists, technical crew, the audience, the instrumentalists and producers, to create a unique aesthetic appeal that is transforming the genre of spoken word poetry in Kenya. Recording of spoken word poetry for purposes of posting in new media spaces has necessitated collaboration with film and video editors, since the virtual space is ideal for video presentations. The advent of spoken word film poetry has further led to collaboration with screenwriters, cinematographers and animators. Both the physical and virtual audience are all collaborators in the performance of spoken word poetry in new media spaces. In this chapter we explore the significance of the new media in promoting collaboration in spoken

word poetry performances. Collaboration is analyzed right from the creation of the text to the production of the performance in new media platforms. The chapter focuses on the elements of theatre which are key to enhancing a performance. These elements include the poet/poem, the performer(s), the audience, sound, lighting, costume, scenic design, the producers and the directors. These elements are categorized into four levels of collaboration: the creative level, the technical level, the performance level and the production level. The spoken word poetry of Mufasa, Teardrops, Brigeddia Poet, Namatsi Lukoye, Kennet B. and Dorphan will be evaluated. The significance of the interaction between spoken word poetry and new media is that it opens room for collaboration in spoken word poetry. Since the new media allows for audio-visual presentations, the spoken word poets collaborate with videographers and photographers to create performances that are designed to capture the attention of the audience.

5.2. Collaboration in Text-Based spoken word Poetry on Facebook and Twitter

Collaboration in the text-based spoken word poetry on Facebook and Twitter, takes place mostly at the creative, technical and performance levels. Most spoken word poets compose their own poems and post them on Facebook and Twitter. Collaboration may take place at this level of the creation of a text if the poet composes the poem together with another poet or vocalist. Such poems are usually accompanied by photographs and videos of the poets and/or other people, mostly their fans or other artists, which involves collaboration at the technical level. Since the spoken word poems are usually long, the poets have to attach eye-catching photographs and videos to draw the attention of the virtual audience by appealing to their sense of sight and hearing. The poets also attract the attention of the audience by selecting attention-grabbing titles to their text-based poems. Once they capture the attention of the audience with these two

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strategies, they are sure that their poems will gain visibility on social media platforms which will in turn attract a wider audience. The need for photographs and videos in these poems creates room for collaboration with photographers and videographers. Dorphan and Mufasa are popular with this kind of poetry on Facebook and Twitter. In an interview with Dorphan he revealed that most spoken word poets use Facebook for their text-based spoken word poetry, because this social media platform is ideal for written texts. Facebook does not restrict the number of words that one can use in a single post, hence making it ideal for long pieces of writing, like poetry. Twitter, however, restricts the number of words that one can use in a single post, hence most poets use it to advertise their poetry, by posting a few attention-grabbing lines from their poems, then directing their audience to their YouTube channel to watch the entire performance. In such instances, the poets post a short extract from their YouTube video to create interest in their audience to follow up on their YouTube posts.

5.2.1. Collaboration between spoken word Poets, Photographers and the Virtual Audience on Facebook

Spoken word poets collaborate with photographers and the virtual audience in their social media performances. Collaboration with photographers is *in praesentia,* while collaboration with the audience is *in absentia*. The use of photography alongside the written word in social media spaces, is a technique used by spoken word poets to draw the attention of the virtual audience as well as enhance the meaning of the poem. Xinyuan Wang states that majority of social media users prefer visual communication to textual communication. He asserts that visual communication is slowly taking up the place of written communication. (Wang, 2016 p.57) In social media spaces a single image can communicate effectively even without the use of words.

When images are combined with words communication becomes even more clearer to the audience. The images become an alternative way in which the poet expresses his message to the audience. Since images are important in social media communication, collaboration between the poet and photographers is necessary. Once the written poem and the accompanying photograph is posted in social media spaces, members of the virtual audience react to it using comments, emojis and likes. In the comment section some members of the virtual audience create their own poems that echo the original spoken word poem. The newly created poems in the comment section become part of the original poem to other members of the virtual audience.

Mufasa posts his text-based spoken word poetry on Facebook every Tuesday, accompanied by the hashtag #poetictuesdays.

This hashtag is important, as it is a hyperlink which directs his audience to his main Facebook page, where they can read and react to his other poems on this platform, that they might have missed. His poetry covers numerous topics, ranging from love to social justice. His love poems are a favourite of many of his followers on Facebook, who get inspired by his witty and sensual way of putting across his message. Sometimes he makes it look like he is talking about love, but there is an underlying issue on social justice being addressed. It is therefore important for his audience to critically analyze his poems for the deeper meaning. Some of his love poems include "She Different," "When You are 14", "June" and "My Uncle wants to Play Matchmaker." Sometimes he posts his Facebook poems without a title. He always attaches a photograph of himself with others in most of these poems to capture the attention of the audience. The use of photographs is a clear indication of some kind of collaboration between him and the photographer. The photos become part of the poetic style employed by the poet to add layers of

meaning in the poem and also to get the attention of the virtual audience. Most of the time the photos are used to create symbolic meaning in the poem. This kind of collaboration might be in *praesentia* or *absentia,* depending on whether the photographer was aware of the poet's intentions to use the photos in the poems, and whether he was present at the time the poem was composed.

In his spoken word poem entitled "She Different" posted on Facebook on 13th July 2021, Mufasa attaches a photograph of himself holding a plate from which he is holding a piece of the tangerine fruit. In the picture the poet keenly examines the fruit he is just about to eat as if there is some mystery about it. This resonates with the message in the poem in which the persona attempts to demystify a lady he finds fascinating by giving several suppositions about her. In the poem he uses anaphora, which is the repetition of words or phrases at the beginning of successive sentences, clauses or lines in a poem. Anaphora is used as an emotional appeal to the audience when persuading them to see things from your point of view. It is also used as an artistic technique intended to add rhythm in a poem. In this poem the persona repeats the words "I bet" at the beginning of almost all the lines to convince the audience that the persona in the poem finds his female subject a mystery. Everything he knows about her is a supposition, and that's why he uses the phrase "I bet" at the beginning of every line to draw the attention of the audience to what he thinks about the mystery woman whom he might have fallen in love with. We know he might be in love with the mystery woman because in the last line he says that her eyes "are the recipe of how to cook a man's heart.".

SHE DIFFERENT!
I bet she's the type to stand in the rain, like the girl in a Ryan Gosling movie.

I bet her tears are hers alone and her joy is for anyone.
I bet she's good with everyone but she's not for everyone.
I bet she loves like there's no tomorrow, and her ex's are still trying to find tomorrow.
I bet she can spend her afternoon sleeping but she can never spend a day unnoticed.
I bet there is no memo on how to be like her.
I bet she hangs out with stars but her shine eclipses stars.
I bet anyone who finds her strange, struggles to interpret different.
I bet her smile holds things together.
I bet her doubts, her dreams, and her laughter are a mining site of precious stones, in fact, I bet her name rhymes with ruby.
I can bet all day but it's her eyes that I'm sure of.. they are the recipe for how to cook any man's heart.
#poetictuesdays

This use of anaphora inspires his audience to create their own pieces in the comment section.

Some use anaphora while some merely repeat his words which is also another role of anaphora.

It makes the audience anticipate the same words from the speaker.

◈ Top Fan
Ken Muiruri
I bet she knows how to prepare the delicious snack you are having!!!😆😆

Christin Mukami
I bet she's good with everyone but she's not for everyone 👌👌🤩

Keshi Paul
I bet her tears are hers alone and her joy is for everyone❤️❤️❤️❤️

Wangui Ene Mwenda
I bet this is the most dope thing I have read today 👌

◈ Top Fan
Meek Phred Hillz
Been a while, these lines are so fresh.
I bet this is how you want this poem to be.

Christine Nzioka
I bet she can spend her afternoon sleeping but she can never spend a day unnoticed 💥

Using the same style as the poet, some members of the virtual audience respond by repeating lines from the poem, while others create their own lines to match the poet's use of anaphora by starting with the words "I bet." There is some creativity from Wangui Ene Mwenda and Meek Phred Hillz in appreciating the poet. They both begin with the poet's use of anaphora "I bet" which gives their compliments some poetic touch. In the end we do not just have plain comments, but poetically constructed pieces that add to the poet's composition. This places the virtual audience as co-creators in the composition of this poem. All these comments are part of this poem, because when a virtual member of the audience comes across the poem, he/she will first of all get attracted to the picture then the poetic text and the comments, all of which will form his/her virtual experience with this poem. These three elements in this poem therefore become part of the poem and should be viewed as one, which makes all the people involved in creating them part of the creators of this poem.

In other cases, some members of the virtual audience go ahead to create an entire poem in response to the poem that the poet has posted. This creates a sub-text within the main poem that members of the virtual audience can read and react to through likes, loves, comments, emojis and GIFs. A good example of one such poem is Mufasa's Facebook poem entitled "When You are 14," posted on 16th February 2021. In this poem the poet describes the changing meaning of the word "love" as people advance in age. It starts from unrealized love at the age of 14 through 16. This leads to many missed chances and regrets at the age of 18, as his peers gain courage to approach the girl he has been eyeing. By the age of 22 the persona has finally gotten himself a girlfriend but is still shy and self-conscious. By the age of 24 love is a fantasy filled with sweet vibes, but things begin to change at 25, when heartbreaks set in and by 28 love has lost its previous meaning and people are ready to take what comes their way. This poem is not only

expressed through words, but also through a picture. The use of the picture in the poem indicates that there was collaboration between the poet and the photographer. Mufasa even gives the name of the photographer as Shery Yohannan which confirms that indeed collaboration took place. In the picture, Mufasa poses with his eyes closed and phone in hand. He appears to be in deep thoughts. The watch on Mufasa's wrist in this picture is symbolic of the passing of time. Just like the time on the watch changes every second, love too changes with time. In the poem love at fourteen feels very different from love at twenty eight. At fourteen through eighteen love is like a dream that the persona keeps chasing but never achieves. Even though the persona's path always crosses that of the girl of his dreams, he never gathers enough courage to declare his love for her. The image of the poet in a sleeping mode with a cell phone in hand is a portrayal of the elusiveness of love in teenage years. The phone in hand is the persona's reality yet he is sleeping and dreaming of the girl who can easily be reached by phone if physical contact is impossible. On the other hand, love at twenty eight love is no longer a dream but a necessity that is hard to come by. The poet includes the name of the photographer immediately after the last line of the poem followed by the photograph. Shery Yohannan, the photographer, is the Co-Founder and Chief Creative Director at Matshepo Moving Picture Company. In 2018 she was nominated for the Kenya Slum Film Festival award. Thus, the use of Yohannan's photography is an indication that Mufasa sought the services of a professional photographer to get the photo for this Facebook poem and it was not just a randomly selected photo in his archives.

> …
> Love is who you are,
> Love is what you feel,
> Love is something you did,
> Love is free,
> Love is where you want to be,
> I feel like I can change the world.
> And it's all love.
> #poetictuesdays

Members of the audience respond to this poem in different ways. While some compliment the poet for his creativity, some create their own poems that are just as long as Mufasa's poem. Some of these commenters are poet's themselves, and they use this space to advertise themselves to Mufasa's followers. One commenter by the name Michael Ollinga Oruko writes a very long love poem that echoes Mufasa's poem. In this poem, Oruko uses Mufasa's model to talk about the manifestations of love at various stages. He starts with love at 14 and ends at 28, just like in Mufasa's poem. He spices up Mufasa's poem by creating more vivid descriptions of this love rather than just making philosophical statements.

Michael Ollinga Oruko
It's all love from 14,
Many days besides February 14,
Explicit yet shy thoughts gathered at 16,
The freedom to experience when you get to 18,
Hoping that love is built from your identity,
And at 18 you've got an ID,
The season you remind your parents you're also an adult in the room and deserve a lover,
Love's the first heartbreak that struck at 22,
After leaving campus only for them to find a better lover,
It's the hope of and desire of hooking up a soulmate at 24,
With a dream of introducing them to your parents at 25,
Bring the city to a standstill with a proposal at 26,
Capture blogs and timelines with splendid, magnificent wedding gowns,
A fleet of high end cars and Italian suits,
And pricey rings at the back of till death do us part vows, at 27,
Love's beautiful if one finds that who loves back in truth,
Love's pain when you realise you wanna divorce at 28,
But the law keeps you together legally for another 2 years,
Though your hearts are apart,
Like the East is from the West,
Love is cherishing oneself,
With knowledge that God is love,
Love is seeing yourself in your other half and loving them as you do to yourself,
You can't give love when you love yourself not,
Many have not loved long,
For they have been short of love for themselves,
Love is beyond age,
Though True love Iike wine,
Becomes fine with age,

And when infidelity and violence knock,
Walking out is love because there's no better edge,
To justify the love, for oneself,
Which only, can give life to love for others,
My pulse stopped a bit,
Coz she pulled me out of my thoughts,
Like the colourful magazine, in the Friday newspaper,
As she pronounced,
I wish you said you'd love me then,
Nonetheless I invite you to my wedding on March 14,
How I wished she would say February 30th,
Coz then I'd have a chance to win her heart,
But it's over,
And I now know,
Love is letting those you admire know you want them to be yours,
Love at 30, hardly called by name,
It's compatibility, a shared vision,
And commitment to agreements signed after the second date,
Maybe, on this 3rd floor,
Love is resignation from false standards,
It's a matching class affair,
It's yoh, come let's live, weren't far from a perfect match.

There are parallels between Mufasa's poem and Oruko's poem in the comment section. While Mufasa views love at 14 as one that is unrealized, Oruko views it as love that goes beyond February 14th, which is Valentine's Day, considered internationally as the day for lovers. While the 18 year old in Mufasa's poem is a boy who is too shy to approach a girl, in Oruko's poem at this age the boy is bold enough to confront his parents about matters of love. Love at 22 in Mufasa's poem is full of self-consciousness, while in Oruko's poem it is a time of heart breaks. The heartbreaks in Mufasa's poem come much later, at 26. By 28 love is indescribable in Mufasa's poem, while it is pain as a result of the desire to divorce in Oruko's poem. Oruko's poem attracts 163 likes and loves, and 20 replies from members of the virtual audience, which shows the attention it attracts among Muafasa's followers. Most comments compliment Oruko for such great creativity, while some commenters tag other members of the virtual audience to come and read the poem. Tagging users on Facebook enables them to view the comment which

they have missed, because Muafasa's poem receives many comments. The tag makes a particular

comment more visible to the one being tagged. Another commenter called Francis Njihi also

comments on Mufasa's poem by creating another poem addressing the subject of love.

◈ Top Fan
Francis Njihi Waruru
You never notice me
You never notice the yearning in my voice when I say hi
The hunger in my eyes and the twitching of my ears when you speak.
You never look back when you pass me
You would have seen a beaten man,foot thumping with fist clenched
And regret displayed on my face
For not trying to reach out
Not speaking out
Yesterday I passed by your place
And I heard you sing
And I swore to make my move soon
And in the morning when we met you had a man holding your hand
And you said,hi,,meet Ben,
and to Ben you said babe,this is Ken my friend.
I died
https://www.facebook.com/Waruru-Art-591334497961648/

Francis Njihi Waruru is designated as one of Mufasa's Top Fans. The "Top Fan" feature on

Facebook allows the owner of a Facebook page to mark his loyal followers with a badge

generated by Facebook. This badge is visible to all Facebook users. Waruru's poem does not

outline the age when love happens, but rather it re-enacts the situation with most lovers at 14

through 18, as outlined by Mufasa. While Mufasa paints love at 14 and 16 as unrealized and

marked by shyness to approach a girl, Waruru narrates a story about his shy persona. The

persona in Waruru's poem is in love with a girl he is too shy to approach at the beginning, which

resonates with Mufasa's love at 14 through 16. As the persona finally resolves to approach the

girl to make his feelings known, he realizes that it is too late, as the girl is already taken by

someone else. This is like Mufasa's love at 18, where the persona loses the girl he has been

hesitating to approach when a friend of his makes the first move. These two poems by Oruko and Waruru, therefore, become part of the entire poetic text originally created by Mufasa alone. The commenters are collaborators of some sort in the creation of this poem. Such poets become co-creators in the comment section. This therefore creates a subtext within the main text which is Mufasa's poem.

In his spoken word poem entitled "Guns Don't Kill People" posted on Facebook on 20th April 2021, Mufasa addresses the issue of social justice. In the poem he explores the various ways in which social injustices have led to the suffering of many people. The persona believes that physical violence is not the cause of people's disillusionment. He believes that poor governance is the root cause of all the injustices experienced in society. He identifies corruption, misuse of power and inefficiency among the things that kill people's hopes. This poem is accompanied by a picture that is extracted from the Reuters Media company. The poet does not mention the photographer, but makes it known to the audience that the picture was obtained from "Reuters" which is a media company. This kind of collaboration is what Whidden refers to as collaboration in *absentia* (Whidden, 2007, p.76). The photographer is unaware that his photography is being used by the poet. In the picture there is the image of a man wearing a mask. On the mask are words, written in bold, demanding for the arrests of Covid millionaires. There is a hashtag attached to those words, indicating that it is a trending topic. "Covid millionaires" is the infamous title given to those who took advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya to make money illegally by embezzling funds that had been donated by foreign organizations for the management of the pandemic. The picture is in line with the issues on social justice that the poet is addressing in the poem. Mufasa talks about the embezzlement of the donations from the billionaire businessman Jack Ma of Alibaba. These donations ended up benefitting the "Covid

Millionnaires" while the ordinary Kenyans, who were supposed to benefit, continued to suffer.

This poem alludes to real events that happened during the Covid-19 pandemic in the year 2020 in

Kenya.

Mufasa Poet
Guns don't kill people.
People kill people.
Hate kills people.
People in positions of leadership who don't take a shot at leading, kill people.
Hospitals without oxygen kill people.
Fake doctors left to run unregulated hospitals kill people.
Ambulances that need you to send cash first before they are an emergency service kill people.
The 12,000 guns produced yearly at Ruiru will not be used to kill covid, they will just be used to kill people.
4 billion could have been used to scale up public vaccination against a virus that kills people.
We are not at war, we are just sick and stuck and depressed and depression kills people.
A government that spreads BBI and Huduma number enthusiastically and is less enthusiastic about public covid vaccination drive kills people.
To render people jobless without any financial cushion is to kill people.
People with nothing to eat can kill people.
Having nothing to eat kills people.
Lacking rent for months is stressful and stress has killed people.
People with everything keep taking from people who have nothing to give, that's how you kill people.
To be a democratic state without an opposition party is how you kill the voices of people.
People with nothing to give, need Churches, Mosques and Temples to give their voices because silence has killed people.
If PPE supplies donated by Jack Ma were stolen at a time when frontline health workers were dying while fighting a virus that kills people,
And KEMSA created millionaires out of public money earmarked for medical equipment needed in the fight against a virus that kills people,
Another Tax increase is a rewritten epitaph on a tombstone of hope that already died in the hands of people who kill people.

#poetictuesdays

Reuters

The virtual audience responds to this poem by repeating some of the lines by the poet and stating

other issues that lead to a depressed society. One commenter, known as Winnie Madoro, states in

a poetic way that acquiring a university degree and failing to secure an employment kills people.

She also states that fooling people that their views are important, then disregarding them, also

kills people. Another commenter by the name Lorna Barrus points out that the frequent

lockdowns that came because of Covid-19 restrictions also kill people. She refers to a specific

point in time, when people could not access medical facilities after lockdown, leading to deaths

that could be avoided at the onset of the pandemic in the year 2020. She further states that the

stress that came because of the restrictions during the pandemic is another cause of death to

many people. This resonates with Mufasa's poem and the picture attached to it. Martin Tiran Jr.

talks of leaders who refuse to accept elections, and incite citizens into riots, as the cause of many

deaths. This always comes in after elections in some countries, including Kenya. Michael

Ollinga Oruko, the commenter in the previous poem by Mufasa, responds to this poem by

writing another very long poem that touches on the same topic.

Michael Ollinga Oruko
Too many killings,
So much killings,
Because people can't rise up for each other but mtu wetu we discriminate and discrimination kills people,
Voting for devils we know end up killing good leadership,
Poor leadership is the disease killing Kenyans,
When MPs salaries are increased and health funds stolen so many caskets are put six feet deep under,
Because witnesses in land grabbing scandals were killed to help kill the truth,
Stray bullets aimed at protestors against bad governance have killed people,
When government taxes ARVs and Medical donations it slowly kills patients,
If police officers take bribes from overloaded, road unworthy matatus, do they remember foreseen accidents kill people?
When parents take young girls for abortion in backstreet clinics,
They within hours kill two people,
When we get married, get beaten but hold on to violent partners to please social media followers we kill ourselves, we're people,
When we're left and can't accept we go berserk and kill people,
When we go for money not love and walk away when reach we're exposing ourselves to death from angry ex-partners,
When partners call married people at 2am and use pet names they kill marriages,
When police hire guns to criminals many people including themselves will get killed,
When KNH takes 8 hours to admit critically ill babies, babies die as helpless mothers watch,
When food donations are diverted to markets fodsale, starving Kenyans soon die,
When we use our only bullet called ballot to shoot down good leadership,
Will we live past tano terror to the next election year,
When politicians flout COVID-19 protocols and hold rallies,
The virus which kills people spread and churches adhering to rules are closed and people's faith begins withering and eventually die,
When we attend rallies against COVID-19 protocols we make ourselves prey for the virus which also kills people,
When we troll others online, don't we remember words kill,
That the tongue has power to bless and curse but we choose the latter and kill people's spirit,

Too many deaths carpenters can't match the coffins demand because cutting trees without planting kills forests,
And drugs overdose,
And alcohol abuse,
Kill organs and families and the future remains to be in death's hands,
But if we choose life over death,
Good over evil,
Will we not stop the killings?

In his poem Oruko feels that people get killed, because no one is ready to speak up. He gives specific incidents in which people get killed like through abortions, voting for the wrong leaders who allocate themselves hefty salaries at the expense of the ordinary citizens, killing of witnesses for land grabbing scandals, heavy taxation by the government on essential commodities like drugs, infidelity and domestic violence, communicable diseases like Covid-19, cyberbullying, among others. While in Mufasa's poem the blame seems to lie entirely on the government, Oruko looks at the problems facing society more objectively. He includes issues that cannot entirely be blamed on the government, like parents aiding their daughters to incur abortions, cyberbullying, infidelity and domestic violence.

Therefore, in the three text-based spoken word poems by Mufasa, covered in this section, there is an element of collaboration between the poet, the photographers and the members of the virtual audience. Each of these collaborators contributes to the content that is viewed and read by the virtual audience. The entire team of collaborators contribute to the virtual experience of those who will have access to the poem on Facebook. The collaboration between Mufasa and the photographers is in *absentia,* because they are not aware that their photography is being used in this particular poem, even though they know the poet has access to the photos. The collaboration between Mufasa and the audience requires another category, since it does not fit the two classifications of collaboration in *praesentia* or *absentia.* The new media space "mirrors conventional performance spaces, allowing the performers to stage their act and the audience to

watch and participate (Wabende, 2020). When the poet composes the poem, he does not deliberately involve the audience and discuss with them how they should respond to the poem, even in cases like that of Oruko, who appears to derive motivation from Mufasa's poem to create his own pieces on Mufasa's page. The poet is fully aware that the audience will react, but he does not dictate how they will react. Although the members of the virtual audience are not involved in the initial creation of the poem, they join in the creation process once the poem is posted on social media. They do not just consume the finished product, but they develop and modify the poem with their own creativity in the comment section. These modifications become part of the finished product available to other members of the virtual audience. The modification by the virtual audience is spontaneous and contributes to the overall experience of the poem in the virtual spaces.

5.2.2. Collaboration Through the Use of Hashtags and Hyperlinks in Text-Based Spoken Word Poetry on Twitter

The use of hashtags and hyperlinks is commonly used on social media to direct the virtual audience to other posts that have similar objectives. A hashtag contains a hash or pound sign (#) followed by a short phrase that is meant to advocate for certain initiatives in the society. Hashtags are mostly used in social media spaces to draw the audience's attention towards initiatives covering social issues. Spoken word poets collaborate with different organizations in the creation of their poems. Some of these organizations assist in the production of these spoken word poems by providing financial aid and determining the theme in the spoken word poems. The use of hashtags in spoken word poems in social media platforms is sometimes meant to connect the audience to the organizations advocating for certain issues in the society. Hashtags help messages to spread far and wide on social media reaching the intended audience. (Saxton et

al, 2015, p.154). The use of these hashtags by spoken word poets helps the advocacy message to reach a wider audience.

In one of his text-based spoken word poems on Twitter Dorphan uses hashtags to direct his virtual audience to other Twitter posts covering the message in his poem. He also uses a short video clip extracted from his spoken word poem on YouTube entitled "Minority Report." He also includes a hyperlink to direct his Twitter followers to his YouTube channel where the recorded version of the entire performance is posted. On Twitter Dorphan posts a few written lines and a short video clip extracted from his YouTube poem, "Minority Report."

#Dorphanage
@Dorphan_age
"Haifai that najichunga na mtu bado ndiye anafaa kunichunga/ kunichunga haimanishi nikiuliza maswali ndio sasa unataka kunifunga/ kunifunga juu nimeuliza maswali yanadunga..."
#FreeBetty #BeyondZeroCorruption #MinorityReport https://youtube.com/watch?v=KEod-uquX_o…
@RedVestsProtest
Translation:
It is not worth it for me to take care of myself yet I am supposed to be taken care of/Protecting me doesn't mean that when I ask questions that's when you want to arrest me/arresting me because I asked questions hurts.

As observed in chapter 4, "Minority Report" is a call to action against poor leadership. In the few lines posted by Dorphan on Twitter the persona laments the oppressive leadership that gags the citizens against speaking out in the face of oppression. This message echoes the words in the short video clip he posts on Twitter. The video is a collaboration between the poet and the videographer. The video clip contains more lines from the poem beyond what is written. The hash tags help us to connect with other sources that cover the same concerns as the poet in "Minority Report." The hash tag #FreeBetty #BeyondZeroCorruption redirects us to the Twitter account of Boniface Mwangi, who highlights the plight of @BettieWaShiro, whom he claims

was arrested during the #BeyondZeroCorruption protest. Mwangi calls upon his Twitter followers to join him at the Central Police Station in order to protest against BettieWaShiro's arrest until she is released from police custody. The "Beyond Zero Corruption" Campaign, also referred to as @RedVestsProtes, is a drive that exposes the rot in the Kenyan society where corruption and misuse of funds. (Ken Opalo, Washington Post May 13 2019). This information is in line with Dorphan's extract from his poem, where the persona laments about being arrested because they asked questions. The Beyond Zero Corruption campaigns, that led to the arrest of some of the protesters, like Boniface Mwangi and Betty Wa Shiro, is a good example of how the government silences those who dare to ask about corruption in the country. Dorphan addresses this issue in his poem "Minority report" in which he urges young people to ensure that they vote in the right leaders.

Therefore, collaboration in text-based spoken word poetry on Facebook and Twitter occurs between the poet and the audience, photographers, as well as videographers. The poet collaborates with photographers and videographers to get pictures that are relevant to their poems posted on social media. These pictures and videos are used to enhance the meaning of the poem as well as attract the attention of the virtual audience. Through the use of hashtags and hyperlinks, the poet is able to direct his audience to the context or motivation for his poetry, which is a special kind of collaboration only possible with poetry posted on social media. Through the hashtags and hyperlinks the poet's collaboration with other people who advocate for the same cause is revealed. The virtual audience can easily connect with the other collaborators by clicking on the hashtags or hyperlinks to gain more insights into the issues raised in the spoken word poem. watch or read more about the subject in the spoken word poem.

5.3. Collaboration in Spoken Word Film Poetry on YouTube

Sometimes spoken word poetry posted on social media platforms, especially YouTube, involves collaboration between the spoken word poet and other spoken word poets and/or other artists. This is common with three kinds of spoken word poetry discussed in chapter one: spoken word poetry as film, spoken word poetry as recorded live performance and spoken word poetry as virtual live performance. Most of the time this kind of collaboration happens *in praesentia* amongst the spoken word poets and producers, directors, vocalists, instrumentalists, and videographers. In this section we focus on spoken word poetry as film because that is where such collaborations take place the most, as it involves several crew members. YouTube features, such as the description section, allow both the poets and producers to reveal to their audience the context in which their poems were created, and sometimes all those involved in the creation. A few spoken word poets have ventured into this type of collaborations, but this section only covers three of them: Mufasa, Teardrops and Dorphan.

5.3.1. Collaboration Between Spoken Word Poets and Musicians

Sometimes spoken word poets collaborate with musicians to create a combination of poetry and music. At the creative level of collaboration, spoken word poets and musicians compose the words of the poem/song together to ensure that the main idea is maintained in both genres. This is necessary to ensure the flow of ideas between the poem and the song. Once the poet(s) and the musician(s) compose the words of the poem/song they engage in the technical, performance and production levels of collaboration to complete their artistic work.

"Tumechoka" is a film that involves collaboration between spoken word poets and musicians. Two spoken word poets came together to compose a single piece alongside musicians. This kind of collaboration is very rare, but Mufasa and Teardrops have collaborated to produce this poetry/music film alongside musicians like Sarabi, Juliani and Maji Maji. This poem/song is about the power of the masses in effecting the much-needed social justice. The poem/song involves both dramatization and poetry/music to pass across a very important message of rebellion against corrupt leaders. In the film a small boy in rural Kenya defies corrupt leaders who come to their home to grab land belonging to his grandmother. The boy's attempted suicide by a chain on the roof top of her grandmother's house is what motivates the entire community to challenge the corrupt leaders and seek justice for the old woman whose land was in the process of being grabbed. The poem/song is posted on the YouTube channel of PAWA254, the producer. This is the first instance of collaboration that one notices even before the video starts playing. The description section of the post which is posted by PAWA254 gives an insight into what the audience should expect from the poem/song.

This song is about Kenya today.
"Tumechoka." Enough is enough. We are tired of the status quo; tired of the thieving political class. We elect them, we empower them and we have the power to bring about change but are we tired enough to do what is necessary to stop oppression and impunity? A young boy's defiance galvanized his community into action, reminding them that the people are the power.
#ChainsForChange

The collaboration in this poem/song begins with the producer in the description section of the PAWA254 YouTube channel. This section is visible to the audience, and through it the producer highlights what the poem/song is about, hence helping in the interpretation of the message. The producer sponsors the production of this poem/song, and to some extent influences the content in

the song, albeit indirectly. The producer may influence the content in the poem by requesting the poet to compose a poem that promotes a specific theme that is in line with the values he/she stands for. The main composers are the poets and the musicians. The director is the next collaborator in this poem/song. For such a complex work of art to be synchronized seamlessly, as exhibited in the video, the director played a very big role in making that happen. Notably, however, his name does not appear anywhere in the video, even though his contribution is evident. This particular spoken word poetry is distinct from many others due to the fact that two poets collaborated to come up with one composition. Usually spoken word poets collaborate with vocalists and musicians, but not with fellow spoken word poets. In collaborations involving spoken word poets, the poet is usually given more prominence than the other artists involved. He/she is always deemed as the pillar that holds the entire performance together, and all the other artists are viewed as accessories, meant to make the presentation more appealing. Therefore, when two spoken word poets engage in a collaboration like the one experienced in the "Tumechoka" video, the audience no longer focuses on one poet, but on the entire crew involved in the production. Both the poets and the musicians possess equal strength in the performance, and together they form an excellent performance, that breaks the barrier between poetry and music, merging the two genres into one beautiful ensemble. The unique attribute of each artist contributes to the aesthetic appeal of the entire performance.

In this collaboration we also have three popular musicians in Kenya, namely, Sarabi, Juliani and Maji Maji. Each of these artists composes their part and fits it in the main piece to create a wholesome poem/song. All the names of the composers are included in the description section of the YouTube channel, and their collaboration is a perfect example of collaboration in *praesentia*.

This kind of collaboration echoes the composition of a poetry anthology, where different poets contribute towards the anthology, with each one of them bringing in their creativity and style of delivery. However, privileging the "literati", in this case the poets and the musicians, undermines the work of the other collaborators that contribute to this masterpiece, hence the reason why this analysis attempts to draw in almost all collaborators, no matter how small their role in this production is. The producer's presence is felt, because the poem/song is posted on their organization's YouTube channel, and he/she writes an introductory note in the description section. However, the director's role in the performance of this poem/song is not documented in the film. Just by watching the poem/song on YouTube the members of the virtual audience cannot even tell that there was a director. The director can only be felt through the organization in the film. Thus, it would have been helpful to include the director's name in the description section, or at the beginning of the film, as part of the opening credits. On the other hand, the cast is visible to the virtual audience right from the beginning of the film, and that might be considered as evidence of their participation but acknowledging them in the closing credits would have been a better way of documenting their participation.

The poem/song is performed alongside a skit that carries the same message of rebellion against corruption and oppression. The main cast in the skit involve a government officer, an old woman and her grandson. The government officer's role is played by Maji Maji, who is also one of the three musicians in this film. He represents the corrupt and oppressive leaders, who enrich themselves by stealing from the poor. The film begins with an altercation between the government officer and the old woman over a piece of land. The government officer uses manipulation and intimidation to grab the parcel of land from the old woman, but she stands her ground. The government officer resorts to the use of force, by sending goons to evict the old

woman from the land. The grandson of this old woman witnesses the eviction and chains himself on top of his grandmother's roof in an attempt to save the situation. This creates public attention and becomes the point of reference throughout the poem/song. This short skit serves to capture the attention of the audience, as well as create the necessary suspense to allow the poets and the musicians to pass across their message. In the skit, media houses interview several people about what led the boy to chain himself on his grandmother's rooftop. Among the interviewees are the musicians and poets in this production, the first one to be interviewed is Sarabi, who plays the role of Mr. Mandela, a resident in the old woman's community. In his role as Mr. Mandela Sarabi sings his response in the interview, voicing out his concern about greed and divisive politics among the leaders, that is causing untold suffering to the citizens. Mufasa is interviewed inside the studio of one of the media houses, and the interview is shown on the television. Just like Sarabi sings his response in the interview, Mufasa recites his response in the form of spoken word poetry.

> Politics is not what you see in a ballot box,
> Politics is how underperforming leaders,
> Use the ballot box to win election,
>
> Our corrupt leaders won"t face jail term,
> But the free airtime bonus,
> Can get a blogger arrested,
> Mr. Mr. Minister,
> Stealing money to build five stars,
> Could you be a star and build a public cancer facility!

In his response Mufasa is critical of the corruption that goes on during elections, and how that affects the kind of leaders in the government. He calls out the excessive measures taken to arrest bloggers, who are simply expressing their opinions about pertinent issues in the society, while allowing politicians to get away with major crimes against humanity. He is concerned about the

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current breed of leadership, that is obsessed with amassing wealth instead of starting projects that could save lives and alleviate human suffering. After Mufasa's poem there is a chorus, which is sung by numerous cast members, who are involved in everyday activities that ordinary citizens engage in to earn a decent living. This is contrasted to the senior government officer at the beginning of the film, who wants to grab a piece of land that the old woman has worked hard to acquire. The chorus sums up the hopelessness, felt by the ordinary citizens about the state of affairs in their society, where leaders have turned into oppressors, and the masses have no one to turn to. Each of the cast members, who sings the chorus, is wearing a chain, either on the neck or on the arm. The chain is symbolic of the bondage that the ordinary citizens feel due to the injustices they experience from their leaders (Ekesa, 2016, p. 85). This chorus is important in setting the general mood of the entire poem/song, hence adding layers of meaning to the poem/song, that would not have been possible without the collaboration. After the chorus, Teardrops comes in as a character reciting his part of the poem/song. He is in a convoy of motorcycles and appears to be on a campaign trail against corrupt leaders. Through the use of word play Teardrops exposes the contrast between the lavish lives of the political leaders and the poverty of the masses. He talks about how leaders ignore serious issues, like famine in semi-arid areas of Kenya, and concentrate on amassing wealth for themselves. The chorus comes in as an interlude between the parts of each poet and musician. Finally, Juliani raps his part of the performance. He advocates for a revolution against poor governance and corruption by encouraging people to hold demonstrations so as to get their rights. As he raps, Boniface Mwangi, a human rights activist in Kenya, seems to be applauding him. Boniface Mwangi represents the producer in this poetry/song performance, because PAWA254 is his brainchild. He came up with the PAWA254 initiative to create a space in which artists and activists can

advocate for social justice and human rights. Lastly, Maji Maji sings his part of the poem/song, and his part is like a resolution to the skit. He sings that for change to take place each and every person must make deliberate efforts to effect social justice. He hands the title deed back to the old woman and advocates for peace. The bystanders are impressed by Maji Maji's act of reconciliation. This prompts them to remove their chains and celebrate their newfound freedom. The little boy is impressed too, and this makes him remove his chain too.

This poem/song involves many artists and actors, who collaborate to create a very effective poem/song advocating for social justice. The poets and the musicians alone could not have created the unique aesthetic appeal, that we experience as members of the audience, even though their words form the backbone of the entire performance. Each participant in this collaboration is significant and should be celebrated for his/her role in the creation of this piece. The members of the virtual audience are also part of the collaborative effort. Their comments and reaction to the video are a source of entertainment as well as education to the other members of the audience. For instance, through the comments one learns the importance of social media in enabling the dissemination of content that might be censored in the mainstream media. We rarely get members of the virtual audience to acknowledge this fact, but this performance brings that out.

BUFFALLO PETE

4 years ago

It's funny most Kenyans listen to this on you tube while local stations are playing mbongo flava and fake gospel music.

45

REPLY

Hide reply

Patriot Muthoni wa Mwangi

1 year ago

Sad

REPLY

Alex Ng'ang'a

5 years ago

It's a bummer that songs like this don't get any airplay, apparently the media is controlled by powerful people who don;t want the truth being told.

Buffallo Pete expresses his disappointment that such poetry/music is never played on local media channels, and 45 members of the virtual audience like his comment, to show their agreement with his statement. Alex Ng'ang'a expresses the same sentiments and gives us the reason why that happens. According to him, the mainstream media is designed to serve the interests of the ruling class, and any content that exposes their weaknesses is not given the space to do so. Through such comments members of the virtual audience learn the importance of social media advocating for people's rights. This helps us to understand the significance of social media in the fight for social justice. Therefore, "Tumechoka" draws in artists, producers, actors and the audience whose collaboration can be seen in the following places: the description section of YouTube; in the video itself; in the comment section.

5.3.2. Collaboration between Spoken Word Poets, the Producers and Vocalists

Spoken word poets collaborate with other spoken word poets, vocalists and producers in creating content for their poems. This collaboration begins right from the creative level. Other spoken word poets and vocalists participate in the selection of the wording in the poems while producers mostly influence the overall message in the poem. Producers sponsor spoken word poetry performances that advance their agenda. They determine the kind of message that a spoken word poet will relay to the audience. In most cases the producers will sponsor spoken word poetry performances that advocate for social justice. However, sometimes a producer may sponsor a spoken word poetry performance that features a very personal topic like love. Since such a performance is mostly for entertainment purposes, collaboration is not only done at the creative and production level, but also at the technical and performance level.

Dorphan engaged in this type of collaboration when composing his spoken word poem entitled "Nyota Yangu." This is one of those unique compositions, in which the poet was asked to create and perform a spoken word poem for a marriage proposal for one of his social media followers, who sponsored the production of this film poem. In an interview with Dorphan he revealed that the collaboration began with the producer first, who provided Dorphan with the concept for the poem. After creating the poem, Dorphan reached out to Eddy Seymour (the vocalist) to sing the refrain of the poem. Dorphan is the one who composed the song that was sung by the vocalist. The producer was planning to propose to his girlfriend after many years of a distant relationship, with him living in the USA and the girl in Kenya. He approached Dorphan for this task after seeing his performances on social media. Initially the poem was supposed to be performed live

during the proposal, but this plan was to be abandoned later, after the groom was unable to travel to Kenya in time for the event. He suggested that instead of a live performance the poet should create a video, which will be played on their wedding day, and not at their proposal, as earlier planned. During the composition stage, Dorphan worked closely with the producer, making several inquiries about his girlfriend. To create an authentic piece about the two love birds, Dorphan required some background information about their love life. The producer narrated to Dorphan all those important things about his girlfriend and their relationship in general. Dorphan used this information to compose the poem. Dorphan's decision to write the poem in the Swahili language was because the producer told Dorphan that his girlfriend loves Swahili and would be thrilled to hear a Swahili poem dedicated to her. Dorphan chose "Nyota Yangu" as the title of the poem, which is the Swahili phrase for "My Star."

Original (Swahili Version)	Translation in English
Wakati mwingi safari hutenganisha watu, Kusonga mbali na nyumbani, Tunajipata mbali na kumbukumbu zetu Lakini mimi kwenda mbali Kulinifanya kuwa karibu na wewe Baada ya miaka mingi ya ujirani Ilichukuwa kupanda ndege Ndio nikatamani mazungumzo na wewe Sio Salamu pekee Sio kupunga mkono tu kama wali Bali kutamani kukuongelesha kila wakati	Many a times a journey separates people, To move far away from home, We find ourselves far with our own memories, But to me going far away, Made it seem like i am closer to you, After many years of neighbourhood, It took taking a flight, Before i could yearn for a conversation with you, Not just greetings alone, Not just waving hands like rice, But I yearned to talking to you all the time.

In this stanza the poet used exactly the information given to him by the producer about his relationship. According to Dorphan, the producer told him that his girlfriend was a friend of his sisters when they were younger, but he had never gotten into a relationship with her while he was

still living in Kenya. Their relationship developed after he left for the USA and linked up with her on social media. That is where they fell in love and started their distant relationship that ended in marriage. In the poem the persona says that it took a long journey to a distant land for him to realize that he had always been in love with her, and wanted to hold meaningful conversations with her, and not just the casual greetings that had always occurred between them. The challenges of a long-distance relationship and the longing that comes with it are also captured in the poem. The persona talks of how he always longs to be physically close to his girlfriend, but the distance cannot allow that to happen, and all he can do is hope that one day they will be together. The poem is a confirmation that distant relationships too can thrive where there is genuine love. The persona views the girlfriend as the star that guides all his dreams and takes away his loneliness. He has hopes that one day they will live happily together.

Original Version (Swahili)	Translation in English
Naomba radhi, Hapo zamani nilikaidi uwezekano Wa sisi kuwa chochote, Ila miaka imenifumbua macho, Na muda umethibitisha Mapenzi yanaweza kutunyaka kwa popote Hata nikiwa maelfu ya maili mbali na uliko, Mimi hukuota Kizaani nikilala wewe ndio nyota Nyota wa kipekee kwa anga zangu Nyota anayeindoa upweke kwa ndoto zangu Nyota, anayenipa nuru kwa giza langu Ombi langu ni uwe nyota wangu wa maisha Nyota, atakayeondoa upweke kwa boma langu, Nyota, atakayeng'owa magugu kwa shamba langu, Nyota, atakayeniwezesha kumeeza mbegu zangu, Huyu nyota na nywele zake asili Huyu nyota na mienendo zake sahihi	I beg your pardon, In the past i joked about the possibility of us being anything, However, years have opened my eyes, And time has proven Love can find us anywhere, Even if i am thousands of miles away from you, I dream about you, In the darkness when i sleep you are my star, A special star in my sky, A star that eliminated loneliness from my dreams, A star that provides light in my darkness, My prayer is that you be my star for life, A star that will eliminate loneliness in my home, A star that will uproot weeds in my garden, A star that will enable me to grow my seeds, This star with her natural hair, This star with her trends that are correct, This star for her goodness she makes me desire

Huyu nyota kwa uzuri wake ananifanya natamani, Roho inatumaini kuwa uliko ingawa ni vigumu kwa miguu kunifikisha Nami natamani uwepo wako Hata macho yasipoipata hiyo picha Kila mara nakuwaza, Ninacho taka ni mimi na wewe maishani Tuwe wenza, Njoo tuliendesha hili baisikeli kwa pamoja, Najitolea kukubeba Japo ukidai usukani pia niko tayari kukusalimisha Nakupenda.	her, My heart hopes to be where you are though it is hard for my legs to get me there, And i desire your presence, Even if my eyes don't get that picture, Every time i think about you, What i want is for you and i in life To be companions, Come we ride this bicycle together, I sacrifice to carry you, Even if you want to take charge i am ready to surrender for you, I love you.

Dorphan also gathered that among the things that the producer likes about his girlfriend is her short hair. This detail is also captured in the poem, when the persona praises the girlfriend for her natural hair. Where the poet says "Njoo tuliendeshe hili baisikeli pamoja" he got that from the producer, who told him that the girlfriend learnt how to ride a bicycle, using his own bicycle when they were kids, growing up in the same neighborhood. Mentioning that in the poem was bringing back the memories they cherished from their childhood.

Even though the producer did not actually write the poem, Dorphan's creativity is shaped by his experiences to a very large extent. This kind of collaboration goes beyond the usual artist-producer kind of collaboration. The producer is involved in the creation of the poem, even though he does not write it. It is like he had someone assist him in writing his love letter to his girlfriend. In the interview, Dorphan said, "I wanted to write something that means something to them. Something that has images and symbols that are very close to them... I was trying to use elements of their lives to build the piece…" (Dorphan 2021). Even though the producer did not participate in the creativity, he was involved in the content of the poem, hence his role in the creation of the poem cannot be overlooked. In addition, the producer and his girlfriend were the

cast in this film poem. The producer was aware that they were acting out the script to the poem, but the girlfriend was unaware of that fact. Dorphan and the producer made it appear like it was an ordinary video coverage of the couple prior to their forthcoming wedding, but what the bride-to-be was not aware of was that the video was going to be used as part of the spoken word poem that was going to be dedicated to her on the wedding day. Dorphan acknowledges the participation of the producer and his girlfriend at the beginning of the film, where he documents their names (Gmwas & red rose) as the cast. They are the cast in that film, and through it we can see how deeply in love they are, which is a confirmation that distant relationships can have happy endings. Dorphan summarizes the beauty of distant relationships in the description section of YouTube.

> "Exploring the metaphor of the star - "Nyota Yangu" translates to "My Star" - This piece is a celebration of love. It addresses long distance and how wishes, memories and hopes keep such relationships alive, dreams and expectations of a lover, traits of the loved one, and to "Nyota" he simply declares, "Nakupenda."

According to Dorphan, distant relationships are held together by the memories that the couple has shared, which keep their hopes for a better future alive. The traits of the lovers is what makes the memories beautiful, and make them dream for a future together, hoping that their love will withstand the test of time. The comments from the audience, which are part of the virtual performance, are also part of what adds to the beauty of the entire virtual experience with this poem. The vocalist and instrumentalist (Eddy Seymour) together with Ian Gwagi also add to the aesthetic appeal of the poem. However, Dorphan is the creator of all the words sung by the vocalist in this video and all other videos belonging to him. Thus, collaboration only happens at the level of performance. The entire performance was directed by Gufy, while the audio was done by Kewsh Entertainment, as acknowledged by Dorphan in the film. All these collaborative

efforts are what makes this spoken word poem memorable and worthy of the thousands of views on YouTube. One of the most commendable things about Dorphan is that he acknowledges all his collaborators in the film. He is also among the few spoken word poets that interact with his audience. In this spoken word poem, he responds to all the commenters on this poem by either responding to their comments or liking/loving what they have said using the YouTube like/love features.

5.4. Conclusion

Collaboration occurs at four levels in the performance of spoken word poetry in social media spaces. As such we have collaboration at the creative, technical, performance and production level. These kinds of collaborations are either done *in praesentia* or *in absentia*. While some scholars would want to privilege the poet in such collaborations and ignore all else, it is important to note that the poet alone might not sustain the interest of the social media audience that is mostly enchanted with audio-visual display of content. To attract the attention of the social media audience the poet needs those pictures and videos. The musicians, vocalists and instrumentalists, supplement the poet's voice to ensure a variety of sounds in a single performance. A social media post is incomplete without the involvement of the audience through reactions and comments. The virtual audience reacts to spoken word poetry in different ways, but the most collaborative ones are those who engage in the process of co-creation with the poet. These kinds of collaborators create another poem in response to the posted poem, which becomes part of the entire poem that the virtual audience will have access to. The involvement of other artists in a performance requires the director to coordinate the collaborations. Sometimes producers collaborate with the poet to produce meaningful content for the virtual audience. Therefore, the social media experience with spoken word poetry is not just about the poet, but all

the other artists, producers, directors and the participating members of the virtual audience who contribute to both content and craft.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research examined how the new media spaces for performance poetry are changing our perception of what constitutes a live performance. Fischer-Lichte's theory of performance was examined against Baudrillard's postmodern theory of hyppereality. According to Fischer-Lichte a performance can only take place when both the actor and the audience are physically present to each other in real time. However, the emergence of the new media as a performance space for spoken word poetry has brought about new dynamics in the performance theory where a performance can take place with the actor and the audience existing in separate locations. The merging of the virtual and the physical spaces witnessed in the performance of spoken word poetry in new media platforms echoes Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality. The members of the virtual audience view the performance online and react to it as though they are in the same physical location with the poet. They leave comments, likes, loves and shares which can be viewed by the poet and other members of the virtual audience which is a reflection of intermediality.

The interactions that take place between the text, the poet and the audience were of great concern in this study, as they were the key to unravelling whether it is possible to achieve liveness in performances that occupy the new media spaces like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The classification of the spoken word poetry, that is performed in new media spaces, was necessary at the beginning of this study, because each form possesses its own unique features that makes the virtual audience react to the poem in a certain way. Once the various forms of spoken word poetry in new media spaces were identified and defined, the analysis of audio-visual images used in spoken word film poetry was done, to establish how meaning is created in this form, and how that influences the understanding and interaction of the virtual audience. We then ventured into investigating how spoken word poetry in new media spaces redefines our perception of liveness due to the audience-poet and audience-audience interactions in the virtual spaces. Our ultimate goal was to evaluate the role of new media spaces in promoting collaborative poetry that involves the poet, the audience and other artists.

In the research we classified spoken word poetry in new media into four categories. These are spoken word poetry as written text, spoken word poetry as film; spoken word poetry as recorded live performance; spoken word poetry as virtual live performance. The distinction of the various forms of spoken word poetry in new media spaces revealed the formlessness that exists in this genre which mixes the live and the mediatized performances. The genre incorporates, print media, film and theatre to produce a new aesthetic in performance poetry. Social media platforms privilege mediatized performances which are in line with the postmodern tenet of populism. It was established that once these poems are posted on social media, the audience-poet and the audience-audience interaction creates liveness to some extent. Although the poet and the audience do not share the same physical location at the time the poem is posted in new media spaces, the reactions sometimes appear in real time. These reactions take place in the form of likes/dislikes, loves, shares, and comments. The "likes" and "loves" are used to communicate a positive reception of the poem by the audience. There is also the dislike feature, which is used to communicate a negative reception from the audience. The share feature is used to pass around the most captivating poems from one member of the virtual audience to the next. The more a poem is shared on social media, the more it receives a higher rating among members of the virtual audience. The emojis are used to exhibit different emotions in reaction to the poem. The comment section is used to state the feelings of the audience in relation to the poem. This is the most important feature in all forms of spoken word poetry in new media spaces, as it creates room for interaction between the poet and members of the audience, and between one member of the virtual audience to another. The members of the virtual audience can state exactly what they feel about the poem and receive instant feedback both from the poet and other members of the virtual audience. This interaction resonates with the one experienced in a real theatrical event,

and the only difference is that one is physical while the other is virtual. Performativity is experienced in these interactions since every action of the poet and that of the virtual audience in reaction to the poem is viewed as a performance.

Spoken word poetry as written text is also referred as text-based spoken word poetry, and it is common on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Facebook is specifically ideal for text-based spoken word poetry, because it allows for long textual posts. Twitter and Instagram allow for short posts, hence most of the poets use these two platforms as a marketing strategy, whereby they post a short captivating quote from their poem and attach a hyperlink, which will direct their virtual audience to another site, where they can read or watch the entire poem. Once the text-based spoken word poetry is posted on Facebook or Twitter, members of the virtual audience begin to interact with it as though the poet is present and voicing out the words in the poem. The members of the virtual audience begin to interact with the poem through likes, loves, emojis, comments and shares. The poet responds to members of the virtual using the same social media features. This type of poetry in new media spaces transcends the traditional written poetry, as it has some attributes of a live performance due to the like/dislike, love, emoji and comment section, that allows the members of the audience to react to the written poem, albeit virtually. Spoken word poetry as film is similar to text-based spoken word poetry in terms of the interaction between the poet and members of the virtual audience. This type of poetry is presented in the form of film, and is mostly found on YouTube, because this space allows the posting of long videos. The poets make use of audio-visual images to enhance the meaning of the poem. Some poets make use of subtitles, which feature the words of the poem. However, members of the virtual audience appear not to pay much attention to the

audio-visual images in their comments, since they mostly focus on the wording in the poems. This, however, does not undermine the role of the audio-visual images. They help add to the aesthetic appeal of the poem, which makes the performance more visible to the virtual audience.

The recorded live performance involves spoken word poetry that is recorded live, during a live performance in a real theatrical event, and posted on social media platforms after the event. This type of poetry is mostly found on YouTube, which allows the posting of long videos. While it is a recorded performance, the audience usually reacts to such poetry as though it is being performed at the time of watching. What makes this type of poetry unique is the fact that there exists two types of audiences: the physical audience and the virtual audience. Members of the virtual audience are able to view the members of the physical audience and even make remarks about them. In this case, the physical audience is elevated to the same level as the poet and becomes part of the performance that is being watched by the virtual audience. The actions of the physical audience become part of the performance that members of the virtual audience will react to. Thus, the virtual audience becomes the ultimate audience in new media spaces, because they can interact with both the poet and other members of the virtual audience.

The virtual live performance is the epitome of liveness in new media performances. It is made possible by the Facebook watch party feature, which allows artists to post their performances to the virtual audience in real time. The members of the virtual audience are able to react to this type of performance also in real time, hence influencing the poet's decisions on the stage as the performance is going on. Liveness is achieved, because both the poet and the members of the

virtual audience are present to each other in real time. The virtual audience is able to hear the poet's voice and see his actions, as the performance is going on in reality. The poet on his part is able to see the number of viewers and their comments, likes, dislikes, emojis and shares, which play an important role in providing motivation. Most of the time the poet reacts to the virtual audience by orally acknowledging their participation and reading their comments, and sometimes calling out the names of the commenters. Thus, the virtual space becomes the new space in the field of performance poetry, that should be given the necessary attention in this age of virtual explorations.

Spoken word poetry as film makes use of audio-visual images to create meaning. Most poets compose cautionary poems and use Kenya's historical figures to remind the masses that what our forefathers fought for, has been eroded due to poor leadership. Through these audio-visual images, Kenya's historical figures that spearheaded the journey to liberation are brought to the forefront, in order to challenge the current breed of leadership, that seems to be leading the country astray. Images of Kenya's freedom fighters and human rights activists are used to remind the audience of the price that was paid to set the country free. These poems cover a number of topics, including environmental conservation, political assassinations, corruption and police brutality. Other audio-visual images used in the film poems are captions, background noises and music to help in the understanding of the poems. YouTube is the space used for this kind of poetry, and the poets use the description section to give further explanation about the poems, so as to make the audience aware of the poet's intended meaning.

Spoken word poetry performed in new media spaces is redefining the concept of a live audience. Unlike the traditional theatre, where liveness is achieved by the physical co-presence between the actor and the audience, the new media spaces are a proof that liveness can also be achieved when the poet and the audience are not in the same physical location. Interaction between the poet and the audience in real time is very important in establishing liveness in new media spaces. This interaction comes in the form of comments, likes, shares and views. YouTube records the number of views, so that poets can know the number of times people have watched their performances online. Likes are a way of the virtual audience communicating to the poet that their performance has met their expectations. The comments and emojis are used by members of the virtual audience to communicate their exact feelings about the performance or even the poet. This approach incorporates Boersma's idea of the manifest level of audience engagement. This kind of interaction is very important as it provides feedback to the poet about how the audience has received the performance. This resonates with Schechner's view of performativity where the "performance principal" is applied to all facets of life and not just in real theatrical performances. The reaction of the virtual audience to the performance of spoken word poems in new media platforms is still deemed as a performance even though the poet and the audience are not physically present to each other.

The performance of spoken word poetry can only thrive in new media spaces where there is collaboration between the poet, the audience and/or other artists, as well as producers. Collaboration in this research was classified into four levels: The creative level, the technical level, the performance level and the production level. Each of these levels of collaboration contributes to the general message and aesthetic appeal of the spoken word poetry performances

in social media spaces. The comments, likes, dislikes, emojis, shares and views from the virtual audience is what creates the desired liveness in poetry performed in the virtual spaces. Social media favours the audio-visual display of content, and most spoken word poets have taken advantage of that to collaborate with the technical crew in their performances, in order to appeal to their virtual audience. It is this collaboration and audience involvement that has moved the performance of spoken word poetry to the next level, where liveness is not only defined in the ability of the poet to be physically present to his audience, but also in the ability of the poet to interact with his audience virtually and in real time. What sets spoken word poetry in new media spaces apart from spoken word poetry recorded on any other platform is the ability of the audience to communicate with the poet and other members of the virtual audience both in real time and over a prolonged period of time. Through the virtual audience the poet gets feedback on his performance which provides opportunities for motivation as well as adjustment. Boerma's concept of the latent level of audience engagement comes into play. Spoken word poetry performed in new media spaces provides a hybrid between the live and the mediatized performances hence accentuating the postmodern tenet of formlessness in the field of performance poetry in Kenya.

The spoken word poems in new media explored in this study have demonstrated that indeed liveness can occur in a performance without the physical co-presence between the poet and the audience. Using the postmodern feature of populism, the study has explored how mediatized performances contain attributes of real theatrical performances due to the ability of the virtual audience to interact with the poet and other members of the virtual audience. Through such performances the boundary between the real and the mediatized performances is broken down.

This creates a new type of performance that is a hybrid of both the real and mediatized performances.

Considering that this study focused on the hybridization of the live and mediatized performances of spoken word poetry in new media spaces, the thesis only covered the work of a few spoken word poets. Further research could be done to include the other spoken word poets not covered in this study. A comparative study of the poets' work in new media spaces could be carried out to establish the nature of the virtual audience that responds to a certain message or to a certain poet in new media spaces. Other studies could be conducted to compare the work of female spoken word poets and that of the male spoken word poets in relation to their use of audio-visual images, audience interaction and the process of co-creation in their new media poetry performances.

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedule with the Spoken Word Poets

The following questions were used as a guide in the analysis of the spoken word poems.

Real Name: Dennis Mutuma Mutua

Stage Name: Dorphan

Sex: Male

1.   Briefly tell us something about yourself and your passion for spoken word poetry.

2.   Which social media platforms do you use the most for your poetry? Why?

3.   What kind of poetry do you post mostly on social media? Why?

4.   Who is the target audience for your poetry on social media?

5.   How do you ensure that your poetry reaches the target audience on social media?

6.   How would you describe your interaction with your audience on social media?

7.   What strategies do you employ to ensure a steady audience on social media?

8.   How do you balance your interaction between the physical audience and the virtual audience in a virtual performance?

9.   Spoken word is meant to be performed before a live audience but why do you sometimes present your poetry in written form on social media?

10.   Who produces/directs your video poems on social media?

11. How do you collaborate with other artists in your virtual performances and film poems?

12. Take me behind the scenes. What we see on social media is a finished product. Tell me, who suggested collaboration between you and the vocalists? Was your decision to use instrumentalists a collaborative one or was it entirely the vocalists' decision? I see other actors in your performance. Why did you include them? Who made the decision to include them? Was it you or the vocalist?

13. Are there other people involved in the production/performance of your poetry? To what extent do these people influence what you compose?

14. Who makes the decision about audio-visual images in your video poems?

15. Give a brief explanation of some of the audio-visual images used in your video poems.

Real Name: Kennedy Odongo

Stage Name: Kennet B.

Sex: Male

1. Briefly tell us something about yourself and your passion for spoken word poetry.

2. Which social media platforms do you use the most for your poetry? Why?

3.   What kind of poetry do you post mostly on social media? Why?

4.   Who is the target audience for your poetry on social media?

5.   How do you ensure that your poetry reaches the target audience on social media?

6.   How would you describe your interaction with your audience on social media?

7.   What strategies do you employ to ensure a steady audience on social media?

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13.   Are there other people involved in the production/performance of your poetry? To what extent do these people influence what you compose?

14.   Who makes the decision about audio-visual images in your video poems?

15.   Give a brief explanation of some of the audio-visual images used in your video poems.

Real Name: Namatsi Lukoye

Stage Name: Namatsi Lukoye

Sex: Female

1.   Briefly tell us something about yourself and your passion for spoken word poetry.

2.   Which social media platforms do you use the most for your poetry? Why?

3.   What kind of poetry do you post mostly on social media? Why?

4.   Who is the target audience for your poetry on social media?

5.   How do you ensure that your poetry reaches the target audience on social media?

6.   How would you describe your interaction with your audience on social media?

7.   What strategies do you employ to ensure a steady audience on social media?

8.   How do you balance your interaction between the physical audience and the virtual audience in a virtual performance?

9.   Spoken word is meant to be performed before a live audience but why do you sometimes present your poetry in written form on social media?

10.   Who produces/directs your video poems on social media?

11.   How do you collaborate with other artists in your virtual performances and film poems?

12.   Take me behind the scenes. What we see on social media is a finished product. Tell me, who suggested collaboration between you and the vocalists? Was your decision to use instrumentalists a collaborative one or was it entirely the vocalists' decision? I see other actors in your performance. Why did you include them? Who made the decision to include them? Was it you or the vocalist?

13.   Are there other people involved in the production/performance of your poetry? To what extent do these people influence what you compose?

14.   Who makes the decision about audio-visual images in your video poems?

15.   Give a brief explanation of some of the audio-visual images used in your video poems.

Appendix 2: Links to Interview Recordings with PowToon

Interview with Kennedy Odongo (Kennet B.)

[Watch my Powtoon: Jul 27, 2021 Powtoon Capture recording](#)

Interview with Dennis Mutuma (Dorphan)

[Watch my Powtoon: Jul 27, 2021 Powtoon Capture recording](#)

[Watch my Powtoon: Jul 27, 2021 Powtoon Capture recording](#)

[Watch my Powtoon: Jul 27, 2021 Powtoon Capture recording](#)

Interview with Namatsi Lukoye's

-The video is available but it will not be published to protect the rights of a minor who was with the poet during sections of the interview.