

HETEROGENEITY AND PERFORMANCE OF SPOKEN WORD IN KENYA

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DECLARATION

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

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to:

My loving parents, John and Florence Ekesa; my beloved husband, David Antony Wafula and our precious little ones, Derek, Ian and Austin; our dear Lynette; my adorable sister, Christine Mikus; my loving brothers, Patrick, Samson, Moses and Joshua and above all, to God my Abba Father.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of intertextuality and performance in the creation of meaning and aesthetic appeal in the spoken word poetry of fourteen Kenyan spoken word poets namely Brigeddia Poet, Dan Oballa, Dorphan, El-Poet, Elsaphan Njora, Imani woomera, Kennet B., Mufasa, Namatsi Lukoye, Ngwatilo Mawiyoo, Raya Wambui, Teardrops, Tess Aura, and Wanjiku Mwaura. The interrogation of the numerous ways in which spoken word texts create meaning through intertextuality focuses on the oral tradition, the novel and other forms of oral poetry like jazz, hip-hop and dub, while creation of meaning through performance takes into account the techniques used by the poets to enhance the interpretation of their poems. Thus, the research draws upon the theory of intertextuality to examine how the interpretation of spoken word relies on other texts, and how this contributes to the heterogeneity of this genre. The study also adopts the performance theory to establish how the poets manipulate the performance techniques and other theatrical elements to enhance the interpretation of their poems as well as add to the general aesthetic appeal. A close textual analysis of spoken word poetry reveals that the genre is diverse in nature since it incooperates other art forms and cannot be studied in isolation without paying attention to other texts embedded within it which play a major role in the interpretation of the text. However, in as much as spoken word constitutes other genres within it, it still retains its own unique features that seperate it from the rest. These unique features are mainly realised through performance, because it is the manner in which spoken word is articulated that distinguishes it from other forms of oral poetry.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Studies show that there are many young people living in Kenya who are faced with challenges including unemployment, urban crime, deprivation, and general stagnation in life (Waswalla 2013). As a result, Kenya's urban youth have launched initiatives through social networks to reclaim their individual and collective dignity, to redefine their role and relevance in society. Such initiatives include artistic enterprises like spoken word performances which have thrived through various platforms including *Fatuma's Voice*, *Kwani? Open Mic*, and the *Poetry After Lunch*, hosted by Kennet B. at the Kenya National Theatre.

Although spoken word has been in existence in Kenya for over a decade now, most people perceive it merely as a form of entertainment. However, a close look at the performances reveals more than sheer pleasure. It is an alternative means of communication to those who cannot access mainstream channels. While politicians use the media and religious leaders use churches and mosques, spoken word artists use any spaces and channels available to them to pass across serious socio-political messages. Christophe Lodemann from the Danish Centre for Culture and Development (CKU) demonstrates this when he says:

The multiplying of diverse voices push the boundaries for a democracy.
The creative and critical young thinkers of Kenya get their own channel
with spoken word from where they can start new relevant conversations.
And this development is relevant for Kenya.
(Kenyan Poets Lounge)

Mufasa, one of the most celebrated spoken word artists in Kenya echoes similar sentiments when he asserts that spoken word transcends ethical, religious, regional, and social divides,

and that his poems bring out the Kenyan urban reality while at the same time exposing his own personal experience. He says this in an oral interview at the Danish Centre for Culture and Development:

Poets share their minds, thoughts and opinions on stages. It is an explosion of your mind, the thoughts trapped in your head and an activation of your passive clicks on the internet. On stage, the conversation you have started in your mind suddenly takes place between 2-500 people. Poets are there to make people listen. And when I perform, people listen.

(Kenyan Poets Lounge)

In the above quote, Mufasa refers to spoken word artists as poets, but are they really poets? This takes me back to the first time I was introduced to this genre. Having had an exposure to hip-hop and reggae music before, spoken word sounded to me more like rap music than poetry. It is this fascination with the similarities between spoken word and the musical genres like hip-hop, reggae, and jazz that prompted me to undertake this research in order to come up with a clear definition of what spoken word in Kenya entails. I set out to investigate how spoken word in Kenya makes use of other existing genres to create its own unique aesthetic appeal.

Mark Eleveld (2003) defines spoken word as poetry that is read and performed before an audience. This definition acknowledges spoken word as poetry and places performance at the centre of this genre. In this research therefore, I discuss spoken word as a genre of oral literature due to its emphasis on performance. In Kenya, spoken word artists make use of the various spaces available to them to perform their compositions to the audience. Kennet B., a renowned spoken word artist hosts both the upcoming and established poets at the Kenya National Theatre. Chris Mukasa, the director of The Kenyan Poets Lounge came up with the idea of Fatuma's Voice to encourage young people to speak out their mind through spoken

word. He invented Fatuma, “a fifty year old woman who is born dumb” and encouraged young poets to speak out the words trapped within her. This became an avenue for them to speak out their mind because as they attempted to speak for Fatuma, they instead spoke out what was buried within their subconscious. Thus, spoken word offered them the space to express their worldviews.

However, other spoken word artists like Imani Woomera, Ngwatilo Mawiyoo, and Wanjiku Mwaura have gone beyond the stage and published their poems in anthologies, subverting the notion that the written is more superior to the spoken by bridging the gap between the two. In the introductory note to her spoken word anthology entitled, *Morning Rain*, Imani Woomera echoes Eleveld’s definition of spoken word when she states that the poems were written to be “performed, sung, or read out loud.” She therefore advises her audience that in order to enjoy her written work fully they should listen to the compact disk (CD) containing the collections “with head phones while reading along.” The main focus in my research is based on the art of oral interpretation and performance because the interaction between the poet and the audience is what gives spoken word a unique experience that sets it apart from the classical forms of poetry that were predominantly written.

Spoken word in Kenya cannot be discussed in isolation without paying attention to the historical development of this art form in general. Contemporary spoken word is said to have its origin and essence in the West African concept of “Nommo.” This is a Bantu word that refers to “the magical power of words to cause change” (Chicago Historical Society). The spoken word poets use words as weapons to deal with social ills in order to transform the society. The modern day spoken word was made popular by *The Last Poets*, a poetry and political music group belonging to the underground Black community in the 1960s. This

group was a product of the African American Civil Rights Movement. The role of the Black arts Movement in the development of this genre cannot also be overemphasised. It was responsible for the expansion of the black cultural persona through jazz and funk due to its experimental and often radical statements which provided the space for alternative political ideologies to be propagated. Poets like Amiri Baraka, and Askia Toure used the concept of Black Aesthetics to link fine arts and politics in their works as a way of challenging the dominant discourses of blackness (Warren, 1990).

In the 1980s, spoken word was adopted by college circles to describe a new wave of performing arts that evolved during the Postmodern Art Movement. Several avenues emerged to give voice to spoken word artists such as “The Nuyorican Poets Café,” which held the first documented poetry slam in 1989. Others were “Da Poetry Lounge” and “The World Stage.” The Nuyorican Poets Café and Da poetry Lounge are closely connected to the poetry slam movement that was made popular by Russell Simmon’s Def Poetry Lounge.

Marc Smith is credited with the growing popularity of spoken word by hosting some of the modern poetry slams in Chicago, Illinois, in the 1980s. Such events are said to often “invoke the memories of raucous poetry readings of the Beat era of the 1950s” (Dill, 2013). As a result, they are often marked by unconventionality and social protest which makes them popular with people representing marginalized identities.

In Africa, the modern day spoken word can be traced to South Africa during the Apartheid era. People expressed their rebellion against the system through protest poetry. Legends like Professor Keorapetse Kgosisile, Don Materra, Dennis Brutus and Mzwakhe Mbuli, used the power of the spoken word as a weapon against oppression. Currently, the platforms for

competitive poetry also known as “slam” are common in Johannesburg through such spaces as WORD n SOUND, House of Hunger and Likwid Tongue. This has extended to other parts of the country where there are platforms such as Cup O’Thought in Durban, Jam That Session in Cape Town and No Camp Chairs Poetry Picnic in Pretoria (Goethe-Institut South Africa, June 2013).

In Kenya spoken word is a genre that emerged at the beginning of the twenty first century with the Kwani? Movement at Club Sounds. However, the popularity of spoken word in Kenya can be attributed to “Rhythm and Spoken Word” event that was held at Daas Restaurant in Nairobi’s Westland’s area. This introduced the idea of poetry slam in Kenya, where judges would consider the quality of work and the reception of the audience when awarding the spoken word artists. Imani Woomera was the host of this programme and the first slam champion was Timothy Mwaura, followed by Dan Oballa (First runners’ up) and Dan Mwangi (Second runners’ up). Currently, this event takes place at Alliance Francaise Gardens in Nairobi, Kenya, and is organised by a committee of spoken word poets under the leadership of Ian Gwagi.

Spoken word as a genre of oral literature in Kenya has not been well defined. It shares similar characteristics with other artistic forms like music and prose, and does not seem to present a specific ideology. The issues raised by these poets include gender-based violence, terrorism, climate change, child abuse, corruption, racism and ethnicity. This genre is mostly performed by young elites of varied backgrounds in Kenya’s urban centres, but attracts a mixed audience comprised of both the youth and adults. The poems seem to rely on intertextuality in terms of form and content bringing about a new art form that embraces heterogeneity.

1.2 Definition of Terms

Intertextuality – “Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991, 20). In this research, intertextuality will apply to both the written and the oral texts.

Slam poetry – “Competitive version of poetry readings” (Sommers-Willet, 2005, 51). In this research the terms slam poetry will be used to refer to a competition among spoken word poets during the Poetry Slam Africa where the winner is crowned the slam queen or king.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

This research investigates how spoken word is a site where many artistic forms converge to achieve heterogeneity in terms of form and content. While some scholars argue that signs derive meaning through the structure of particular texts, spoken word relies on other texts for its interpretation. The study establishes how spoken word derives meaning from other texts through intertextuality and performance and how the genre creates an intertextual collage with other artistic forms like music, oral tradition and the novel to extend the meaning of the text. The research also interrogates how spoken word artists manage to manipulate their performance techniques to enhance the interpretation of their poems, as well as to challenge metanarratives in society.

1.4 Objectives

This study set out to:

- 1.4.1. Investigate how intertextuality in spoken word contributes to the interpretation of the text;
- 1.4.2. Interrogate the role of performance in the interpretation of spoken word poetry.

1.5 Research Questions

This research sought to answer the following questions:

- 1.5.1. In what ways does intertextuality in spoken word influence the interpretation of the text?
- 1.5.2. What role does performance play in the interpretation of spoken word poetry?

1.6 Justification

This research is motivated by the desire to explore new dimensions in the art of oral poetry as the spoken word artists strive to embrace heterogeneity in their poems. The study is mostly interested in the new spaces taken by spoken word poets in Kenya as they attempt to challenge metanarratives in society. Over the years, some oral poets have challenged dominant discourses in society in a variety of ways. This study investigates the trajectory taken by spoken word artists as they tackle the subversion of metanarratives in Kenya through intertextuality. This research is therefore an attempt to expand the genre of oral poetry and underscore the argument that spoken word in Kenya is an alternative means to challenge dominant discourses in society.

Besides, spoken word poets have been neglected in the criticism of their work and their inclusion to the literary canon. Through their performances they have represented the voice of the marginalised in society by exposing the metanarratives that have led to the subjugation of different groups of people. This research explores how spoken word poets have taken a new approach in the struggle against metanarratives through oral poetry.

Earlier studies on oral poetry in Kenya have focused on poems from specific ethnic communities leaving out a minority group in our urban centres that does not subscribe to any

ethnic group but embraces cultural diversity in a variety of ways. Through the use of Kiswahili, our national language and English, our official language, the spoken word poets have managed to reach a wider audience beyond our national borders.

Finally, the study of spoken word in Kenya is important since scholars have dealt with similar genres from other regions like America, Canada, England, and the Caribbean, but more research needs to be done on spoken word in Kenya. Besides, most of the research conducted on spoken word even from other countries has been inclined mostly towards pedagogy of education, leaving out the literary approach to this genre. This research therefore hopes to make a contribution towards presenting spoken word poetry in Kenya as a text that can enrich present and future literary discourse.

1.7 Literature Review

This review dwells on spoken word as a genre of oral literature. According to Lusweti (1984) oral poetry is a branch of oral literature which takes many different forms and occurs in many cultural and social contexts. Okumba Miruka (1994) gives a more specific definition by stating that oral poetry is a verbal expression of feelings, ideas and thoughts in verse form. He asserts that poetry and song are not exactly the same, and that song is just one way of performing poetry in addition to reciting and declaiming. Joseph Muleka (2005), bridges the gap between oral poetry and song in his thesis entitled “Images of Women in Abakhayo Bweya Oral Poetry and their Social significance for Girl Children.” He argues that oral poetry is synonymous to song and that there is a thin line between the two art forms. In my research I look at the intersection between poetry and song by focusing on intertextuality as a dominant feature in spoken word, which allows the poets to take advantage of the musical genres to enhance their performance in terms of form and content.

Henry Indangasi (2016) in his seminar Paper entitled “The Mathematics of Literature,” talks about the intersection between genres by looking at prose poetry as a “Sub-genre in which prose and poetry intersect.” He points out Alexander Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* as a perfect example of a novel in verse where the closed poetic format of the sonnet has the “typical features of the novel such as setting, narrative, dialogue, characterization, conflict, and resolution.” While Indangasi focuses on the intersection between prose and poetry in Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, in my research I deal with the intersection between prose and spoken word poetry as well as music and spoken word poetry in Kenya by focusing on how this intersection contributes to the creation of meaning through intertextuality.

Ruth Finnegan (1977) asserts that performance is key to any form of oral literature. She states that the only way to ensure the continuity of an oral poem is through performance where important aspects like “The skill and personality of the performer, the nature and reaction of the audience, the context, the purpose” (p. 28) provide an insight into an oral art form. My research is based on Finnegan’s idea that the text alone cannot complete any discussion of oral poetry without considering the element of performance. I look at how spoken word poets use improvisation and innovation in their performances to appeal to their audience and how that contributes to the understanding of their poems.

Wanjiku Kabira and Karega Mutahi (1998) are of the same view with Ruth Finnegan that performance is important in oral literature. They recognise the significance of the cultural context in the understanding of a performance by asserting that:

Oral literature can only be fully appreciated within its cultural context and performance. It is the cultural context that gives the audience the total picture of the implications of the literature itself. In the performance, the extra linguistic features enhance the message contained in the language used (p.6).

However, some scholars are skeptical about the idea of performance poetry since they believe that it is inferior to written poetry. In an interview with John Robert Lee, Derek Walcott dismisses performance poetry as childish, individualistic, and as one with a poor standard of dialect. He is against the mixing of such kind of poetry with ideas of nationalism. He says, “I think that there is a sort of virulent, vehement, aggressive incoherence that is taking the place of poetry and that is stupid.” (Bim: Arts of 21st Century 2.1 2008-2009: 17). This assertion by Walcott brings about the binary opposition between spoken/written poetry. It is quite evident that Walcott does not consider performance poetry as real poetry just like many other scholars who view oral poetry as inferior to written poetry. This includes spoken word which is a form of performance poetry. However, spoken word poetry subverts this notion by enhancing the coexistence of the written and oral poetry, as the artists sometimes perform their written versions of spoken word on stage, and others better still publish their poems in books.

Billy Collins, in the introduction to *The Spoken Word Revolution* by Mark Eleveld and Marc Smith, seems to negate Walcott’s assertion by privileging the oral over the written. He views oral poetry as liberating, by referring to it as “a freedom dependent only on the ability to open the mouth – that most democratic of instruments – and speak.” Furthermore, he perceives written poetry as ensnaring when he describes it as “the prison cell of the page” where silence dominates. His inclination to performance poetry is further heightened when he talks of it as encompassing “the warmth of the voice,” as opposed to the written which involves “the chilliness of text.” Although I agree with Billy Collins that spoken word is liberating, I do not share in his sentiments that written poetry is oppressive. I believe that both forms have the power of transforming the world if effectively employed. Spoken word takes advantage of both forms to challenge dominant discourses in society.

Marc Smith, who is said to be the founder of poetry slam, echoes Billy Collins' sentiments when he views spoken word as poetry's primary form. He says, "I think when poetry went from the oral tradition to the page, someone should've asked, is that really poetry? I think slam gets poetry back to its roots, breathing life into the words." This assertion by Marc Smith takes us back to the question posed earlier: Is spoken word poetry? According to him, spoken word is not only poetry, but also the original form of poetry. This calls for a brief etymological definition of poetry. The word poetry comes from the Greek noun *poiesis*. When used as a verb, it means "to make." Therefore, it can be translated as "to create poetry." The art of creation does not necessarily involve writing alone. It could also include speaking out, like the case of spoken word poetry.

Bob Holman (1994) also celebrates performance poetry in his foreword to *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Café* by stating that, "poetry has found a way to drill through the wax that had been collecting for decades! Poetry is no longer an exhibit in a dust museum. Poetry is alive; poetry is aloud." Holman's choice of the phrase "dust museum" in relation to written poetry clearly brings out his bias. He is opposed to the classical poetry that relies heavily on writing. In the foreword to his book he writes boldly: "DO NOT READ THIS BOOK!...this book reads to you." This shows his support for orality, which is the key element in spoken word. While Bob Holman seems to shun written poetry in favour of the oral poetry, in my research I have shown how the blend between the written and the spoken is part of what contributes to the aesthetic appeal in spoken word, hence subverting the notion of "high" and "low" art.

Ciarunji Chesaina (1997) looks at the duality of oral literature as a literary art and as a performing art, and notes that “whereas written literature uses writing as its medium of expression, oral literature depends on a combination of language and performance” (p.29). Spoken word artists bring their written poems to life by performing them to an audience, hence bridging the gap between written poetry and performance poetry. This is the stand I wish to take in my research by looking at how spoken word artist integrate forms of oral literature and written literature through intertextuality.

Gil Scott-Heron, the late spoken word artist and black civil rights activist once famously proclaimed, “The revolution will not be televised” (2009). According to him change begins in one’s mind first and therefore the initial stages of a revolution cannot be caught on camera because it happens in one’s mind. In this observation Scott-Heron seems to acknowledge that spoken word has the potential to bring about a transformation. While he only talks of the transformation that takes place at the individual level, in my research I also look at how this revolution later spreads to the audience through performance.

Isidore Okpewho (1979) looks at the effect of oral poetry on both the audience and the performer by stating that poetry has the power to touch us emotionally. He asserts that the dramatization and repetition present in the performance of poetry raises the emotions of both the performer and his/her audience. Isidore (1985) further rejects the notion that poetry is all about the order in which words are arranged. He states that “the essence of true poetry therefore lies in its power to appeal strongly to our appreciation and, in a sense, lift us up.” Spoken word poems are composed in such a way that they appeal to our emotions by exposing the metanarratives in society that have kept us oppressed. In so doing the poets

influence the feelings of the audience towards these grand narratives. This is in line with Isidore's observation that:

There are basically two ways in which a piece of poetry can appeal to us. One is by touching us emotionally, so that we feel either pleasure or pain; the other is by stirring our minds deeply so that we reflect on some aspect of life or some significant idea.

Spoken word plays both roles by not only touching us emotionally but also exposing us to the happenings in our society so that we may reflect upon them and transform our worldview.

Tara Conley (2008) makes an observation about the relationship between the artist and the audience in his book, *Confronting and Transforming the Foe Within: An Application of Napanthla Theory*. He talks about "Napanthla consciousness" which he describes as the psycho-emotional pliability that is achieved through spoken word spectatorship. He argues that it is possible for spoken word to provoke "audiences to reside within threshold spaces of awareness and alternative ways of thinking." (2008, p.8). In my research I investigate how spoken word artists in Kenya use the spaces available to them creatively to challenge dominant discourses.

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) introduces the term heterodoxy to refer to what Conley calls alternative thinking, meaning the "world of opinion opens." He asserts that it is the oppressed to come up with the opinion in order to point out the "arbitrariness of the taken for granted" (Valencia, 2010: p.16). According to Dill, if the audience is exposed to such heterodoxy, they may just begin the "untelevised revolution" about which Scott-Heron had talked about. While I agree with Bourdieu that it is the oppressed to begin the revolution, my research will mainly focus on how the improvisation and innovation of the performance itself is revolutionary.

Maisha Fisher (2005) and Jocson (2005) discuss how the urban youth find spoken word a viable outlet for challenging the dominant discourses in society. Fisher advocates for the use of spoken word as a mode of teaching by studying the oral tradition as part of a longer lineage of black literacy practices. She presents two teachers from New York who organized poetry writing and performance spaces for their high school youth to articulate their concerns in the society. While Fisher and Jocson look at how spoken word provides a space for young people to express their concerns, they do not discuss how the intertextuality in spoken word contributes to an aesthetic appeal that embraces heterogeneity.

Karin Barber (1997) in her essay entitled "Preliminary Notes on Audience in Africa," looks at the audience as "the body of people prepared to grant the performer space and time in which to mount such a display, by suspending or bending the normal patterns of communicative turn-taking." She views the audience as constituting the performance and explores the subject of "economics of entertainment." She argues that there is a difference between a performance in which the audience pays to attend and that which is customary. She also explores ways in which technology has enabled artists to reach a wider audience that is removed from the "face-to-face interaction of speaker and hearer." Spoken word in Kenya offers the poets a platform in which to present pertinent issues in our society today. In most of these performances, a fee is charged to the audience before entry is granted hence deviating from the traditional oral poetry where payment was mostly voluntary in the sense that one would reward an artist who is more appealing rather than the artist imposing a fee on the audience who might feel cheated in the end when the performance does not meet their expectations. Spoken word has also invaded the digital space where there are several poets who have recorded their performances on videos and You Tube reaching a far and wider

audience than a live performance can afford. This changes our perception of what constitutes the audience.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in his article entitled "Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space," states that the performance space is governed by its own politics. He says, "The war between art and the state is really a struggle between the power of performance in the arts and the performance of power by the state – in short, enactments of power" (p.38). He challenges Peter Brook's notion of "the empty space" by asserting that any given space in the world has a historical or emotional background, as well as a connection to other spaces. In his work *Globalectics* Ngugi examines the relationship between space and a work of art by stating that the socio-political context in which a work of art is produced has some influence on it. While Ngugi Wa Thiong'o says this in relation to the staging of his play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, in my research I look at the relationship between space and a work of art by focusing on spoken word performances. I intend to establish how the socio-political environment leads the spoken word artists to improvise their performances in order to bring out the general feeling of the masses.

Gichingiri Ndigirigi (2007) argues that Peter Brook's idea of "the act of theatre" only considers the "man walking across the empty space as someone else watches". However, he asserts that the "identity" or the "feelings" of the person watching is equally important. He feels that "Brook's formulation of the act of theatre leaves out a crucial ingredient, that of the message." He outlines the theatrical communicative model which involves the sender, in this case the person walking, the receiver, that is the person watching, and the message, which to him may be both "verbal and non-verbal". In this research, the performance of spoken word poetry considers the sender (the poet), the receiver (the audience) and the message (The

poem) as key players in the “act of theatre” that are crucial in the interpretation of a text. Ndirigi further asserts that talking of the theatrical space in terms of tradition brings it out as a “forum for debate and the exchange of ideas.

Dill (2003) asserts that “in the spirit of Beat Poetry, spoken word is often marked by unconventionality and social protest.” He believes that this could be the reason why a large number of people representing marginalized identities have taken up the genre both as poets and active audience. Although Dill talks about social protest and unconventionality in spoken word, he does not talk about how spoken word relies on intertextuality to create meaning. Furthermore, he does not look at how the spoken word artists improvise their performance space to reach their target audience, which will be covered in this research.

Bell Hooks (1994) in the analysis of rap music in contemporary black culture acknowledges that spoken word is capable of transforming the audience. She observes that oral poetry “has become one of the spaces where black vernacular speech is used in a manner that invites dominant mainstream culture to listen, to hear – and to some extent, be transformed” (p.171). While Bell Hooks focuses on the use of black vernacular speech in oral poetry in Canada, my research will cover the use of *Sheng* in spoken word in Kenya to transform the urban youth.

Miriam Maranga-Musonye (2014), in her article entitled “The Literary Insurgence in the Kenyan Urban Space: Mchongoano and the Popular Art Scene in Nairobi”, states that Sheng is mostly used by youths who reside in Eastlands, a place “characterized by low economic status, poor housing, poor infrastructure, and a high rate of crime.” She observes that Sheng dominates the language of youth from this area hence signifying “the status of urban youth culture.” Having achieved this status in society Sheng is therefore used by some spoken word

poets in order to appeal to the youth to transform their mind sets, by exposing and challenging the metanarratives in society that have kept them in a disadvantaged position for years.

Youth Speaks, an arts programme that engages in civil action for social change based in Francisco, CA, states that they have made the connection between poetry, spoken word, youth development and civic engagement in order to deconstruct dominant narratives so as to achieve a culture that is more inclusive and active. They encourage the young people to use their own vernacular in expressing themselves. My research has focused on how spoken word in Kenya has made use of *Sheng* to reach the Kenyan urban youth who view themselves as a people who have transcended their ethnic differences to achieve a heterogeneous society.

Kimberly Black in her article entitled “They’ve Got Us So Conditioned That We Purchase Our Oppression,” examines the performance of the final round of competition for *Brave New Voices, 2010* for her analysis of how language and culture play a major role in the politics of identity and being. In her work she focuses on the use of mother tongue by spoken word artists in creating identity as advocated for by Youth Speaks. In my research I have focused on how spoken word artists in Kenya use *Sheng* to appeal to the urban population especially the youth who view it as the language of the people. This brings out an element of intertextuality with other genres like dub poetry that embraces the use of Creole in their compositions.

Tammie Jenkins (2013) in her PhD dissertation submitted at the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, examines how the intertextuality in spoken word is as a result of its genealogical contributions. She argues that intertextuality in spoken word

poetry can be used to reveal hidden transcripts found in Tracie Morris's *Project Princess*. Although Jenkins explores the concept of intertextuality in *Project Princess*, she does not capture intertextuality and performance in spoken word poetry from a Kenyan perspective. Besides, Jenkins's dissertation is mainly concerned with intertextuality in spoken word as a form of public pedagogy. In my research, I look at Intertextuality in spoken word in Kenya from a literary point of view where I examine how it contributes to interpretation of a text and the aesthetic appeal.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

My research is aimed at investigating intertextuality and performance as dominant features in spoken word and how they contribute to meaning and the aesthetic appeal in this genre. As a result, the interpretation of the data has been informed by two critical theories namely; the theory of intertextuality and the performance theory. The theory of intertextuality has been used to guide my analysis of data in chapter two where I look at how intertextuality contributes to the creation of meaning in a text as well as the aesthetic appeal. The performance theory has been useful to this study when analysing the data in chapter three where I focus on the performance techniques employed by the spoken word poets to influence the interpretation of the text.

Lincoln and Denzin (2000) state that critical theory involves a “radical restructuring of society towards the ends of reclaiming historic cultural legacies, social justice, and the redistribution of power...” Therefore in my analysis of spoken word in Kenya, I will make use of the postmodern theory of intertextuality as well as the performance theory.

This research is based on the postmodern idea that meaning does not reside within a text but rather it is developed as the reader interacts with the text, bringing forth his/her cultural, social, and personal influences. Postmodernism rejects grand narratives in explaining reality but advocates for as many interpretations of a text as there are readers.

Jean Francois Lyotard (1979), argues that we should embrace a multiplicity of theoretical viewpoints so as to appreciate the heterogeneity of human experience and make use of little narratives rather than grand narratives which he believes are old fashioned and oppressive because each narrative has a right to truth. He advocates for the “emancipation narrative” which looks at the interconnection of events related to one another. He asserts that the narrative of emancipation involves all the conceptions which attempt to explain history such as class struggle, socialism, and capitalism.

Intertextuality is considered as the pillar of the postmodern movement which emerged in the 1960s. The term intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva when talking about Mikhail Bakhtin’s texts. She says, “Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (quoted from Clayton and Rothstein, 1991:20). She further asserts that a text will always have utterances from other texts which “intersect and neutralize one another.” This means that texts are always influenced by other texts. Kristeva came up with the concept of intertextuality to challenge Ferdinand de Saussure’s claim that signs gain meaning through structure in particular texts. This argument is relevant to my research on intertextuality in spoken word in Kenya where I examine how these artists make use of existing texts to enrich their poems in terms of form and content. I examine ways in which spoken word poets create meaning in their texts by making references to other genres like the oral tradition, the novel and other forms of oral poetry.

Terry Eagleton (1983,192) is of a similar view with Kristeva when he states that all literature books are to some extent “rewritten”. It is in view of this statement that I intend to use intertextuality in my research to establish to what extent spoken word has been influenced by other genres and how that has contributed to the interpretation of the text and the aesthetic appeal. The proponents of intertextuality believe that writing involves the process of reading another text. This could also be said of spoken word artists who seem to write their poems by reading other texts to enhance their work.

Martin Coyle, looks at intertextuality from a deconstructionist point of view. He believes that intertextuality refers to both the relationship among literary texts and the dialogue between them and other writings. Coyle asserts that:

Each text takes its meaning from other texts, not merely prior texts,
But other concomitant texts and expressions of culture and language.
The blank and marble pages, the squibbly lines, the scrambled chapters,
The skipped pages of *Tristram Shandy* are intertextual events because
They respond not only to extant literary texts, but to contemporary and
Mideaval ideas of logic, or order of rationality (Coyle 1990, 613).

Coyle’s observation is relevant to my research because I look at how spoken word is a form of collage where various art forms converge to form one heterogeneous text that is in constant dialogue with other texts.

Meyer Howard Abrams’s description of intertextuality provides the most appropriate framework for this research. He asserts that intertextuality looks at the various ways in which texts are linked to other texts through open or covert citations and allusions, or by the assimilation of the characteristics of an earlier text by a later one, or by participation in a

common stock of literary codes and conventions (1981, 200). In this research I explore ways in which spoken word poets have employed each of these intertextual elements in their work. In my research I use intertextuality to describe how texts derive meaning from other texts and hold dialogue with them through pastiche, allusion, and parody. This is intended to demonstrate how a text can acquire new meaning due to the experiences of the audience and the social realities, hence enriching the interpretation of meaning in spoken word. Through the use of smaller narratives by spoken word poets to represent the dominant discourses in society, existing texts are absorbed into new ones to suit the social realities of the audience.

The performance theory has a radical nature which is demonstrated by its inclusive and holistic approach to theatre and performance, with popular culture, folklore, and ethnic diversity incorporated into the cross-disciplinary mix. In my research I will use the concept of “performativity” which is closely related to the postmodern view that performance is not only intrinsically artistic or theatrical, but also something that pervades the fabric of the social, political and the material world. The term “performative” was first coined by J.L Austin, a linguistic philosopher, during lectures at Harvard University in 1955 where he said that “to say something is to do something” (Austin, 1962). Spoken word artists do not only perform their poems to entertain the audience but they also use them as spaces to challenge dominant discourses in society.

Richard Schechner asserts that “performing on stage, performing in special social situations ... and performing in everyday life are a continuum” (Schechner, 2002, p.143). He argues that every human being is in some sense a performer and that various figures in the public arena like politicians, religious leaders, and business men and women adopt strategies of performance and role play in order to achieve a specific goal. In the same way, spoken word

artists employ various techniques in their performances to get their message to the intended audience.

Weinstein (2010) refers to the performance techniques like use of gestures and body movement as “physical text”, which includes other elements like words, voice, and intonations. According to him, these techniques help in the interpretation of a performance text. Spoken word poets in Kenya usually employ the paralinguistic features in their performances in order to influence the interpretation of their works.

Schechner’s idea of street theatre performances that are done before an audience some of whom may become participants has guided my research in the sense that during spoken word performances some members of the audience include spoken word artists who participate in the poetry slam of the day. Schechner’s and Kaprow’s shared idea of the “found space” is also useful to my research in which I have demonstrated how spoken word artists make use of any space available to them to pass across their message. Schechner asserts that, “the theatrical event can take place in a totally transformed space, or found space” (Schechner, 1977). In this case theatre is substituted for its outdoor counterpart. This is relevant to my research in which I intend to investigate how spoken word performances rely heavily on improvisation and innovation in order to create a space for their performances which sometimes could be on the streets.

1.9 Scope and Limitation

In order to obtain a focused and comprehensive analysis of intertextuality and performance in spoken word poetry in Kenya, I have confined myself to the work of fourteen spoken word poets, namely Brigeddia Poet, Dan Oballa, Dorphan, El-Poet, Elsaphan Njora, Imani Woomera, Kennet B., Mufasa, Namatsi Lukoye, Ngwatilo Mawiyoo, Raya Wambui,

Teardrops, Tess Aura and Wanjiku Mwaura. The research will cover both their live performances and video recordings. I will specifically analyse their spoken word poems in relation to intertextuality and performance. The fourteen were sampled due to their popularity and contribution to the development of spoken word in Kenya.

1.10 Methodology

The nature of this research called for both extensive and intensive reading of the works of other scholars on oral poetry in general and spoken word in particular as a genre of oral literature. Both primary and secondary texts were reviewed under library research. The second part of the research involved the sampling of spoken word artists from varying backgrounds who have ever performed at the various poetry slams in Kenya, especially the Poetry Slam Africa. They were selected based on their use of intertextuality and performance in their poems. This helped me to gather what Patton refers to as “information-rich cases,” which enabled me to “learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry” (Patton 2002, p. 230). In depth discussions, conversations and dialogues were held with the selected artists who were regarded as key informants in this research. This was aided by use of research tools namely questionnaires, interview guides and check lists.

I began my research by attending live performances of spoken word poetry at the Kenya National Theatre and Alliance Francaise so as to select the accomplished poets. I did this by interrogating the audience and organisers of spoken word poetry on who they rate highly in the spoken word field in Kenya. I interviewed Dan Oballa, the first runners’ up in the third poetry slam in Kenya held at Daas Restaurant in Nairobi, in order to get the background information about spoken word in Kenya. I then interviewed Kennet B., who hosts spoken word performances at the Kenya National Theatre to seek authenticity on issues involving

this genre, since he is one of the pioneer spoken word poets in Kenya. I also interviewed Ian Gwagi, concerning the Poetry Slam Africa which is usually held quarterly at Alliance Gardens, since he is the key organiser of the event. This helped me to gather information about the spoken word poets who have ever participated in the previous poetry slams, which assisted me in selecting the award winning poets to be covered for the purposes of this research.

My research covered spoken word poetry spanning a period of fourteen years since the introduction of spoken word in Kenya, from 2002 to 2016. I attended live performances involving the selected spoken word artists at the Kenya National Theatre, Alliance Francaise, The Michael Joseph Centre (Safaricom House), and the All saints Cathedral. I also made use of video recordings of spoken word poetry on You Tube from various sources like “AM live”, “The Trend” and “Churchill live” on Nation Television in Kenya, and Kwani? Trust, covering the fourteen year period. The video recordings also helped me to sample the accomplished spoken word artists based on their content, mode of delivery and popularity. I also used the catalogue of the winning spoken word poems featured at the Poetry Slam Africa to select the spoken word artists whose poems are analyzed in this research. I then put the performed poems in DVD mode for purposes of transcription and further analysis.

During the live performances I observed and recorded the speech and dramatization paying close attention to performance techniques such as the use of gestures, tonal variation, facial expression, body movements, musical accompaniments, costumes and décor. I also observed and took note of the strategies employed by the spoken word poets to involve the audience in their performances. I recorded all this on DVDs. I also took still pictures of the selected spoken word artists during the performances.

Since performance is key to spoken word poetry, I interviewed two adjudicators to furnish me with information concerning the qualities they look for in poets before crowning them the winners during the Poetry Slam Africa, a poetry competition of spoken word artists. The two judges were Mufasa (Ken Kibet) and Wanjiku Mwaura, who are also award winning spoken word poets. I also made enquiries about the details on the adjudication guide for poetry slams from the adjudicators, which gave me a clear description of what is expected from a spoken word poet.

In the analysis of the spoken word poems from the selected artists, I used the theory of intertextuality to foreground elements like pastiche, allusion, and parody to establish how the artists make use of existing texts to enrich their performances in terms of form and content. The use of pastiche helped me to establish how spoken word poems absorb styles, genres and story lines from other texts to create a new art form. Through allusion I interrogated how these artists make overt references to other texts to enrich their performances. I also examined how these artists make use of parody to ridicule the ills in our society by making references to earlier texts that have glorified them.

I also used the performance theory to establish how the spoken word artists employ paralinguistic features and performance techniques such as facial expression, gestures, body movement, intonation, instrumentation, costume and décor to enhance their performance and to aid the audience in the interpretation of the poems. I examined how the spoken word poets involve the audience in their performance and how that contributes to the aesthetic appeal of this genre. The poets' use of both the physical and emotional space to appeal to the audience was of equal concern in this research where I investigated how they utilize any space available to them to challenge dominant discourses in society.

CHAPTER TWO: INTERTEXTUALITY IN SPOKEN WORD IN KENYA

2.0. Introduction

The twenty first century Kenya has experienced the rise of a new wave of oral poetry, popularly referred to as spoken word. This art form has provided many talented artists with the space in which to articulate their concerns in society by addressing pertinent issues within our borders and beyond. The first section of this chapter introduces the key spoken word poets whose work is extensively analysed in this study, while the subsequent sections explore how intertextuality between spoken word and other genres influence the interpretation of the poems. These sections reveal the intertextuality that exists between spoken word and the oral tradition, the novel and other forms of oral poetry through allusion, pastiche and parody.

2.1. The Biographies of the Spoken Word Poets

The number of spoken word poets in Kenya is continuously growing as the genre gains more popularity. In this study, fourteen spoken word poets were sampled for analysis based on their propensity to employ intertextuality in their poems and their ability to come up with improvised and innovative ways of delivering their poetry to the audience. The following are the sampled poets listed alphabetically using their stage names: Brigeddia Poet, Dan Oballa, Dorphan, El-Poet, Elsaphan Njora, Imani Woomera, Kennet B., Mufasa, Namatsi Lukoye, Ngwatilo Mawiyoo, Raya Wambui, Teardrops, Tess Aura and Wanjiku Mwaura.

Brigeddia Poet

Brigeddia Poet is a male spoken word poet whose real name is Francis Onono. He holds a certificate in Criminal Justice from the Kenya Institute of Studies in Criminal Justice and works as a Forest Ranger in Kapsabet, Kenya. His poetry is greatly inspired by Fuli Brakes

and he has composed poems such as “Mamu Lizi”, “Special Dedication to Ladies”, “Mheshimiwa” and “The Agent” which he has performed on various platforms in Kenya including “Churchil Live”, a popular television comedy show on *Nation Television*.

Dan Oballa

Dan Oballa is a male spoken word poet whose real name is Daniel Obungu. He holds a Master of Arts in Literature from the University of Nairobi. His inspiration as a poet is influenced by a number of people including Ogwang’ Lelo, a Luo nyatiti player, Talib Kweli, an American hip-hop artist and Suzanna Owiyo, a popular Kenyan Musician. He is the winner of the 3rd spoken word slam organised at Daas Restaurant in Westlands, Nairobi. He was also the featured poet in Wapi? in August 2009 and was on the cover photo for Wapi? Magazine for that season.

Dorphan

Dorphan is a male spoken word poet whose real name is Dennis Mutuma Mutua. He holds a diploma in Information Technology but works as a full time spoken word artist. His love for hip-hop has greatly influenced his poetry, especially the works of Tupac Shakur, the late hip-hop rapper. Other poets who have influenced him include Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka and Okot P’Bitek. He has composed poems such as “Mum Aliishia”, “Najua”, and “Colossus”. He adopted the stage name, Dorphan, as an alter ego to enable him embrace his state as an orphan and encourage others like him through his poetry. He is the 34th Poetry Slam King, a title he received after winning the 34th Poetry Slam Africa, which is a poetry competition held quarterly in Kenya but invites participants from all over the world. Currently the event is organised by a committee of poets under the leadership of Ian Gwagi, and Dorphan is among the committee members.

Elsaphan Njora

Elsaphan Njora is a male spoken word poet. He is a holder of a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Nairobi, where he specialized in sociology and communications. His father is his greatest inspiration as far as his poetry is concerned. He is the founder and director of EOP Nation, which stands for Eve of Poetry that was initiated to offer a platform for spoken word poets to showcase their talent to the public. Currently, he hosts a show dubbed @51 aimed at marking the beginning of a whole new generation that can speak out through poetry for the next fifty one years. He is also working on his poetry anthology entitled @51 which will cover fifty one of his poems. He believes that spoken word has always existed in Africa and no one should ever claim to have brought it to Kenya.

Kennet B.

Kennet B. is a male spoken word poet whose real name is Kennedy Leakey Odongo. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Nairobi and is a full time spoken word poet. His poetry is greatly inspired by the Jamaican dub poets, especially Mutabaruka and Linton Kwesi Jonson. He has a spoken word poetry album entitled “Classified Curriculum: Future Edition”, and is also the founder and director of “The Pot”, a popular children’s spoken word group comprised of three siblings who are his own children. He is the host of “Poetry After Lunch”, a poetry and comedy show that takes place at The Kenya National Theatre, every Thursday, at 2.00pm. Besides, he also hosts a spoken word programme on Citizen Radio popularly known as “Mseto Extra”, every Saturday at 2.00pm, in addition to hosting an annual tree planting event in his hometown in Nyanza province aimed at bringing together upcoming poets to plant trees and engage in poetry sessions. The poet also features on the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation vernacular radio station known as “Mayenga FM”, after every news bulletin, where he presents spoken word poetry in *Dholuo*, one of Kenya’s

local languages. He believes that spoken word is “the blackboard carried from the classroom to the streets to teach the general public on life skills.”

Mufasa

Mufasa is a male spoken word poet from Kenya whose real name is Ken Kibet. He is currently pursuing a Bachelor degree in Business and Information Technology at the Kenya Methodist University. His poetry is greatly influenced by Saul Williams, Shane Koyczan, and Alicia Harris and he has produced a poetry album entitled “Inside Out.” He is also a Poetry Slam Africa king and one of the committee members and judge at the Poetry Slam Africa.

Namatsi Lukoye

Namatsi Lukoye is a female spoken word poet whose real name is Jackline Joy Lukoye Namatsi, but prefers to use her African name because she considers herself a pan-Africanist. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Relations from the United States International university-Kenya, and a post-graduate Diploma in Mass Communication from the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication. She works as a public relations officer at the Cerebral Palsy Society of Kenya where she uses her poetry to advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities. Her poetry is greatly inspired by Elizabeth Bennet and Maya Angelou and she attributes her success as a poet to Dr. Klaus Hornetz who sponsors her poetry work. She is among the spoken word poets from Kenya who were selected for an exchange programme in Germany. She has composed several poems including “Queen”, “Politricks” and “The Champ”. Apart from being a spoken word poet, she is also a rapper, and a fashion designer and sometimes fuses these elements in her performances.

Raya Wambui

Raya wambui is a female spoken word poet. She holds a private pilot licence and works as a manager at Pet Spa in Nairobi. Her poetry is greatly inspired by Maya Angelou, especially her poetry book entitled *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. She has composed several poems like “Define and Conquer”, “You Work for Me”, and “Stand Up”. She has performed her poetry on various international platforms including “Poetry Africa 2014” in South Africa. Her poetry has been described as revolutionary by various sources including the *Badilisha Radio*. She is also one of the Poetry Slam Africa queens.

Wanjiku Mwaura

Wanjiku Mwaura is a female spoken word poet. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology, Gender and Development Studies from Kenyatta University, and a Diploma in project management from the Kenya Institute of Management. She has also studied the German language and works as a voice over artist and a radio drama author with the Deutsche welle Radio (DW-RADIO) in Dolby. Her career as a poet was greatly influenced by the late Dr. Ezekiel Alembi, who once served as the director of the Kenyatta University Radio Station. She finds inspiration from the works of Maya Angelou and has composed poems such as “I Speak Continental”, “I am Only Fourteen” and “What Do you Want?” She has a published anthology of her poetry entitled *The Flow of My Soul*. Mwaura is also the 9th Poetry Slam Africa queen and a judge during Poetry Slam Africa.

2.2. Intertextuality between Spoken Word and other Art Forms.

Having given basic biodata of the key spoken word poets who will feature prominently in this study, the main focus is now on the use of intertextuality in their poems. To provide this chapter with the backdrop against which to situate intertextuality in spoken word in Kenya, it

is important to first expound on the basic tenets of intertextuality as brought out by different scholars. Proponents of intertextuality believe that literature evolves from literature. Graham Allen lauds French theorist Laurent Jenny for drawing a distinction between “works which are explicitly intertextual - such as imitations, parodies, citations, montages and plagiarisms - and those works in which the intertextual relation is not foregrounded” (Allen, 2000).

In this chapter I look at how the spoken word artists in Kenya utilize resources from oral literature by blending their poems with songs, proverbs, and oral narratives. Finnegan (1970) states that oral literature was perceived as “the work of communal consciousness and group authorship rather than ... of an individual inspired artist.” I focus on how the spoken word poets in Kenya take advantage of the fact that there is no claim of authorship as far as oral literature is concerned to incorporate material from this genre into their poems in order to give them fresh meaning.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), talks of the “carnivalization” of genre where a variety of discourses converge, comprising of day to day social speech, songs, proverbs, and other forms which when brought together can serve a new role. In this chapter, I will not only focus on how oral literature can be used to create meaning in oral poetry, but also look at how prose can be infused into oral poetry through spoken word. This is in line with Umberto Eco’s assertion that intertextuality brings about an “interrelationship between texts,” causing them to generate meaning through other texts. A similar view is held by Charles Bodunde who states that “each literature or text has the capacity to influence and extend the meaning of the other.” (Bodunde, 1994, 72). I also look at how the spoken word poets blend ideas from other forms of oral poetry to show how they depend on earlier texts to relate to issues within their environment. Biodun Jeyifo asserts that there are correlations between works of art within

different genres (Jeyifo, 1988, 277). It is this correlation that I focus on in this chapter by looking at how it influences our perception of the spoken word poems.

2.2.1 Spoken Word and Oral Tradition

Oral tradition is a major source of intertextuality in spoken word in Kenya. Artists make use of existing oral literature material to create their poems both in terms of form and content. According to Finnegan (1970), the African oral tradition contains texts which are “passed down word for word from generation to generation and thus reproduced verbatim from memory throughout the centuries” (p.442). These texts are found in the form of folktales and fables, epic histories and narrations, proverbs or sayings, and songs.

Wanjiku Mwaura in her spoken word poem entitled “I Speak Continental” blends the poem with myths and legends from various cultures in the African oral tradition. She takes us on a journey through the rich African cultural heritage where we are first introduced to the Ashanti of Ghana. The persona in the poem ushers us to the West African oral tradition by dancing to the Ashanti drums. The repetition of the words “Ashanti drums” in stanza one is significant to the poem in that it emphasizes the communicative aspect of these drums. Kwabena Nketia (1963), states that there are three modes of drumming among the Ashanti of Ghana which include; the signal mode, the speech mode and the dance mode. The signal and speech mode are strictly for communication while the dance mode is used mainly for recreation. Therefore when Mwaura mentions the Ashanti drums in the poem, one’s knowledge of the Ashanti “talking drums” also known as the “Atumpan” enhances the understanding of her appreciation of the different ways of communication in the African culture. These drums come in pairs and they are played in a way that imitates the local Twi language. They are used mainly in shrine drumming to announce a healing ceremony and also to communicate

with the gods (Twumasi, 1975). Therefore, the Ashanti drums are used in this poem to transport the audience to the world of the gods in West Africa. This is captured in the following lines:

Listen to the vigorous dance of my hips as I move my feet,
To the Ashanti drum, to the Ashanti drum, to the Ashanti drum,
Transported to West Africa, I meet Oboshi,
Goddess of the biggest river in Igbuzo,
Who punishes all who flaunt traditions,
Gives them leprosy.

The move from the Ashanti of Ghana to the Igbo of Nigeria, signifies the mutual relationship that exists between these two West African countries due to their use of English as a *Lingua Franca*, having been under the British colony. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a *lingua franca* “is a language that is adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different.” Although the two countries do not share a border, the poet connects them with each other due to their ability to communicate using the English language despite the fact that the two communities (Ashanti and Igbo) have different native languages.

Mwaura fuses the Igbo mythology in her spoken word poem by alluding to Oboshi goddess of Igbuzo also known as Ibusa. According to the West African oral traditions the Oboshi goddess is considered to be the supernatural protector of Igbuzo. Through legends the narrative of how Prince Umejei of Isu founded Igbuzo after being sentenced to exile for committing an abomination, has been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Mwaura utilizes the punitive attribute of goddess Oboshi who was believed to cause the death of anyone who tampered with any natural resources found in the river like fish and other reptiles, trees and animals, to give an alternative narrative which attempts to define the

Igbo culture. She uses this as a platform to talk about cultural integration when the persona in the poem talks of learning new words like “ikaru” which according to the poem means “morning” in the Yoruba language.

The poem moves from the west to central Africa through music and dance. The poet makes allusion to the “Lingala beat from the Congo hit” in an attempt to show the diversity of cultures in Africa. The persona celebrates all these cultures in equal measure hence demonstrating heterogeneity.

We are then taken back to West Africa among the Fon people of Benin through the Dahomey mythology of “Mawu-Lisa” which explains how death came on earth. This is done through allusion to Gu, the eldest son of the creator, as captured in the following lines:

I wanna speak of the Fon people of Benin,
Tell of Gu
The oldest son of the creator between sun and moon,
Then where? Found in Sudan!
Blame death on the hyena.

Our knowledge of the myth improves our understanding of these lines because the poet retells the narrative in fragments. According to the myth, humans were created from the union between the twin deities, Mawu and Lisa. Mawu is the female goddess of the moon while Lisa is the male god of the sun. The twins became the parents of the seven pair of gods among them Gu, who was charged with the responsibility of making the world habitable (Hamilton, 1988, p. 42-45). In this spoken word poem, death is blamed on the hyena but in some versions of the Dahomey mythology death is blamed on the monkey for challenging the gods in their role as the sole creators of all that exists in the world. By including this myth in

the poem, Mwaura brings out the relationship between the different cultures in Africa who share a common belief that humans were originally meant to be immortal but due to some misinformation, death was commissioned by the gods. In fact, there is a similar myth in Kenya, where the weaver bird carries the blame of causing death to humankind, by delivering a false message of death to humankind.

The mention of Shango as the Yoruba storm god in the next stanza of the poem takes one back to the legend of Shango believed to be the fourth king of the ancient Yoruba capital of Oyo. According to the Yoruba oral tradition, Shango was a powerful king but some people in his empire challenged his throne causing him to flee into the forest where he committed suicide. After his death, it is believed that Shango send fire from heaven to the houses of his enemies and that's how he came to be known as the god of thunder and lightning. In the poem Wanjiku Mwaura captures this legend in the following lines:

I wanna introduce the Shango,
The Yoruba storm god,
Who if now was thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands
Of years ago
May be these kind of rains
That we get nowadays
Could be him trying to tell us something,
Something that we keep being told by meteorologists
About the weather, climate change
Something to show that he is mad.

Wanjiku Mwaura gives her own interpretation amid the narrative by addressing contemporary issues such as climate change. She changes the narrative into a cautionary tale by demonstrating that the gods are not happy about man's contribution to environmental degradation.

The poet further moves to South Africa where she makes allusion to the bush men who believe that when one dies he/she transforms into a star and watches over the living. This knowledge keeps the persona in the poem at peace every night she looks at the sky because she feels that she is in constant communication with her ancestors.

I wanna speak of the bushmen,
Who believe the dead become stars,
And that, that would explain why,
Every night I watch the sky,
I feel at peace.
Some nights, I think they even speak
From the letters of the black canvas of the sky,
Spelling out my destiny as I read.

The poet then brings us to East Africa by making reference to the Taarab music of the Swahili people of Coastal Kenya. Here the persona concentrates on the therapeutic aspect of Taarab music which reminds her of “what truly counts.”

I wanna speak of the Swahili,
Coastal Kenya,
Move meticulously slowly,
Letting soft Taarab music
Course down my bones,
Taking away the seed of life,
Reminding me of what truly counts.

The poem is used to celebrate the diversity of the African culture by taking us through the oral traditions of the various regions in Africa. The persona takes the audience on a journey from the Western part of Africa where we are introduced to the Igbo, and the Fon people of Benin and their culture. We are then taken to Central Africa where we enjoy the Lingala beat

from the people of Congo before we are transported back to West Africa through the Yoruba mythology. We are then taken to South Africa into the culture of the Bush men. The poem comes to an end in East Africa with soft and slow music from the Swahili people. It is important to note that the poem begins with a vigorous dance to the Ashanti drums from West Africa and ends in meticulously slow moves of the Swahili people in East Africa through the “Soft Taarab music.”

Therefore, Wanjiku Mwaura makes use of the oral tradition to appreciate African cultures while at the same time addressing contemporary issues like climate change and environmental degradation. Although some scholars insist that a text can be interpreted on its own account without making reference to other texts, I believe that this poem can only be understood in the context of the African oral tradition. In fact, Wanjiku Mwaura herself confirmed to me in an interview that she composed the poem after a thorough research on the cultures of the people of Africa.

In my interview with her, she revealed to me that she composed the poem with the aim of showing the world that “the more we are different the more we remain the same.” She set out to compose a poem about the different cultures of Africa which are similar to each other and to other cultures across the world with the intention of acknowledging and appreciating the African culture that has been ignored for many years. With a map of Africa in hand she looked up the different regions in Africa from the west to east and the south, establishing the kind of people that live in those areas. Once this was done she used Google to research on the cultures of these people and used the information to compose the poem, to show that she was talking about real people that actually exist. This poem therefore is a celebration of

heterogeneity in Africa by emphasising the fact that although each of the African countries is made up of different people with different cultures we are all the same.

Namatsi Lukoye is also a spoken word poet in Kenya who has made use of the African oral tradition to compose her poems. Like Wanjiku Mwaura, she uses myths, legends and songs from the African oral tradition in her poems. In her spoken word poem entitled “Queen,” Lukoye celebrates the beauty of the African woman by making reference to legendary female figures of Africa like Queen Makeda, Queen Nzingah, Queen Tie, Queen Amina, and Queen Nefertiti.

The poem “Queen” begins with a Swahili song that is characterized by ululation, a common feature of songs from Africa. The song introduces the main theme of the poem which is the leadership qualities of the African woman. Throughout the poem a different song with a similar beat is used to introduce a new queen in the poem. The songs act as an interlude to the main narrative in the poem. Each of these songs works to emphasize the qualities of the African woman leader, chief among which is her patience.

In the first stanza of the poem, the persona feels like a queen whom she likens to Queen Makeda of Sheba. According to the legend of the Royal family of Ethiopia, Queen Makeda is the Biblical Queen of Sheba who conceived a son by King Solomon, hence the origin of Ethiopia’s Solomonic line. Lukoye alludes to the legend of Queen Makeda with the intention of bringing out the beauty of the African woman that captivated the wisest of kings ever. This is heightened when she points out that the queen is “comfortable in her skin, size and shape.”The mention of the physical attributes of the queen especially the skin, brings in the question of race.

There is a queen inside me yearning to shine,
Queen Makeda of Sheba deep inside,
Comfortable in her skin size and shape, (...)
It is her feet the strength they have,
That makes her stand as the world shakes.

The poet celebrates the beauty of the African woman by comparing her to the Queen of Sheba whose charm the great King Solomon could not resist. She points out the very features that are always a subject of ridicule by racists such as the skin colour and shape to subvert the notion that all that is black is inferior. I confirmed this fact from Namatsi Lukoye herself during an interview where she said, “Makeda was black and that’s the woman Solomon fell in love with.” It is through the mention of Queen Makeda that we realize that the persona is a black woman who believes that she has great potential as a woman and leader just like the Queen of Sheba. According to the legend of Queen Makeda which is also captured in the Kebar Negast (The Glory of Kings), Ethiopian Holy scriptures, the Bible and the Koran, her visit was extraordinary by ancient standards. According to 1st Kings 10:10, “And she gave the King a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.” This gave her favour in the eyes of the king who granted her all her desires. The persona in the poem “Queen” yearns to shine just like Queen Makeda who desired to learn about the wisdom of King Solomon. According to the legend, although Solomon had many wives and concubines he was captivated by the black African beauty from Ethiopia and hatched a scheme to plant a seed in Makeda so as to have a son by her. He succeeded in his plans and the queen gave birth to a son whom he named Menelik.

The second stanza of the poem makes allusion to Ana Nzinga Mbande, queen of Matamba, West Africa. The persona in the poem likens herself to Queen Nzinga whom she compares to a mountain and a flowing river:

Nzinga queen of Matamba,
It's her might oh she is a mountain,
A flowing river that souls confide in,
Jaber, it's the confidence in her stride.

This gives the impression that the African queen was a source of refuge to her people, and this is a trait that the contemporary African woman wishes to emulate to free herself from oppression. According to the legend of Queen Nzinga, she was a powerful leader who resisted the Portuguese colonization of her people by forming alliances with other foreign nations and setting them against each other in order to free her people. She is also praised for possessing both the masculine and feminine qualities which she used to her advantage. She is known to many as a symbol of inspiration. By comparing herself to this great female African leader, the persona seems to imply that a female leader will go to any extreme to protect her people from oppression just like queen Nzinga protected her empire from slave trade during her reign.

The third stanza makes reference to Tiye, the Nubian queen of Ancient Egypt. The persona desires to be like this Nubian queen who apart from her physical beauty she also knows how to take care of her household and to love.

Tiye, the Nubian queen
Black and beautiful and shape with pride
A master in the home and a slave for love
She is a winner of hearts (...)
I need to find because I want to be her.

The persona re-emphasizes the notion that black is beauty by alluding to queen Tiye who is presented in legends as black, beautiful and gorgeous. She is actually viewed as the standard of beauty in the ancient world and also as one of the most influential queens to rule Ancient Egypt. To understand why the persona refers to Tiye as a winner of hearts we must go back to the tale about Tiye in which we are told that she was greatly loved and honoured by her husband, Amen-Hetep III, one of the greatest Pharaohs the world has ever had. It is this deep affection for her that made the king to elevate her to the status of royalty even though her parents were not of a royal lineage. The persona voices every woman's wish to find a man who adores her like king Amen-Hetep III adored queen Tiye.

The poet presents Queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt in stanza four. The persona feels that she possesses qualities of a queen which are charm and worth. She alludes to Cleopatra to insinuate that she is the embodiment of these traits that she believes are within her. She says:

There is a queen inside me of charm and worth,
Cleopatra, beauty doesn't come perfectly designed,
From a golden reed she takes no less no compromise,
She knows her place and rules it right,
It's her uniqueness that makes them bow.

The persona views Cleopatra as one who does not settle for less and feels that this is the quality that commands respect from the men folk. This is true of Queen Cleopatra who according to the Egyptian oral tradition, took her time to respond to Marc Antony's summon in Tarsus, because she considered it arrogant. When she finally decided to go to him she went on a magnificent, gold encrusted royal barge which forced Antony to go to her rather than wait for her at the palace, as he had expected. The persona feels that this kind of character brings out a woman who is sure about what she wants in life and goes for it.

In stanza five the poet alludes to Queen Amina of Zaria whom she hails for being different from the rest. Other qualities that the persona finds admirable about the queen are her ability to be reasonable and loving as captured in the following lines:

Amina queen of Zaria
She is proud to be different,
Beyond doubt she is reason,
The whisper of love,
The slap of treason,

In order to appreciate this stanza more it is important for one to revisit the legend of Queen Amina of Zaria who defied all odds to become different from other women by learning military skills from the warriors after she became “Magajiya,” the heir apparent to her mother who was then the ruling queen of Zazzua. Upon the death of her mother, her brother took over the reign of Zazzua, while Amina became the leading warrior of Zazzua cavalry. Ten years later she was crowned the queen of Zazzua at the death of her brother, using her military skills to expand the territory of Zazzua. She also built a defensive wall around the military camps she had established. Some towns which still exist to date were formed from these military camps and they are referred to as “ganuwar Amina” meaning “Amina’s wall”, in her memory. She is also commonly remembered as “Amina, Yar Bakwa ta San rana,” which means “Amina, daughter of Nikatau, a woman as capable as a man.” This explains why the persona is fascinated by this legendary hero who is brave and therefore a good model for all those women who aspire to hold leadership positions. The mention of Amina in this poem thus seems to make the point that women empowerment in Africa is not an alien concept as perceived by many but rather the traditional African communities gave women a chance to engage in military practice. The legend of Queen Amina thus becomes an avenue for the poet to explore her feminist agenda. In my interview with Lukoye, she raised the

question why there was so much fuss in Africa about the place of women in society yet in the days of queen Amina, African women used to lead and win battles.

In stanza six the poet makes reference to Queen Nefertiti. She admires her poetry and encouragement as well as her resilience.

Nefertiti, the queen, it's her time,
Her poetry her words of encouragement
She keeps going, she keeps moving (...)
Such a spirit you cannot break her down.

In order to understand why the poet feels that Nefertiti is resilient and cannot be broken down, Allen Drury's historical novel gives an account of the strained relationship between the queen and her husband Amenhotep, after he impregnates their daughter in an attempt to get a male heir. Nefertiti withstands this act of shame but decides to move to her own palace when the husband enters into a gay relationship with his younger brother called Smenkhara in order to have him as his heir and lover because Nefertiti could not have sons. This account emphasizes the poet's central idea brought out in the final song in which she praises Nefertiti for her beauty, leadership and resilience. This happens to be the virtues that the persona aspires to have because they represent a true African woman like herself.

Therefore, the poem "Queen" by Namatsi Lukoye makes use of the African oral tradition and history to retell the story of emancipation of women by outlining famous African queens who did great things for their people and are still remembered to date. This challenges the notion that the traditional African culture was oppressive towards women and gave them neither the time nor the space to exercise their leadership skills. In the interview Lukoye asserted that African women underestimate their strength yet there are great female leaders of the past who did great things for their communities. The poet also makes use of the song to emphasize the

main message in her poem that African women leaders have admirable qualities that should be embraced by all contrary to the common belief that women cannot make better leaders. Thus this spoken word poem is an intertextual collage comprising of poetry, songs, and legends from different communities in Africa.

Brigeddia's spoken word poem entitled "Mamu Lizi" is a narrative of the life of a beautiful young girl called Mamu, who, despite her academic achievement falls in a trap by marrying a wealthy man called Musa who turns her life upside down. She becomes a victim of domestic violence, forcing her to quit the marriage and start a new life as a single mother. The persona in the poem is Mamu's childhood friend.

Through pastiche Brigeddia incorporates elements of the oral narrative into the spoken word poem. In our interview, he revealed his childhood passion for folktales which he used to perform in primary school, leading me to infer that his choice of this narrative technique in this poem is influenced by his love for oral narratives. In stanza one he makes use of the oral narrative feature of timelessness as shown below:

Alizaliwa mnamo tarehe tisa mwezi wa tisa,
Mwisho wa hiyo karne enzi za babu.

This can be translated as:

She was born on the ninth day of the ninth month,
The end of that century during the days of our grandfathers.

Timelessness is a feature of oral narratives in which the story refers to no particular time in history. The persona does not provide the exact year or century when Mamu Lizi was born. He foregrounds the date and the month of Mamu's birth day rather than the year or century to make the story applicable today as it was during the days of his grandfather. This is a

common characteristic of oral narratives that usually begin with the opening formula such as “Long time ago...” or “Once upon a time...” By setting the poem in a timeless space the persona draws the line between the natural world and the narrative world. However, in the last stanza of the poem, the persona releases the audience from the narrative world back to reality by posing direct questions through the use of apostrophe and bringing the audience back to the twenty first century.

Ila nina swali tu
Ni nani kati yenyu kwenye karne ya ishirini na moja
Ana haki ya kumpiga ama kumponda mumeo?
Kati ya wanaume wote,
Ni nani kati yenyu atachukua mke wa mtu, mtoto wa mtu (...)
Na kumfanya mitungi?
Ila sina jibu.

Translated as:

But I only have a question,
Who amongst you in the twenty first century,
Has the right to beat up or crush the husband?
Amongst all the men,
Who amongst you will take somebody's wife, somebody's child,
And turn them into pots?
But, I don't have an answer.

This brings the poem to a full circle by re-emphasizing the main message in the poem. He provokes the audience to see domestic violence as a vice that should be shunned by all. He draws the relevance of his narrative poem to the twenty first century by not only looking at violence against women but also violence against men which our society has been experiencing lately.

The poet also makes use of the structure of the plot of oral narratives to present the events in Mamu Lizi's life. The plot is the order of events in a story. The plot in this poem is linear with three main stages. A linear plot is simple in nature and has three main parts, namely, the exposition, the climax and the resolution stage. The exposition phase marks the beginning of the narrative where we are introduced to the life of the main character and the problems facing her. The persona, a close friend to Mamu, narrates Mamu's childhood life where she was raised in comfort by her parents. We are also given her educational background where the persona tells of how she was a very intelligent student who passed her examinations with flying colours and was recognised and given an award by the provincial board of education. Her problems begin when she joins the university and meets Musa, who later becomes her abusive husband. Mamu's marriage turns sour when Musa starts coming home late and absconding his responsibilities in the house. This develops into domestic violence when he starts beating up Mamu at the slightest provocation. The climax of a story is attained when the main character makes an attempt at solving the problem. In this story the climax is reached when Mamu decides to quit the marriage and seek for help in Mwanza.

The resolution in a story is usually arrived at when the problem is finally solved or a question answered. The resolution in this narrative is arrived at when Mamu meets a Good Samaritan in Mwanza who takes her to the hospital where she is treated and gets well. She looks for casual jobs to fend for her child and one day while selling groundnuts on the streets she meets the persona and runs to him. She hugs him with tears rolling down her cheeks. It is then that the persona realizes that Mamu's life has taken an ugly twist. Therefore, Although Brigeddia's poem "Mamu Lizi" does not make direct references to oral literature texts, the opening formula, and the structure of the poem imitate oral narratives to a great extent. Just

like the oral narrative, this poem has an opening formula, and the structure follows a linear plot, namely the exposition, the climax and the resolution.

Kennet B. in his spoken word poem entitled “Silent River” makes allusion to Professor Wangari Maathai for her contribution towards environmental conservation. While stories are yet to be created about this legendary figure, Kennet B.’s poem will carry her legacy from generation to generation. At the beginning of the poem, the persona brings to our attention that it is written in memory of Professor Wangari Maathai, before he embarks on exposing how human beings are busy destroying the environment by cutting down trees at their own peril. The government’s preoccupation with saving money at the expense of our natural resources is brought under scrutiny. He believes that if something is not done to conserve the environment then our country will pay dearly in the future as Wangari Maathai had once warned.

It is sad to see the strings that hold our ecosystem zikikatika,
Naona picha ya future mama mazingira alituachia ikikaribia
Enyi walimwengu arise and change the concept of our protest,
And let the placards read: “No more cutting trees,”
Instead of: “No more increment of salaries,”
Because after all there is no tomorrow we are saving for,
If we cannot volunteer in curing our environment today.
This is a debt that we will surely have to pay.

Kennet B. further paints a picture of what we should expect if something is not done to protect our land from environmental degradation by revealing to us how all the natural resources will continue decreasing until there will be nothing left in the ecosystem to ensure our survival. He parodies the government’s stance on salary increment by exposing the irony in denying employees more pay so as to save while there is no future to save for if we

continue destroying natural resources. He observes that such a situation will disturb the spirit of “mama trees” in this case, Wangari Maathai.

The polar bears are sinking
The ozone layer is thinning,
Thunderous lightening are striking,
And all the other natural water levels are shrinking.
Ni nini tutado ili spirits za mama trees zirest in peace?

The persona in the poem urges us to stop this destruction of the environment as it has devastating consequences. He believes that Wangari Maathai played an important role in saving our environment and that after her death no one seems to be keen on taking up the responsibility of protecting our ecosystem. He ends the poem by paying a special tribute to Wangari Maathai.

Ni lini tutawacha kuangamiza mazingira
Which is now bleeding, mourning, seeking to be healed,
After the departure of mama mazingira.
Mother Nature will always remember you by your name,
Honourable Wangari Maathai.

A listener who is aware of the great sacrifice that Wangari Maathai made to protect Uhuru Park and other public fields from land grabbers will appreciate this poem more because he/she will understand why the poem is written in her memory and why the poet alludes to this legendary character who also won the Nobel Peace Prize. This poem is also important to the coming generations who will never have a chance to meet Wangari Maathai but will get to know about her struggle to protect our environment. By making allusion to Wangari Maathai in this poem, Kennet B. is keen on ensuring that her legacy about environmental conservation will be part of the oral tradition for the coming generations.

2.2.2 Spoken Word and the Novel.

Sometimes spoken word makes use of allusion to develop and expand ideas in the poems. In this section I seek to establish the extent to which the use of intertextuality between spoken word and the novel enriches the meaning of the poems by focusing on Mufasa's "Son of a Woman", Raya Wambui's "I Was Not Made to Amuse" and Elsaphan Njora's "Africa." At this point I wish to make it clear that allusion in this section is viewed from the point of view of the audience, because they play a major role in the interpretation of a text. Besides, in the various interviews I held with the poets most of them revealed to me that they were not consciously influenced by the novels alluded to in their poems.

The title of Mufasa's spoken word poem "Son of a Woman", echoes Charles Mangua's novel *Son of a Woman*. However, in an interview with him, he clarified to me that he has never read Charles Mangua's novel and in fact, initially when he was composing the poem he had not intended to have "Son of a Woman" as his title, but had wanted it be "God Made Man". In this poem the persona expresses his dissatisfaction with his father for deserting him and his mother when he was a little boy. He presents pieces of his brief life with his father and we are left with no doubt that he was an irresponsible man who never played any active role in his son's life. This is further heightened by the persona in the following lines:

But when I finally grew up,
I preferred the mum that slapped me
When I had soil on my hands,
Than the dad that said, "Let him be."

These words leave no doubt that the persona never really felt his father's presence, but has fond memories of his mother, who although strict, was always available for him. He declares his status as the son of a black woman whom he is very proud of because he believes she is

strong to have brought him up single-handedly. He mentions the sacrifices that his mother made for him to have a better life, as shown below:

I cannot forget I am a son of a woman,
Who fought for education,
Who starved so I could be educated.

This acts as a counter narrative to Mangua's *Son of a Woman* where the narrator who also refers to himself as the son of a woman just like the persona in the poem, shows no regard for his late mother by branding her a prostitute for having no idea who his father was. He says, "I am the son of woman... Never had a dad in my blinking life. My whoring ma could never figure out who my pop was...It was one of the scores of men who took her for a bed-ride but she wasn't bothered to remember who among them I resembled" (p.7). Thus Mufasa's poem echoes Mangua's idea of single motherhood but rather than blame it on women he focuses on men's contributions to such situations.

Mufasa uses this poem as a space to pass across his feminist agenda. He focuses on the plight of women, especially single mothers. This part of the poem reflects upon the poet's real life as revealed to me during the interview where he confirmed that he was brought up by a single mother. He makes allusion to Chris Mukasa's concept of Fatuma's voice which I have already explained in chapter one where the persona claims that he is the son of the voice of a woman which is the voice of Fatuma, a woman whose husband infected her with the HIV/AIDS virus due to his promiscuity.

And I am a son of a woman, a voice of Fatuma,
Single mother living positively with HIV,
That she did not seek to have when she chose to love a man,
Who did his manly duties, alright.
He went out and brought home food and HIV

So she made him food to eat while he made her take
ARV pills after those meals.

He also exposes men who take advantage of women by siring children with them then abandoning them for much younger girls. According to him the absence of overt domestic violence does not equal a problem-free life in marriage. He looks at how men make women suffer emotionally by neglecting them. This is captured in the following lines:

This is for the woman whose husband has never hit her,
But don't tell her she doesn't know violence,
Because her husband actually pushed her aside,
By sleeping around with younger women,
When her body was disfigured,
By giving birth to the four kids they have.

He further talks about the issue of wife inheritance in the Luo community in Nyanza and how that affects women from this community.

This is for that woman in Ahero with muscles on her eyes,
Because she has managed to push back tears,
So that children cannot see her pain,
Because it hurt when her husband died,
It hurt when she was forced to be inherited,
By her late husband's brother.

He concludes his poem by stating that he is also a son of a man who only took notice of him when he was in form three. The last two lines of the poem bring the persona's point of view to a full circle when he acknowledges that although "God made man first," He made the "woman to last." This is contrary to what the narrator in Mangua's novel portrays about women. While he paints them as amorous and weak, Mufasa presents women as victims of

circumstances who come out of all situations stronger. Therefore, even though Mufasa composed the poem without Charles Mangua's novel in mind, a reader who has had an exposure to the novel will appreciate the manner in which the poem gives the subject of single motherhood a fresh look. Unlike the novel, Mufasa's poem celebrates women for their resilience through their life struggles.

Raya Wambui, in her spoken word poem entitled "I Was Not Made to Amuse", alludes to Maya Angelou's work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The persona believes that one day after she has made it as a great poet, the journalists will book her for interviews to discuss how she became successful rather than her challenging journey to stardom. She wishes for that day to come so that she can answer the most vital questions about the struggles of an upcoming poet that the journalists always pretend to have forgotten to ask during interviews.

They will paint my face to reinforce the mask,
"When did you start writing?"
Is approved by the editor.
"Why didn't you stop?" Is not.
So I will answer now, for the questions,
They will pretend they forgot.
I couldn't stop writing when daddy was impressed.
I couldn't stop writing when mama taught me that;
Practice makes perfect and didn't teach me
How to settle for less.
I couldn't stop when my geekyness meant,
That the cool kids wouldn't miss a chance
To laugh at my best.

The persona points out those things that would motivate her to continue writing. The fact that her father was oppressed and her mother always encouraged her to be the best would be the reasons she would give the journalists for her never giving up on writing. Although her allusion to Maya Angelou's, *I know Why the Caged Bird sings*, comes much later in the poem, when it does come, a listener who has some background information of the life of Maya Angelou through her autobiographical novel will appreciate more the last three lines in the poem as quoted above. The persona looks at some of the things that were a set back to her in her career as a poet. One of the things that would have worked against her was the fact that she was a geek, just like Maya Angelou as a young poet living in Stamps with her grandmother, Annie Henderson. In the novel, Maya Angelou reveals that as a child she constantly heard others saying that she was ugly since she had kinky hair, dark skin and she had extra weight.

In the poem the persona also tells of how the “cool kids” would always look for the opportunity to make fun of her even when she thought she had done her best. This is similar to Maya Angelou's account in the novel, where in the prologue she narrates how one day in church, unable to finish reciting a poem in front of the congregation on Easter Sunday, she runs out humiliated, peeing, crying and laughing all at the same time. The other children make fun of her. The situation is made worse when one of them trips her down. It is only her brother Bailey who comes to her rescue. Thus, appreciation of the huddles that Maya Angelou went through in life before she became successful can contribute towards understanding why the persona in Raya Wambui's poem, “I was Not Made to Amuse” is cynical about the journalists who only come in when one has made their own success and even then, they do not seem to be bothered with what the poet had to go through to become a

star. The poet further exposes some of the most devastating incidents that happen in the lives of some poets that could just break them forever, but they use their poems to move on.

I couldn't stop when I grew up in an age
Where writing a love letter means you're desperate.
So I have a chest of poems to crushes
Who crushed me
When all I had was awkward silence, shaky legs.

The mention of a love letter and awkward silence is reminiscent of Maya Angelou's novel, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, where the narrator relates how she was furious when in her seventh grade at school, Tommy Valdon, an eighth grader wrote her a note asking her to be his valentine. When her friend Louise explains to her that valentine means love, she says loudly, "Not ever again." This is because of the trauma she had gone through trying to look for affection from her mother's live-in boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, who ended up abusing her sexually.

The lines that follow open up the poem to varied interpretations by directly making allusion to Maya Angelou's work. The persona says:

I couldn't stop when I knew
I couldn't cry in public,
For a statutory date rape,
That would never shame the culprit.
I couldn't stop when Maya told me
That the caged bird sings,
When I discovered that I too,
I am a phenomenal woman.

By making open allusion to Maya Angelou's text, *I Know Why the Caged Bird sings*, and her poem "Phenomenal Woman" the poet invites the reader to interpret the poem from different perspectives. The mention of the phrase, "statutory date rape" takes one back to an incident in the novel where the narrator reveals how she was sexually molested and later raped by her mother's live-in boyfriend, Mr. Freeman after having thought that he was out to show her the affection that she so much needed from a father figure. This reference brings out the pain and humiliation that some poets go through before they achieve their success. In an interview with Raya Wambui she revealed to me that she composed the poem at a time when she was struggling to get recognition as a poet and everything seemed not to be working out for her. That's why she portrays successful poets as normal human beings who have their own struggles in life rather than the larger than life figures always painted by the media. However this poem can also apply to anyone facing challenges in life that they wish to overcome. The persona further reveals that she decided to make a list of the things that would have made her stop writing poems, but which instead encouraged her to keep going.

I was too young,
I didn't have the right dress,
And the wrong colour to be identified with,
I can't try to outshine whoever is coming next,
They don't understand me,
And if I speak my mind,
I might as well be getting undressed.

This stanza seems to allude to Maya Angelou's novel, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, where the narrator tells of how on that Easter Sunday when she was to present the poem before the congregation her grandmother had to mend a dress for her which she discovered was a second hand dress from some white woman. This made her feel awkward as she entered the church. Besides as a black girl living in Stamps back then her race was always the

subject for ridicule by the white children. In the poem the persona goes through the same challenges that the narrator in Maya Angelou's novel experiences. This includes abject poverty, racism and hopelessness. The lines from the poem that the narrator in Angelou's poem was unable to finish were; "What are you looking at me for? I didn't come to stay..." In this poem these words can be interpreted to mean that there is no permanent position in life since the persona hopes that one day she will be a famous poet that will attract journalists and it is then that she will let it be known to them of the struggles that poets have to go through in order to realize their dreams.

In an interview with Wambui, she revealed that the poem was written in order to express her frustrations as an upcoming poet facing many challenges in life. She also told me that one of her role models as far as poetry is concerned is Maya Angelou, and mentioned her poetry book entitled *I Know Why the Caged Bird sings* as having shaped her perception of the world. She particularly mentioned how the poem "Phenomenal Woman" transformed how she viewed herself as a girl because for the first time she felt good about being a woman. This therefore indicates how Angelou's works in general influenced the composition of this poem. Elsaphan Njora's spoken word poem entitled "Africa", brings to mind Wallace Thurman's novel, *The Blacker the Berry*... However, just like Mufasa, Njora was not influenced by this novel when writing the poem. In fact, in our interview he revealed that he had never read the novel and only used the phrase because it was commonly used during his days in school. He also said that he heard the phrase from a Kenyan musical group called the Kleptomaniacs.

In the first stanza of the poem the persona exposes the stereotype that has been placed on the African continent for a long time by branding it as a "dark continent." This is similar to what Emma Lou Brown goes through in the novel, *The Blacker the Berry*... where Baxton makes

fun of Alva for dancing with Emma Lou whom he describes as “that coal scuttle blonde.” (p. 110) Just like the African continent, Emma Lou’s black complexion is the source of sorrow, humiliation and pain to her among the Mulatto members of her family, her lighter hued Negro friends, and her white associates. Alva sees no fault in Emma Lou, apart from the fact that she is “a little dark.” Although he enjoys her company he is always reluctant to invite her to meet his friends because they will ridicule him for his preference for “dark meat” and send her away without any regard for her feelings. This is the same marginalization that Africa as a continent goes through.

However, rather than concentrate on the negative perception of blacks by whites, Elsaphan Njora looks at the positive side of Africa. In the next stanza the persona subverts the notion that Africa is a dark continent by pointing out some of the achievements made by Africans such as winning an Oscar award.

Now we birth leaders to the free world,
Oscar award winners on the first try,
Africa, the new frontier,
Ladies and gentlemen,
I present to you the dark continent
After all the darker the berry,
The sweeter the juice,
With flavours the world is yet to abuse,
As present to you the sweeter shade,
This dark continent.

The persona ridicules the manner in which the racists always address Africa as a dark continent to imply that there is nothing good in it. He uses the very same words to bring out the other side of Africa that is always concealed to the rest of the world. He celebrates

Africans by saying “The darker the berry/the sweeter the juice” which echoes Braxton’s words from Thurman’s novel *The Blacker the Berry...* where he says that Emma Lou is “just as good as the rest, and you know what they say, ‘The Blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice.’” Similarly, the poet compares Africans to a darker berry which, due to its darkness is sweeter and purer, hence challenging the notion that everything that is black is bad. He further asserts that the presence of darkness does not necessarily mean the absence of light and draws a comparison between Africans and a dark night which makes the sky and the stars clearer. This brings out the beauty of Africans by referring to them as constellations. He observes that although Africans have been through difficult times, they will keep fighting until they gain the respect they deserve. This was confirmed in an interview with the poet where he said that he composed the poem in order to encourage Africans to take pride in their race regardless of how others want to view them.

In the poem, the persona reveals that the world is aware of the potential that Africans have but has always suppressed it by portraying them in a negative light. He urges Africans not to be cowed by that but instead to realize that they are royalty.

Let me tell you something,
The world is not ready
For what Africa has to offer,
That is why they will try
To push us to the curve,
Giving us names and labels,
But we don’t mind
After all royalty can never
Be referred to as commoners.

The poem ends in a clarion call where the persona urges Africans to take their rightful position in the world and subdue it. He encourages them to ignore all negativities from the rest of the world that might derail them from achieving their success. Therefore, while Njora did not intend to make allusion to Thurman's novel when composing the poem, a listener who has ever read Thurman's novel will have an extended meaning of the poem.

2.2.3 Spoken Word in Kenya and other Forms of Oral Poetry

There is a very close relationship between spoken word in Kenya and other forms of oral poetry from other parts of the world like dub, hip-hop and jazz. All these poems have their roots in the African oral tradition just like spoken word in Kenya. According to Feinstein, jazz poetry has its roots in the African oral tradition of story-telling and makes use of rhythm, syncopation and call and response (Feinstein, 1992). A similar view is expressed by Christian Habekost in relation to dub poetry who holds that dub poetry makes use of the African oral traditions which were carried by the slaves through the middle passage and "recreated and reinterpreted under European dominance." He also observes that dub poetry makes use of "call and response patterns, folk tales, duppy or ghost stories or the famous trickster narratives...children games...nursery rhymes...riddles...proverbs." (Habekost 1993, 72).

The various ways in which spoken word in Kenya makes use of the African oral tradition especially the oral narratives both in terms of form and content has been dealt with in the first section of this chapter. In this section I will focus on the features of spoken word that are similar to dub, hip-hop and jazz poetry. They include code switching, Rastafarianism and challenging of meta-narratives. Other features like call and response structures, use of musical accompaniments and language games can only be realized through performance and will therefore be discussed in chapter three.

The use of code switching and code mixing is one characteristic that spoken word poetry in Kenya shares with the other forms of oral poetry. For instance, the use of *Sheng* in spoken word is similar to the use of creole also known as “Patwa” or “Patois” in dub poetry and the use of the language of the nation in hip-hop. Both dialects undermine the structures of Standard English by creating a hybrid language. According to Afua Cooper, Jamaican Creole is the natural language of dub poetry. This view is made evident by Linton Kwesi Jonson, a renowned dub poet who in the introduction to his first collection of poems entitled *Dread, Beat and Blood*, explains the reason why he uses Jamaican Creole in his poems. He attributes it to his exposure to a colonial government and emigrating to the mother country which brings out the tension in the languages. This is brought out in his poem “It Dread Inna Innglan” in which the persona voices a peaceful protest against a Jamaican worker who is wrongfully convicted of armed robbery. The griot calls upon all members of the black community to rally against Margaret Thatcher’s racist politics. The poem is a combination of Jamaican Creole and Standard English as seen in the following lines:

Dem frame-up George Lindo
Up in Bradford town
But de Bradford blacks
Dem a rally round...
Maggi Tatcha on di go wid a racist
Show.

In his article entitled “Language, Creativity and Radio” Benson Oduor Ojwang defines *Sheng* as “a mixture of Kiswahili which is the national language and English which is the official language of bureaucracy and vocabulary items from several indigenous Kenyan languages.” He asserts that *Sheng* is a landmark of urbanization used by the Kenyan youth in identity formation. Such individuals consider themselves as “Nairobians” or just Kenyans keeping their ethnic identities concealed. Some spoken word poets in Kenya have adopted the use of

Sheng in their poems to forge a new identity that distances them from their ethnic backgrounds in order to have their work appreciated by all Kenyans irrespective of their socio-cultural background. Decker (1993) looks at how hip-hop empowered and established imagined communities between the artists and their audiences. Some spoken word poets in Kenya have gone as far as adopting stage names like Teardrops, Mufasa, Kennet B., Brigeddia and Dorphan which do not align them to specific ethnic groups in order to forge a new identity that endears them to a specific type of audience that embraces heterogeneity.

Teardrops is known for his use of *Sheng* in most of his poems. In fact, he almost always ends his poems by saying that *Sheng* is his mother-tongue and sometimes apologises to his audience if he has to perform his poems that are written in Standard English. During one of his performances at the Fete de la Musique concert at Alliance Francaise, in Nairobi on 18th June 2016, he performed his poem entitled “Daughter When You are Grown” where he humorously told the audience that he also knows some English words like flower which he translated as “maua”, and is therefore justified to present his poem in Standard English. This caused uproar in the audience that has always associated the poet with *Sheng*.

In one of his poems entitled “Morphine” Teardrops uses *Sheng* to attack those who sexually violate innocent girls leaving them with permanent scars that can never be erased.

If wanyama hawajui what the abuse
Of the young ones entails,
It shows how binadamu wako worse
Than animals.
Kenye wanalack ni long ears and tails.

In this poem Teardrops uses a harsh tone to address all those who defile young girls. He reveals to us the pain and anguish victims of rape go through. He draws the comparison between men and animals and observes that animals are even better since they do not defile their young ones like humans do. He creates a character called Maria and makes her a victim of sexual violence. He presents the psychological trauma that Maria is going through after having been defiled and impregnated by a stranger. She can never erase the incident in her mind and whenever she walks she feels that the whole world has already seen her naked. However Teardrops has hope for this generation that seems lost. He encourages women to speak out against such violence since that is the only way they can be liberated in this cruel world.

Speak baby speak coz ukinguruma
Jungle mzima inago silent,
Na hata simba inaingiza mkia kati kati ya miguu.
Speak baby speak coz wewe ndio mouth piece ya millions.
Millions of women wenye wanakufa ndani kwa ndani ya pain.

Teardrops believes that it is only the power of the word that can save women from this age long humiliation and degradation by some men. He believes that if women learn to voice out their resistance against rape then even the bravest of men will be frightened. He describes the kind of power that exists in a woman's voice by stating that it can even scare a lion. He believes that the voice of one afflicted woman can save many others who are hurting deep inside from crimes committed against them. By using *Sheng* in this poem, Teardrops is able to reach out to those young girls in urban centres from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are most vulnerable to sexual violence, in order to sensitize them and empower them to rise up and fight against such oppression.

Dorphan too, in his spoken word poem entitled “Mum Aliishia” makes use of both *Sheng* and Kiswahili. The audience is taken through an emotional journey of a child who has been brought up without the love of a mother because all the time he inquires about her the response is “mum aliishia”, meaning that his mum left. In a sad tone the persona who is a small child narrates how his birthday always makes him miss the love of a mother longing to have her sing to him a birthday song just like the other children.

Niliuliza nikaambiwa mum aliishia,
Niliikuwa sad sikuimbiwa juu mum aliishia,
Sitaki kujudge juu sijui reason mum aliishia,
Ni birthday yangu leo,
Yet another reason ya kumiss mum this year.

The repetition of this stanza at the beginning and at the end of the poem helps us to reflect on the persona’s anguish at having to grow up without a mother. The use of *Sheng* paints a clear picture in our mind that the persona is a child brought up in one of the major cities of Kenya where this language variety is widely used especially by the youth. However during a presentation in Dr. Miriam Musonye’s oral literature class on 16th July 2016 at the University of Nairobi, Dorphan revealed that he comes from Timau, a small town in Meru, found in the Eastern province of Kenya, but uses *Sheng* because even as a young boy he always felt that he belongs everywhere and not just in his home town, hence his adoption of *Sheng* which does not tie one to a particular region. Later, in an interview with him he told me that he uses both *Sheng* and Standard English in his poetry to reach varied audiences from different socio-economic status. In the stanzas that follow the persona acquires a narrative voice where he reveals how he came to be raised by his father’s family after his mother had conceived him out of wedlock. This poem resonates a great deal with the poet’s personal life.

Some spoken word artists in Kenya subscribe to Rastafarianism which is a religious and social movement associated with Reggae music as well as dub poetry. This movement which evolved in the 1930s in Jamaica was aimed at encouraging resistance to oppressive societal structures. Habekost (1986) looks at how the Rastafari faith deeply affects dub poetry by asserting that the genre is “a social, revolutionary art form where a radical voice shouts of the struggle of the oppressed all around the world” (p.17). The dub poets achieve this in their poems through symbolism which brings out the Rastafari belief that the Biblical city of Babylon represents the main oppressor of the people of God, whereas Zion is the promised land they will inhabit after their release from oppression. Murell (1998) asserts that the Rastafarians believe that the spirit of Babylon survives as an oppressive force in modern day political and economic systems from the west. Thus in dub poetry the word Babylon is symbolic of the oppressive western culture while Zion represents the place of redemption, where the Rastafarians will go to someday. Mutabaruka, a popular dub poet from Jamaica, mentions the Bible as a possible tool to fight against the oppressive Babylonian regime while at the same time quoting Malcolm X, in his dub poem entitled “Any Which Way...Freedom”. This is captured in the following lines:

By de ballot or de bullet,
By de bible or de gun
Any which way freedom mus com

Imani Woomera (2006), in her spoken word poem entitled “Politics” published in her poetry anthology *Morning Rain*, echoes the use of symbolism characteristic of dub poetry when she mentions the words “Babylon system” in stanza five as captured below:

Cuz see they got this system
This rooted in Babylon system
They control us and we assist them in destroying

Cuz we work

We pay.

She exposes ways in which the western world controls the developing nations through religion and other forms of “financial aid” that are only meant to keep them in bondage. She also faults these nations for being responsible of their oppressed position in society by accepting everything the west washes down their throat. Just like the dub poets Woomera calls upon all the affected to stand up and resist such oppression. The poem ends with the words “Let’s resist this” in order to emphasize on the need to liberate themselves from the oppressive Babylonian system, in this case the patronising western world.

Challenging of meta-narratives is another feature of spoken word that is similar to dub, hip-hop and jazz poetry. Stapleton (1998) looks at how hip-hop makes use of hidden messages to challenge dominant discourses and give a social critique. Decker (1993), too, observes that early hip-hop artists used the language of the nation to challenge dominant discourses in order to “rearticulate a history of racial oppression and struggle that can energize the movements towards black empowerment and independence.” Similarly, spoken word in Kenya offers poets the space in which to challenge the meta-narratives in our society today by making social commentaries that are aimed at correcting the social ills in our midst.

Dan Oballa, in his spoken word poem entitled “Do not Say Goodbye to the Mau Mau”, asserts that there is nothing to celebrate about Kenya’s independence because even after fifty years we are still in bondage. He exposes how the country is still dependent on the west for even the basic of resources like maize, yet claim to be independent, despite the fact that we are unable to complain about the rising taxes. Projects that could have been done locally are

given to foreign investors hence impoverishing the country which has to charge high taxes in order to sustain the debt.

It's fifty years after the imperial flag fell,
Yet we still struggle with matters of identity,
Who are we?
And even after the American USAID,
Has filled our bellies with yellow maize,
Still we are oppressed with matters of hunger,
And even after the Chinese have upgraded
Our highways to super highways,
And the Russians have rushed in
And upgraded our local *muratina* brew,
To where you view Vodka brew,
Still we can't get drunk to retain our sobriety,
And complain about the rising VAT.

The persona in the poem further reveals why the country is still grappling with poverty after all these years of independence. He blames our leaders for engaging in corrupt deals that have led to massive loss of property as they amass wealth to themselves in a bid to remain in power. In an interview with Dan Oballa he revealed to me that he was inspired to compose the poem because he felt that Kenyans have waited for far too long to realise the benefits of their struggle for independence due to failed leadership. He therefore uses the poem as a space to attack the rot in our society and sound a warning to the leaders that if they do not effect positive changes the “the Mau Mau shall return.”

Namatsi Lukoye also tackles the issue of poor leadership in her spoken word poem entitled “Politricks” where she challenges the kind of divisive politics that our leaders engage in, to mislead the masses. The mention of the word “politricks” reminds me of a similar word

coined by the Rastafarians, but during an interview Lukoye clarified that her usage of the word was not influenced by the Rastafari tradition. Nevertheless, a listener who is conversant with this ideology will have an extended interpretation of the poem which is a revolt against divisive politics. The poet chooses to call it politricks to show her contempt towards such dirty tricks played by our leaders. According to Murell (1998), the Rastafarians get involved in what is commonly referred to as “grounding” and “reasoning” where they coin words to assist in their “reasoning” process as they come up with terms such as “polytricks” instead of politics to express their dislike towards the institution of politics. With this knowledge in mind the following lines in the poem can help interpret the poem in a new light:

The horsemen are on the door knocking
Tell me did you see their horses
Or greed has blinded you from seeing them plant,
Seeds of hate and hunger.
Nani kama sisi tunalowa kwa yote
Holy tricks ikawa politricks
But hawa ticks wametunyonya sana damu
Nasi bado tutamuinua tu yule wetu
Ili pia nasi tule
Basi sisi wote kupe.

The persona castigates all those who normally vote for leaders from their ethnic groups in order to benefit directly from their leadership. She further attacks the leaders who are out to embezzle public funds through corrupt deals. She reveals that the leaders only use the poor to remain in power by clothing them in their ethnic cocoons yet the main problem is the gap between the rich and the poor.

El Poet whose real name is Akil Ahmed in his spoken word poem entitled “Paranoid” challenges the notion that Islam is a misogynistic religion. He expresses his bitterness towards those who are always pointing fingers at Muslims branding them terrorists, forcing them to live in constant fear of being arrested for a crime they have not committed. Theirs is a case of “guilty until proven innocent.” The situation is made worse when it is the security agencies, charged with the responsibility of protecting all citizens that are in the forefront in pointing an accusing finger towards innocent Muslims. This is brought out in the following lines:

Policemen, mostly the ones naughty,
Stop me and force me
To produce my identification roughly...
“Kijana Wapi Kitambulisho?
Na unafugia nani ndefu
Na hujafika miaka ya kumea mafuzi?
Unafanya kazi arshapapu?
We Waria ya wapi?

In the poem the persona further points out how the recent terror attacks in the country have suddenly turned every Somali into a terrorist in the eyes of many citizens including their own friends who are now treating them suspiciously. He however cautions about the need to be careful as it could just be a ploy by the western nations to plant seeds of hatred among African nations and lead them into destroying one another. He believes that it is only the power of the spoken word that will save the Muslims from this stereotype placed upon them. However the persona is not blind to the fact that there are cruel militia men who are shedding innocent blood in the name of Islam. He acknowledges that indeed many people have lost their lives in the hands of the terrorists but that should be left to God to avenge. To him

spoken word is the weapon we can use to discourage young people who can easily be lured into terrorism. He says:

And lastly, let us use spoken word,
To bridge the gap between the informed
And the ignorant who are swayed everyday
Into terrorist camps.
Peace, love, unity
And more peace, love and unity.

This message resonates with Raya Wambui's poem entitled "Define and Conquer" where the persona says that allowing religious divisions will give terrorists an upper hand. In an interview with Raya Wambui she told me that she composed the poem at a time when the country was hostile towards Muslims after the West Gate Attack in which many lives were lost after terrorists invaded the West Gate Mall in Nairobi.

Wanjiku Mwaura's poem, "I Died", from her poetry Anthology entitled, *The Flow of My Soul*, brings out the negative effects of ethnicity, similar to El-Poet's and Raya Wambui's poems on discrimination along religious lines. Through vivid description, the poem exposes how innocent lives were lost during the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya as captured in the lines below:

Clubs on my head
9 by 9 stone on my arm
Burning log pokes my back
I cry out

Am sorry am not...
Stones plummet my back
Please forgive me

Insults jeer in my head

They really hate me

In an interview with Mwaura she revealed that she composed the poem to sensitize the society that some of the stereotypical jokes people make about different ethnic groups can actually lead to very devastating consequences if they are not checked, just like what was experienced during the post-election violence. In the poem there is a man from Western Kenya who cannot pronounce his /s/ properly and finds himself in great danger during the post-election violence when his assailants are hunting down victims from his tribe. His wife too is not spared because although she comes from the “right tribe”, she is killed for marrying in the “wrong tribe”.

Please forgive me

That's my wife begging

I hear her die

I want to save her

So we can die together

The way I say my 's'

Is my crime

Am sorry

She got married to man who

Can't say properly

She suffers now for that

She's a traitor

He is not one of us

He is chaff

Why did you choose him

In a sad tone, the persona narrates how his very own “loving” neighbour turned against him and participated in his killing and that of his wife, to show how ethnicity can turn otherwise good people into monsters. Mwaura wrote this poem in the aftermath of the post-election violence.

Ngwatilo Mawiyoo’s poem entitled “Flag and Future” echoes Wanjiku Mwaura’s “I Died” by presenting the theme of violence. In the poem the persona questions the significance of the Kenyan national flag if peace cannot be maintained within our borders. She mentions the colours of the flag and what each one of them represents and wonders why there is political instability when the flag is supposed to be a symbol of peace, love and unity.

They declared black the colour of my people,
The Luo and the Taita and every shade within,
Including them who chose here over past homes.
Green signified the land and its fertility,
Of Marsabit and Murang’a and Malindi,
Every altitude and region between.

Red was the blood spilled till ’63 in wars
Our own and not, every encounter known
And shrouded in silence a declaration
Of our right to direct our destiny.

White
Was the way they hoped we would live
For posterity: in peace, love and unity.

In the subsequent stanzas of the poem, the persona exposes how the citizens have forgotten the symbolic meaning of our national flag and resorted to killing each other. The magnitude of the killings is brought out by the poet’s choice of words such as “Spews” and “jagged rift

cut a century deep”. This emphasis is also heightened through the repetition of the phrase “blood spews” in line 1 and 6 of the stanza below:

But in the city blood spews as rocks fly
To kill kinship and police in turn
Set young limbs in their sights
Every temple hot and righteous
Vengeful fists on freedom fields
And blood spews in the rift Valley
An artery bearing a jagged rift cut
A century deep, so we fight and die today,
To honour the memory though
There are healing salts at Magadi.

The word “rocks” in this poem is used metaphorically to refer to any weapon than can be used to cause death. The use of alliteration further puts emphasis on the theme of violence in the lines “To kill kinship and police in turn” and “vengeful fists on freedom fields”. All these poetic devices are used to ridicule those who violate the significance of our national flag, which contains the white colour as a symbol of “peace, love and unity.”

It is important to note that while spoken word seems to have similar characteristics with other forms of oral poetry it does not share in all the ideologies. This is brought out clearly by Teardrops in one of his poems, where he clarifies that spoken word should not be confused with poetry that subscribes to the Rastafari tradition. Through parody he ridicules the glorification of marijuana which is usually smoked during the process of “grounation” where the Rastas come together to smoke and “reason” about their religion and current affairs. During such sessions they use the personal pronoun I, which appears in the name of his

imperial Majesty Haile Selassie. They believe that each Rasta is a part of God, called I, hence substituting the pronoun “me” for “I and I”. In one of his poems Teardrops says:

Ju najua words ninabonga hazikolinked
Na rules zenye ziliandikwa na Haile Selaise,
Inspiration zilitoka kwa mkono ya kushoto
Yenye imelala kwa ash tray or the burning bush

The persona distances himself from those who believe in the ideology of Haile Selaise. He then uses the poem to talk about contemporary issues affecting our society today like unemployment, immorality, drug and substance abuse, and poverty.

2.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, spoken word poetry in Kenya is a genre that embraces heterogeneity by bringing together different genres and cultures from around the world as demonstrated in this chapter. The poems derive their meaning and aesthetic appeal by incorporating other art forms like oral literature, prose and other forms of oral poetry. However this is not to say that spoken word poetry is merely an imitation of other genres as it has its own unique features that blend in with other forms of literature. While on the page spoken word might seem like other types of oral poetry, it is the performance that distinguishes it from the other poetic forms as will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: PERFORMANCE OF SPOKEN WORD POETRY IN KENYA

3.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on how performance of spoken word influences the interpretation of the text. Each performance in this context is regarded as a text that is distinct from any other, including even a repeated performance of the same poem by the same artist. In chapter two it was indicated that it is only through performance that spoken word can be distinguished from other poetic forms like Hip-hop, Jazz and dub poetry, thus, it is important to look at the various paralinguistic features and performance techniques that the spoken word poets use to capture and hold the attention of the audience.

Ruth Finnegan (1977) asserts that the idea of oral poetry without a performance is non-existent and that it is important to look at the skill and personality of the performer, the nature and the reaction of the audience, the context as they help bring out the literariness of a text and contribute to the creation of meaning (p.28). Since the interpretation of a performance lies in the hands of the audience, it is the duty of the performer to ensure that his intended meaning is clearly captured.

Kenneth Burke (1965) looks at the diversity of perspectives during the interpretations of a text by placing the audience and the text at the centre. While Burke leaves out the actor and the playwright in the interpretation of the text, this research considers all the key players including the spoken word poet, the text, and the audience. An examination of the various elements of performance employed by the poets to ensure that their intended meaning reaches the audience is therefore the focus of this chapter.

Wolfgang Iser (1978) states that it is the reader who determines the meaning of a text and not the writer, which allows for multiple interpretations of a work of art. Erving Goffman (1959) draws the distinction between what is “given” and what is “given off” to explain the various ways in which an action can be interpreted by the viewer. He describes the “given” as the intersection between the actor’s intention and the viewer’s interpretation, while the “given off” as a situation where the viewer interprets the action in a totally different way from the actor’s intention (p.6). This chapter examines how the spoken word poets manage to use various performance techniques to ensure that their intended meaning, that is, the “given” is what reaches the audience. Goffman looks at the various ways in which actors control the interpretations of the audience in what he calls “Impression Management.”

Ruth Finnegan (1977) asserts that a poem can be sung, chanted (recited) or spoken, but sometimes it can involve a combination of all these modes. Most spoken word poets use the spoken mode of delivery but it is not uncommon for some to infuse the spoken with the sung or chanted modes hence creating a collage of genres within a single text.

Wallenstein (1991) asserts that performance is the “physical text” which involves the use of gestures, bodily movements, words, voice, intonation and other non-verbal cues. It is a combination of all these elements which leads to the interpretation of the text by the audience. The same view is held by Walker and Chaplin (1997) who state that it is performance which provides added meaning and different interpretation of a text. In this section I will begin by looking at how the spoken word poets make use of paralinguistic features like use of gestures, facial expression, body movement and tonal variation. I will also look at other elements of performance like the use of musical accompaniment and dramatization to enhance the interpretation of the message in their poems. In the next section

I will focus on how the poets involve the audience, the space and the context to enhance meaning in their poems as well as add to the aesthetic appeal.

3.2 Articulation

Raya Wambui delivers her poems mostly in the spoken mode. This is evident in her spoken word poem entitled “You Work for Me” where she manipulates her voice to articulate her dissatisfaction with the leaders for neglecting their duties as servants of the people and instead putting their own interests first, by engaging themselves in corrupt deals. In an interview with her she told me that she composed the poem to remind the people that it is the duty of the politicians to work for them since that is the reason they elected them. The use of apostrophe in the poem enables her to lodge a direct attack at the leaders as though they were in the audience. Apostrophe is a feature of oral poetry that enables the poet to directly address his/her target audience for immediacy of expression. With a scornful tone she says:

You work for me.
And I'm tired of seeing my countrymen bleeding
For the sake of your fees.
See, you work for me,
But I cannot believe in your incompetent grinning,
At my nation's needs.
You work for me
Inadequately.

The poet places a poignant pause between the last two lines in the above stanza in order to foreground the word “inadequately” expressing her disdain for the very leaders that were elected to serve the people and yet have done very little for the ordinary citizen. The words “You work for me” are said emphatically throughout the poem to serve as a reminder to the

leaders to take up their rightful position as servants of the people. The use of rhyme, alliteration and consonance in the poem gives it a rhythmic flow as Raya alternates between stressed and unstressed syllables to give the poem a sense of musicality that helps to add to the aesthetic value. The poet also says the stanza outlined below in an ascending tone, in such a way that she begins the first line in a low tone but keeps increasing it as she moves through the succeeding lines, and by the time she reaches the end, her pitch is at its peak and she is almost shouting.

You work for me.
Do your job!
Get it right!
My land is filled with resources, inspiring!
Do the job you've got now,
Before you start applying,
For promotions, with notions,
Of wasting more of my time.

The poet maintains a low tone at the beginning of these lines but her voice begins to ascend in the line, "Before you start applying". Her voice reaches the peak on the last line to show the urgency with which she expects the leaders to shelve their personal interests for the sake of addressing issues affecting ordinary citizens. The last stanza acts as an anti-climax and is said in a relatively low tone and by the time the poet is reciting the last line her voice is reduced to a mere whisper. This serves to signal to the leaders that she has said all that needs to be said and the decision to either serve the people or leave office depends entirely on them.

You work for me,
Just in case you forgot it,
My anger has passed the point
Where I lost it.

The time has now come,
To get real or forfeit.

3.3 Musical Accompaniment

Dorphan uses a combination of the spoken and the sung modes in most of his poems. This technique is quickly taking root in the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya hence underscoring Wallenstein assertion that “Poetry has always craved the company of music in which tone, rhythm and cadence, and lyricism, too, are the property of both. It is the rhythm in the poet’s head that determines the meter and often the mood of the words as they fall off the page” (Wallenstein, 1991, 595).

During the performance of his poem entitled “Najua” at the All Saints Cathedral in Nairobi on 1st July 2016, Dorphan treated the audience to spoken word infused with song and musical accompaniments. The poem was sung at intervals accompanied by musical instruments to introduce variety in the performance and also to reinforce the meaning. However this technique has been put under scrutiny with some questioning the difference between spoken word and rap. The technique is widely taking root in spoken word hence the need to distinguish this genre and rap, which also employs a similar style. While rap relies entirely on the beat from the musical instruments for its rendition, spoken word can still be performed without musical accompaniments since the artist does not follow the beat but the beat follows him/her. Throughout the performance of this poem the audience was glued to the stage as Dorphan presented a sad journey of a hopeless young “Nairobian” trying to eke a living through his talent as a poet. He keeps dreaming and hoping that one day the sun will shine brightly on him but every new day he wakes up to the same frustrations of not being able to pay his rent on time, not having enough bus fare to town for a performance, not getting paid as per his expectations, among other problems facing the young and unemployed in the

twenty first century, Nairobi. The poem begins with the stanza below which is sung by the vocalists and is repeated at intervals throughout the performance. Before they begin Dorphan employs the technique of involving the audience in the performance by asking them to sing along to the following words from the poem:

Najua jua litawaka, na jua litatua,	I know the sun will shine, and the sun will set,
Najua kuna kiangazi,	I know there is drought,
Na kuna time ya mvua,	And there is time for rain,
Najua dua la kuku, halingusi mwewe,	I know the kick of a hen, cannot hurt the hawk,
Hata wakikushuku, usijishuku wewe,	Even if they doubt you, do not doubt yourself,
Najua...a...a, najuaaaaa	I know.... I know....

This stanza sets the mood of the entire poem. As the vocalists sing the words, the poet dances to the beat of the song slowly moving across the stage, his face turned upward to create a picture of one who is in deep thought which prepares the audience for the message of hopelessness that is about to be delivered. The hopelessness is captured in the Swahili proverb that says, “Dua la kuku halingusi mwewe” which means that the kicks of a hen are too weak to protect her chicks from the ruthless hawk. The extended meaning of this proverb is that the powerful in our society will always want to trample on the weak by grabbing everything that belongs to them just like the case of the hawk and the hen. The pensive mood of the poet and the words help us to conceptualize the challenges facing many young people in Nairobi when they wake up every morning unsure of what the day shall bring their way. Hence, the poet invites the audience to accompany him on a turbulent journey as captured in the following lines:

Saa hizo nili’have kukaa stage	At that time I had to stay at the bus stage
Masaa ka mbili	For about two hours
Juu nilipoteza mbao	Because I misplaced my twenty shillings
Ndio fare ishuke at least na mbao	So that the bus fare can go down by twenty shillings.

Naenda ku'perform event,
Organiser hanilipi anadai
Kuniappreciate.

I go and perform at an event,
The organiser doesn't pay me claiming that he will only
Appreciate me.

The musical instruments which include the acoustic guitar, the bass guitar, the key board, the drum set, and the violin, too, have a role to play in the performance of this spoken word poem. They help to set the mood of the poem since they are played softly and slowly to march the poet's words and movement. However, it is the guitar which gives the vocalists the rhythm with which to sing parts of the poem. The fact that the poet comes on stage bare foot does not escape notice. It is a deliberate attempt at presenting the picture of a jobless young man who is struggling to survive hence the lack of shoes. No wonder in the end the poet says that one day when his dreams come true it is the shoe that will give the testimony of what he has been through. In the course of the performance the poet at times echoes the words of the singers in order to emphasize the message entailed in the song. The singers continue singing while the poet picks the lines from the song and speaks them out making it sound like an echo. This helps to lay emphasis on the following lines:

Rush hour tic toc kwa city clock,	Rush hour tick tock on the city clock,
Bado tick tock mkononi kwa mbota,	Still tick tock from the watch on my hand
Dark hour meli ya success kwa dock	Dark hour the ship of success at the dock.

Dorphan has also performed this poem on other platforms, one of which was in an oral literature class at the University of Nairobi on 16th July 2016, but each time he takes to the stage one is left feeling as though it is the first time he is interacting with the poem. This is due to his ability to improvise his performances to suit the needs of his audience. During the performance at All Saints Cathedral, he was accompanied by "Sheila and Her Band" which comprises of Betty Sheila Mumbi, alongside two other vocalists, an acoustic guitarist, a bass

guitarist, a keyboardist, and a violinist, because he was dealing with an audience that was out to be entertained since the performance took place on a Friday evening, a time when most people in Nairobi are out to relax after a long day's work and especially at the end of a busy week. I confirmed this with Mumbi, the lead vocalist, who revealed that to get the rhythm of the song she only needs the acoustic guitar, and that the other musical accompaniments are only used to make the performance more entertaining. However, during his performance at the University of Nairobi, Dorphan only came with the lead vocalist and the acoustic guitarist since the purpose of the performance was mostly educational. This same poem has been performed in one of the street performances dubbed "Mama's Day Out", available on YouTube, where the streets of Nairobi act as the backdrop that give the poem its setting. To get the attention of the passers-by, the performance begins with the guitarist playing his notes and the poet and the vocalist dancing to the tune. Once an audience is established, the vocalist takes over the performance by singing the first stanza of the poem before Dorphan takes over with the spoken version. In the end he encourages the audience to join in singing the last stanza of the poem. The choice of the streets of Nairobi as a space to perform this poem is significant in the sense that it is here where we would most likely meet people of all ages who are struggling to meet ends meet by engaging in whatever income generating projects they can lay their hands on, just like the persona in the poem.

3.4 Dramatization

Spoken word has also invaded the digital space through the use of dramatized skits recorded and posted on YouTube. In this case, the poet creates characters to enact scenes from the poem during the performances. There is usually a merger between the spoken word poet and the characters in the skit, in the sense that the poet is also one of the characters. A good example is the spoken word video entitled "Tumehoka" by Sarabi, Mufasa, Teardrops,

Juliani and Maji Maji. The performers are a combination of spoken word poets, musicians, and actors which make it easy for the poem to be spoken, sang and acted out, all at the same time. In fact, in this video Teardrops, Mufasa and Juliani perform both as poets and actors, since they speak out their lines while dramatizing. In an interview with Mufasa, he revealed to me that apart from being a poet, he is also an actor.

At the beginning of the video just before the first stanza of the poem, the audience is treated to a dramatic scene where a rich man in a very expensive car visits a peasant old woman on her farm demanding that she gives up the parcel of land to him in exchange of twenty thousand Kenyan shillings only. The woman rejects the offer prompting him to hire goons to destroy her property including the title deed. The woman's grandson who witnesses all the injustice against his family climbs on the roof top with a chain around his neck ready to commit suicide. This story hits the media houses prompting journalists to come to the scene to establish the cause of the boy's agitation. They meet Sarabi who is acting as Mr. Maneno, a witness of all that has happened. He sings the first stanza of the poem which is used as a narration of the events leading to the little boy's attempted suicide. He sings the poem as follows:

Kenya fifty plus one na bado tuko minus,	Kenya is fifty plus one and yet we are still minus,
Juu kuna watu Fulani hawatu-mind us,	Because there are people who don't mind us,
Wananchi tuna-mind	citizens we mind,
Mbona walafi watuongoza?	Why are the greedy leading us?
Wanatutawala juu wametugawanya.	They rule over us because they have divided us.

The introduction of the poem with a skit helps to capture the attention of the audience who have to listen to the rest of the poem in order to get the whole story. The interest of the audience is sustained through suspense where they are left wondering whether the old

woman's grandson will commit suicide or not. To get the full story they have to listen to the whole poem as the story is told in fragments amid the spoken and sang versions of the poem. The skit explains the reason behind Sarabi's angry tone and contemptuous attitude towards corrupt leaders. His facial expression shows anger which helps to bring out his defiance against such leaders just like the little boy's decision to commit suicide which can be viewed as an act of resistance against oppression.

While the audience is still pondering about the little boy's fate, Mufasa takes up the poem in a spoken mode in the form of an interview at a media house, where he expresses his contempt towards politicians whose sole purpose is to grab the national resources. He rebukes them for engaging in corrupt deals like stealing of votes during elections, misuse of power by arresting people who exercise their freedom of speech on social media, and embezzling of public funds, as captured in the following lines:

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!

During the performance, Mufasa puts a lot of emphasis on the words "Mr. Mr. Minister". The use of alliteration and repetition in this line helps to emphasize the point that the persona is addressing none other than political leaders. Besides, in Kenya ministers are usually addressed by the prestigious title of "Honourable" and thus when the persona chooses a

“lesser” title of Mister, he is reducing them to the level of ordinary citizens. This helps to reinforce his contemptuous attitude towards them in that he no longer regards them in high esteem as is expected of their status in society. The lines that follow are said in a high pitch to bring out the persona’s contempt as he directs his accusations towards the minister’s greed for public property. Throughout this stanza, the persona uses a bitter tone to express his disgust towards such leaders whose sole purpose is to amass as much wealth to themselves as possible instead of taking care of the most pressing needs in our society like provision of good health care facilities. It sounds outrageous that the leaders steal public funds to build posh hotels yet the citizens whom they are supposed to serve are suffering. This echoes Raya Wambui’s poem “You Work for Me” which serves to remind our leaders that it is their duty to serve the citizens. The leaders can only fulfil their role of being the servants of the people if they put the interest of the citizens first before anything else. The next stanza is sung in the form of a chorus by all the characters involved in the performance of the poem.

Tumehoka kuibiwa,	We are tired of being robbed,
Tumehoka kuigizwa,	We are tired of drama,
Tumehoka	We are tired,
Kupewa ahadi	Of receiving promises,
Kunyimwa miradi,	of denied projects,
Ooh ooh aah aah aah	Ooh ooh aah aah aah
Wananchi tunang’ang’ana	Citizens we are scrambling,
Kila siku tunapambana,	Everyday we are struggling,
Na tumechoooka!	And we are tired!
Wananchi tunang’ang’ana	Citizens we are scrambling,
Kila siku tunapambana.	Everyday we are struggling.

As the chorus continues some characters are shown working in deplorable conditions to earn a living mostly in the “Jua Kali” sector. A keen look at them indicates that they are all bound in chains as they go about their daily activities. Some have the chains around their necks, while some have them around their arms. The use of chains here is symbolic of bondage due to the lack of freedom experienced by the working class. They feel oppressed but lack the voice to express their grievances to the powers that be. Most of them are exposed to hard labour and they lack basic needs like water and food yet they have no one to turn to. The leaders who are supposed to protect them have turned into the oppressors taking away whatever little that they have, as witnessed in the case of the rich man who grabs the old lady’s piece of land, in the skit at the beginning of the performance. This brings in the question of class struggle in the poem where the poor are marginalised by the rich in order to maintain the status quo.

The persona complains of how the leaders grab all the means of production denying them a chance to climb up the socio-economic ladder. For instance, the ordinary citizens cannot be granted tenders for development projects since they are preserved for the rich who already own a lot of property. The leaders cover up their evil deeds through hypocrisy and making of empty promises. This stanza acts as a refrain that is repeated throughout the poem, an element that is characteristic of the musical genre. The repetition helps to emphasize the message of resistance against oppression in the poem because at last the citizens have found a voice to challenge their leaders by stating that they are tired of their situation, an indication that they want change.

Teardrops bridges part of the song that follows where the singer is complaining that since 1963 the country has not registered any positive changes and over forty million people are still engaged in making wrong choices. The switching between the spoken and sang mode, creates a beautiful collage in the poem giving it a unique aesthetic appeal. It also makes the lines memorable to the audience. Teardrops says:

I wonder kama Turkana kuna bar,
Kama iko ni moja, inaitwa baa la njaa,
Sunday best ya hustler pajama kwa mtoi wa prezzi,
Mifuko za waheshimiwa ni kama amboseli,
Zimejaa na mandovu,
Mifuko za wananchi ni kama akili ya mheshimiwa,
Hazinanga kakitu.

During the performance of this stanza Teardrops is escorted by a large group of boda boda cyclists and he says these words aboard one motorcycle while lifting his fist in the air, a sign of defiance. He exposes the morass in the leadership by making reference to Turkana, a semi-arid area in Kenya pointing out how the leaders have neglected the region which is associated with hunger yet there is a government that should cushion the citizens against such extreme conditions. There is the use of a pun between the words “bar” and “baa”. A pun is an amusing play on homophones and homonyms. In this case the pun serves to bring out the contrast between the people of Turkana who are starving to death and only know of “baa la njaa” (hunger), and other Kenyans who have plenty of food that some of their money is spent on alcoholic drinks at the “bar”. The poem also brings out the gap between the rich and the poor by making a comparison in their mode of dressing where the persona likens the best dress of a pauper to the night gown of the president’s son. There is also the use of imagery in the poem to talk about the illegal ivory business that our “honourable” leaders are involved in, by drawing comparisons between the elephants in the pockets of our leaders to money in

their pockets. He also uses sarcasm in comparing the empty pockets of the masses to the empty heads of our leaders. In this stanza Teardrops acts as a revolutionist by exposing the leaders for people to see them for who they really are in order to stir the masses into action. The fact that he is escorted by a big crowd in a peaceful demonstration heightens the message of resistance against oppression. The refrain is introduced immediately after these words to help create some cathartic effect in the audience so as to ease the built up tension in the poem.

Juliani comes in with the spoken version of the poem expressing his anger at the leaders for their greed to amass wealth while the poor continue to languish in poverty. His tone is combative as he says that he is ready to engage the leaders in a fight no matter how strong they think they are. He asserts that not even the tear gas can stop him from fighting for his rights. He draws the contrast between the rich man's world and the poor man's world by saying that while a poor child cannot afford good medical care, the rich are wasting their money away through parties which are used as platforms to conduct corrupt deals like dishing out of tenders which will be funded heavily but all the money will go to waste since the projects will never be implemented.

Hizi vidole zimekonda kwa njaa
Zitastangle shingo zimenona kwa kunyakua.
Imefika point tunachagua machozi
Ya tear gas kupigania haki
Ama ya mtoto tukikosa doh ya hosi,
Hao wako huko wakigonganisha glasi,
Wakigawanya kandarasi,
Pate tenda bila utendakazi.

A song is used to break the intensity of the combative mood as we progress into the final stanza which acts a resolution to the skit that was introduced at the beginning of the poem. The setting is at the old lady's home where her grandson is still at the roof top with a chain around his neck ready to commit suicide. A crowd is gathered and Maji Maji and the old lady are standing before the crowd. Maji Maji is holding a piece of paper in his hand. He begins to address the crowd where everyone is carrying chains in their hands to symbolise their oppressed position in society. This part is said in a call and response structure where Maji Maji calls the whole community to come together and fight the injustices in their community. He leads the crowd into a declaration for change by declaring what needs to be done to effect change in the community while the crowd responds in unison as follows:

M: Miaka nenda miaka rudi stori ni vile

P: Tumechoka

M: Ukibeba mzigo kila siku one day I say,

P: Utachoka

M: So we have to push for change

P: Tumechoka

M: First I have to change myself

P: Nimechoka

M: Nachukua hatua

P: Nimechoka

M: I hope tuko pamoja wewe na wewe aiseh!

P: Ooh ooh aah

3.5. The Audience and Space

We cannot complete the discussion of performance in spoken word without looking at the role of the audience. Karin Barber (1997) argues that as long as there is a performance there will always be an audience. Whenever the spoken word poets stage a performance there is

always a certain type of audience they are targeting. This audience determines the poet's choice of subject matter and the mode of delivery. Interviews with the spoken word poets revealed that most of the poets usually compose their poems for specific types of audience. Namatsi Lukoye stated that she composes her poems mostly for adults over twenty three years of age and who understand more about issues in life. However she was quick to add that most of the time she just composes the poems with no particular audience in mind but later after the performance she discovers that a particular poem of hers appeals to a certain audience. For instance, although she composed the poem "Queen" as a personal reflection, she discovered later on after the performance that the poem appeals more to adult women and men who value the women in their lives. This could be attributed to the fact that this poem elevates the status of a woman by bringing out all the virtues inherent in her. As a result, the poem helps to uplift the image of the woman in society contrary to the metanarrative that women are inferior to men.

In an interview with Raya Wambui I found out that most of her poems are written for specific audiences. She revealed that her target audience keeps shifting depending on the issues being addressed in a particular poem. For example, the poem entitled "The Bull in a China Shop" targets the policy enforcers in matters of environmental conservation. She wants the poem to reach those who have the power to stop the poaching of elephants before they become extinct. Her wish as she was composing the poem was that it could reach the target audience even through a third party who would attend her performance then take the message to those in positions of power to effect tough rules that would safeguard our wildlife. At the beginning of the performance, Wambui makes a deliberate attempt to place the poem in its context by asking the audience whether they know the term used to refer to a male elephant. One person in the audience shouts "bull" and she recognises that as the right answer then goes ahead to

perform the poem. This technique of involving the audience helps in the interpretation of this poem because the audience is now aware that the poem is talking about elephants and not just any bull. In the poem the persona feels that the government has not done enough to ensure that poaching is wiped out in the country. She observes how loopholes in the judicial system encourage rather than discourage poaching as brought out in the lines below:

Though too far from here to hear,
There is a herd,
One of those members is fallen and butchered,
Before thirty six pounds of heart
Reaches full stop.

With over eleven million Kenyan shillings,
For one kilo of horn
And a maximum possible fine
Of one million Kenyan Shillings
I guess certain risks in the industry are real.

In the above stanza, the persona shows how ridiculous it is for the courts to issue a fine of one million Kenyan shillings for an offender who has gained over eleven million shillings from poaching. This kind of contradictory measure by the courts encourages any would be poacher to go for it because the “reward” is lucrative. She feels that it is the responsibility of the government to put up tough measures on laws concerning our wildlife in order to protect our economy from such predators. She points out how Mombasa enjoys the prestige of being the Port of East Africa, yet all that goes through the port to other countries are smuggled goods, among them the elephant tusks, intended to benefit other nations that will process them into finished products that are valuable while Kenyans remain with the worthless carcasses of the killed elephants. As a result the country suffers double loss since it gains nothing from the

poaching venture and at the same time the economy is affected because our wildlife is a major source of tourist attraction, but with the declining numbers of elephants, tourism in Kenya is greatly affected.

Mombasa, city *ya raha*
Is the port of the East Coast,
But we are leaving it to Malaysia
To catch our smuggling boats
In the name of hard worked for,
Soap stone goddesses
Whose images are actually curved out of carcasses,
From where they once came.

The poem looks at how laxity in our security system causes rampant poaching in the country where it is very easy for the poachers to access weapons that are used in their “trade” like guns. She compares the whole poaching situation to a bull in a china shop to indicate how destructive these poachers are to the country. In this case, the poacher is the bull while the China shop is the country. Just like a bull can bring down a shop with China ware within seconds, the country’s economy can be paralysed by these poachers very easily if the government does not implement stop guard measures.

In an interview, Raya explained to me that she chose the phrase “a bull in a china shop” because China has the biggest market for ivory in the world and she feels that it is about time somebody put a stop to it to protect our wildlife from extinction. She also feels that the poachers thrive in Kenya because “They are only after the government that never implements.” She reminds us that it takes one year and eight months for a baby elephant to be born yet for the poachers it is only one day and the life of an elephant is terminated for their own selfish gains. She appeals to the law makers and law enforcers to play their role in

protecting our wildlife and our economy from destruction. She asserts that “We are shooting ourselves on the foot, if we do not pay attention to poaching and its impact on our economy.”

Ruth Finnegan (1977) asserts that the composition and transmission of literature is largely determined by the nature of the audience (p. 214). She believes that a poet considers his/her audience long before the performance when creating the poem and “it is never a mere after-thought.” Majority of the spoken word poets I interviewed during the research, confirmed the fact that they always think about the audience at the composition stage. Although she observes that there are rare cases where the audience is not involved in a performance, in most cases the performance of oral literature must include the audience. She further outlines two types of audiences in the performance of oral literature as the participatory audience, and the separate audience. She argues that there is a difference between poetry that is composed for a participatory audience and that which is composed for a separate one in terms of purpose and function.

The participatory audience occurs when almost all those who attend a performance participate in it since “The audience, even as listeners and spectators-but sometimes in a more active role – are directly involved in the realisation of the poem as literature in the moment of it’s performance” (Finnegan, 1977, 214). This is commonly used in spoken word performances that infuse music with poetry. The poets in such cases usually encourage the audience to join in the singing. A good example is Dorphan’s spoken word poem entitled “Najua” already analysed in section 3.2 of this chapter. During the performance of this poem at All Saints Cathedral, he invited the audience to join in the singing, clapping and dancing. This made them to appreciate the poem even more because they had to learn the words of the song to enjoy the performance. In fact their role as a participatory audience was heightened

when the electricity went out in the middle of the performance and the audience maintained the rhythm of the poem by clapping since most of the musical accompaniments could not be played because they are electrical. Looking back, I think it would have been ridiculous to listen silently to a performance in total darkness, but the interest of the audience in the poem was sustained by their participation in the clapping, singing, and dancing to the end. Therefore the role of the audience in this poem was to add to the general aesthetic appeal.

Some spoken word poets use costume to communicate a particular message to the audience as well as capture their attention. Brigeddia is one such a poet who normally uses costume to arrest the attention of the audience. In most of his performances he usually appears on stage dressed in a game warden's uniform, which enables him to assert his authority to the audience. This always creates a sudden hush among members of the audience who are unsure of what to expect from him. In an interview with him, he revealed to me that he usually comes on stage in his uniform to make a statement to his audience that those in the disciplined forces too are talented in the performing arts. He also revealed to me that in his line of duty, he is not allowed to salute without his full uniform on including the crown, which always necessitates him to come in his uniform especially when he has to salute. On reaching the stage he always surveys the audience from left to right then proceeds with this familiar declaration:

Ni kawaida kamanda anaposimama	It is routine every time the commander stands
Kwenye jukwa,	on the podium,
Sheria na masharti hutumika,	Rules and regulations must be applied,
Saluti ishara ya heshima na salamu	salute, a sign of respect and greetings.

After saying these words he usually takes off his crown before saying, “This is the other side of the commander-in-chief of the armed poets.” This kind of introduction has the effect of arousing the interest of the audience. By removing the crown and declaring that he has another side other than that of being a game warden, the audience is now prepared for his performance as a poet. I sought to find out from him why he usually appears in his performances clad in that uniform and he revealed to me that he is indeed a game warden currently working in Kapsabet, located in the Rift Valley region of Kenya. His words and the action of removing the crown acts as a reminder to the audience that although Brigeddia is a game warden, he is on stage as a poet. From this point he usually goes ahead to perform his poems.

During the performance of his poem entitled “Special dedication to Ladies”, on “Churchil Live”, a popular comedy show aired every Sunday on the *Nation Television* (NTV) channel, Brigeddia marched in calculated steps to the podium, causing a hush in the audience. He then made the salute and proceeded with his usual declaration of the requirements of a commander when he takes to the podium, as demonstrated above. To reassure them that he was not on stage as a ranger but as a poet he removed his crown and said, “This is the other side of the commander-in-chief of the armed poets”. However he began his performance in the same commanding tone when he said:

Kama wewe ni mrembo	If you are a beauty,
Jitokeze, jionyeshe,	come out, show yourself,
Na usimamame wima hapa.	And stand confidently, here.

Although these words are not part of the poem he said them as if they were, and the audience was perplexed when he insisted that the beautiful lady has to step forward and join him on the podium. When he realised that no one will obey his command he pointed out to one lady in

the audience and ordered her to join him on stage. He then proceeded with the performance of the poem using the lady as a point of reference. In the delivery of the actual words of the poem as brought out on You Tube, he drops the commanding tone and adapts a loving tone because the poem is about love and the persona is celebrating the beauty of the woman he loves. Throughout the performance the poet faces the lady on the stage and addresses her directly. This is achieved through the use of apostrophe. The persona is in praise of the beauty who loves him despite the fact that his level of education does not match hers. He has only studied computer packages while the beautiful lady is a degree holder. He uses imagery and hyperbole to describe the lady, most of which is derived from communication technology as shown below:

Mrembo wewe ni msoft kuliko Microsoft
You are so excellent kuliko Microsoft excel
You are the only woman who has the power
To get me on point kuliko Microsoft power point.

Although the poem has a light hearted tone, the persona still manages to express his feelings of love towards the lady whom he finds irresistible. He finally declares that theirs is the kind of love that will never end because the lady is like a computer virus that cannot be removed even with the best of anti-virus. The comparison of the lady to a computer virus is ironical. While the lady brings joy to the man because of the love that they share, the virus brings pain and loss to the person whose computer is infected. This leaves the audience with multiple interpretations as to what the persona intends to portray by making such a comparison. It could mean that by falling in love with the lady the persona has lost a part of himself and the situation cannot be reversed. The performance of this poem is done on the same platform where comedies are performed and perhaps this is what motivates Briggiddia to adapt a light hearted tone in this particular poem because most of his poems are usually revolutionary in

nature and even when he talks about love it is usually with a sad tone like in the case of his poem “Mamu Lizi.” At the end of this poem Brigeddia leaves the audience with a closing remark, characteristic of all his poems.

Ila ni kawaida kamanda anapoondoka	However, it is obvious when the commander leaves
Kwenye jukwaa	the podium
Sheria na masharti hutumika,	Rules and regulations must apply,
Saluti, ishara ya heshima na salamu.	Salute, a sign of respect and greetings.

This closing formula acts as a signal that the poem has come to an end and now Brigeddia is walking out of the performance as a game warden once again because he usually ends up putting his crown of duty back on his head before marching out of the stage. This kind of approach to his poetry has made Brigeddia popular as a poet for drawing the connection between his profession and talent by blending the two. In the poetry world he retains an element of his profession by displaying the ethics of a game warden and even identifying himself as “The commander-in-chief of the armed poets” a title that resonates with “Commander-in-chief of the armed forces.” The fact that he always begins and ends his performances by maintaining all the rules and regulations that a game warden needs to observe means that you can never divorce his profession from his talent because they are all part of him and must therefore be reflected in everything he does.

Teardrops and Jicho Pevu are also good at involving the audience in the performances of their spoken word poems. During their performance of a joint spoken word poem, entitled “We Will not Forget You”, in honour of the Garissa University terror attack victims at Uhuru Park in Nairobi, Kenya, they involved the audience throughout by introducing a nursery rhyme in the poem. At the beginning of the performance, Teardrops gives instructions to the audience to clap their hands in a rhythmic way so as to provide the beat for the nursery

rhyme. Once the audience gets the rhythm, Teardrops tells them that every time he says “*Watoto wangu wee!*” (my children *wee!*), they should respond by saying “*Wee!*” while clapping their hands to the rhythm. The audience is only to stop when Teardrops says “Pause,” after which Jicho Pevu takes up the first stanza of the poem in which he salutes the victims of the terror attack and laments how human beings have lost their sense of humanity and have turned greetings into violence. He ends the stanza by saying, “God ni mpowerful Al-Shabaab ni nini?” meaning that God has the power to defeat the Al-Shabaab.

After this stanza both Teardrops and Jicho Pevu take the audience through the nursery rhyme once again, and the audience responds in the same pattern as before after which Teardrops takes over the second stanza of the poem. He alludes to the Bible by quoting John 3:16, which states, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” This verse is used to challenge the terrorists that God is more powerful than any weapon the Al-Shabaab may have at their disposal and that He loves humankind and that is why He gave His only son, Jesus, to die for our sins so that we may have everlasting life. This allusion is meant to challenge the Al-Shabaab that the physical death of the victims is not the end because there is everlasting life. The poem is meant to give hope to the families and friends of the victims of the terror attack that although they have lost their loved ones, one day they will be reunited in the afterlife. After this stanza the audience is led through the nursery rhyme once again before the next stanza.

Jicho Pevu points out ways in which human beings have become evil by concealing their hatred in composed faces yet they carry weapons to destroy one another. He questions the validity of black as a symbol of humanity if the blacks are busy destroying one another. The

audience is again taken through the nursery rhyme before Teardrops comes in with the next stanza in which he makes reference to the little girl from Mombasa, Kenya, who had a bullet lodged in her head after an attack at a church by Al-Shabaab militia. He challenges the terrorists that even though they wanted to terminate her life, she survived because God is powerful and can stop any weapon against causing harm to His people. He draws a comparison between corruption and terrorism by asserting that it is our corrupt officers at the immigration office who allow these terrorists to sneak into the country. After the nursery rhyme Jicho Pevu takes over by emphasizing the need for unity which will help curb this unnecessary bloodshed. Teardrops says that there has to be a revolution to stop terrorism within our borders. He points out tribalism as a major cause of bloodshed in our country. He states that a revolution should start with every Kenyan trying to effect positive change around them and getting to know what is really ailing our society. The poem ends with Teardrop's common slogan in which he categorically states that Sheng is his mother tongue. Perhaps sheng as a mode of communication in itself is a revolution, since it brings together all the ethnic groups in Kenya pushing away tribalism.

Therefore the role of the audience in the performance of this poem by Teardrops and Jicho Pevu is to provide catharsis in the poem by breaking the tension created in the poem using the nursery rhyme, especially for the sake of the friends and relatives of the victims who formed part of the audience. The poets chose a nursery rhyme that is easy to follow because every child in Kenya has sang that rhyme at one point in their childhood. The nursery rhyme extends the meaning of the poem in the sense that the Al-Shabaab is viewed as the devouring lion that wants to kill the children of Kenya but she (Kenya) is ready to protect her children. The performance of this poem at Uhuru Park which is Kenya's freedom square is

significant in the sense that this space acts as a backdrop to the message of liberation from terrorism in the poem.

The separate audience on the other hand is one that attends a performance but does not participate actively in it. In this case “the performance is sometimes a specialised activity, explicitly valued as an end, with a special time and place set aside for its enjoyment” (Finnegan, 1977, 228). Most of the spoken word poets in Kenya fashion their poems in this manner since they choose a venue for their performance and adhere to a strict time frame which might not allow them time to involve the audience. Some of the venues they choose for their performances are entertainment spots where people come to relax and enjoy after a busy day. They include PAWA 254, Alliance Francaise, Michael Joseph Centre, Goethe Institute, and The Kenya National Theatre.

However, even though this type of audience remains silent throughout the poem, their response to the poet’s words or mode of delivery enables him/her to gauge how his/her poem has been received. Finger snapping and foot stomping is a common response of the spoken word audience whenever they feel that the poet has driven a point home. This is usually achieved when the poet delivers punch lines and also when he articulates real issues in society. The poet’s role is to perform and the audience sits back and enjoys. The audience may also be involved in other activities like drinking, and dancing while listening to the poet. During one of his live performances at Alliance Francaise on 18th June 2016, Mufasa entertained the audience with his spoken word poem entitled “The First Time.” This is a love poem in which the persona laments on how the woman he loved toyed around with his feelings. He begins the poem with a nostalgic tone by taking the audience down memory lane

when he first encountered the lady. He was very innocent and naïve that he allowed his feelings for this lady to control him. He went to all extremes to please her.

The first time you asked me to enter your world,
I was confused,
I quickly took off my shoes,
Didn't know if I was supposed to,
But I told myself if your world
Was anything like your neck or your eyes,
With sunshine that swallows the movements
In my capillaries just to hold me in shock,
Then I had to.

As Mufasa performed this poem to the audience, most of them were keenly listening to him silently, while others were having refreshments. The audience was out to be entertained and this choice of a poem was perfect for the evening since it was talking about love. The poet's clarity of voice, the lighting on stage and the soft and slow tune produced by the musical instruments all helped to set the mood of love. Mufasa is usually a rather fast speaker in most of his poems but on this night he chose to articulate his words slowly to ensure that the audience got his message clearly. He took the audience through a journey of love in which the persona reveals that theirs was the kind of love that never waited for Valentine's Day because every day was Valentine's Day for the three years they were together. However, the tone of the poem changes to one of lament when the persona begins to describe how their love was prematurely terminated when he thought that they were doing just fine. He describes the emotional turmoil he went through as he tried to come to terms with the unexpected break up.

Two weeks, two weeks after you left,
You didn't break my heart,
My heart was too surprised to break.
At least not immediately
I had tattooed your life in my body
Those hot showers and scrubbing myself
Would not rub off your memory
Your voice was still a scar,
I couldn't trust on my skin
Forget the bruises your goodbye left me.

The persona takes us through the pain of a heart break. He uses personification in giving a description of how his heart reacted to the break up by saying that it was too surprised to take in what was happening to their love. This shows how difficult it was for the persona to accept that he had been jilted. He talks about how he had immersed himself in the relationship which made it difficult for him to let go. Memories of their life together haunted him and made it hard for him to accept that it was all over. The once sweet love left a painful mark in his life. Throughout the performance of this poem, the audience listens keenly and silently. The poet uses a song to relieve the audience of the pent up emotions created by the poem. The song is not part of the original poem but it is introduced in this context in order to provide entertainment to the audience who respond by dancing to the tune without joining in the singing.

Karin Baber states that colonialism in Africa changed the way in which the audience is perceived. While the traditional African audience was a participatory one, the colonial African audience was an expanded one. She asserts that performances which require one to pay in order to attend are different from ritualistic ones. Most spoken word performances are paid for and on average a ticket sells at eight hundred Kenya shillings, which is different

from the ritualistic performances where one needs to be a member of a particular community to gain admission.

Barber also looks at how “technology of communication” changes the way we perceive the audience. She views the print media as being responsible for taking away the traditional concept of a live audience that interacts with the performer directly. She feels that as a result, the performer might not tell the exact number of people that will have access to the work of art. Some spoken word poets have resorted to print media in order to expose their poems to a wider audience. Imani Woomera, Wanjiku Mwaura, and Ngwatilo Mawiyoo have written their spoken word poems in anthologies while Raya Wambui and El-Poet have their own blogs where they publish their poems. In an interview with Raya Wambui I inquired why she chose to write down her poems and she told me that it is a strategy to reach out to her audience who prefer written poetry. Umberto Eco (1979) asserts that an author has to foresee the model reader who is “able to deal interpretively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them.” By putting their poems in print media the spoken word poets assume that they will reach a particular audience that will interpret their work in the right way even if the performance element is missing. This helps to increase the number of people who have access to their poems.

Spoken word has also found space in the digital world which allows the poets to reach a wider audience through the use of You Tube, television and videos. This concept is expounded upon by Barber when he says, “Television has made possible the imagining of an atomised, dispersed but mass audience turning in simultaneously to the same programme.” This category of audience is removed from the live performance since no matter how interactive the poem is they cannot participate in it in the same way as those attending a live

show. Although they can sing along or repeat a chorus their input does not affect the actual performance.

A good example of a spoken word poem that is meant for a digital audience is Kennet B.'s poem entitled "Green Talk" in which the persona talks about the effects of environmental degradation and how it threatens to destroy the whole universe. The use of the digital platforms to perform spoken word pushes oral poetry to a new level where the poet removes himself from the live audience and only interacts with a digital audience that has no direct influence on the performance. Whatever action the audience is involved in does not affect the performance in any way. The poet makes use of audio-visual aids that can only be demonstrated in a video mode to talk about the atmospheric crack and the depletion of the ozone layer, which if not checked will render humankind extinct.

The much talked of atmospheric crack is getting larger
And this could be the beginning
Of the worst human witnessed natural disaster.
The non-wanted race 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,
How sad.

The audio-visual aids which only the video can afford to bring out are used to lay emphasis on the extent of the environmental degradation which would not have been possible if it was a live performance. These words are spoken at the beginning of the poem as we witness a catastrophe in the environment where we are shown the beautiful globe as it should have been before the environment was tampered with. Scenes of the thinning ozone layer and

forest fires are shown to emphasize to the audience that environmental degradation should be shunned. Landslides and volcanic eruptions are shown destroying an entire race and wiping away any form of life on earth. While all this is happening, the persona dares to dream of a greener environment where people are planting trees to conserve the environment. The poet infuses a song in this poem where he tells us that the choice to have a better environment is in our hands.

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.

In a live performance the audience would have mustered the song easily and joined the poet in the singing hence adding to the beauty of the entire poem. However, the digital audience can sing along as the poet sings but will not add any value to the performance. The poet cautions that talking and coming up with policies alone will not save the environment. All that people need to do is plant trees. He talks of how it will be difficult to access basic commodities like water if we do not change our treatment of the environment.

The role of the audience in the performance of spoken word cannot be over emphasised. Right from the composition stage, a poet needs to consider his target audience and fashion his poem in a way that will be appealing to them. This is in line with Richard Bauman's assertion that "performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence" (Bauman 1977, 11). Thus, it is not just enough for a spoken word artist to compose a poem but he/she is

expected to deliver it in the most effective way in order to reach his/her target audience, since the quality of performance is measured through the audience.

3.6 Context

There are different contexts for the performance of spoken word in Kenya. While some perform their poems for entertainment, others do it to sensitize the community about pertinent issues, and still others do it for competition. Although this genre usually tackles serious issues in our society, some poets have devised ways of making it entertaining by introducing songs and musical accompaniments. Dorphan, Kennet B., Mufasa, Namatsi Lukoye, and Teardrops exploit the use of music in their spoken word poems to give it that element of entertainment.

In one of her performances of the poem entitled “Queen” Namatsi Lukoye both entertains and educates the public about the importance of appreciating women in our society. The entertaining aspect of the poem comes in when she introduces a fashion show in the performance by having models do a catwalk on the stage to display the physical attributes of the various queens in the poem. Each model is designed to display the attributes of each of the queens referred to. As the poet calls out the queens by their names as they appear in the poem, the corresponding model does a catwalk across the stage displaying the attire such a queen supposedly used to adorn herself with. During the interview with Namatsi Lukoye she said that she carried out her own research to establish what each of the queens used to wear, then used her skills in fashion design to come up with an appropriate attire for each one of them. She therefore uses her poem as a space to display her skills in fashion design since the context of her performance is that of entertainment. In the same performance she also brings in a choreographer who dances around her as she performs to add to the aesthetic appeal of the poem while at the same time meeting the needs of her audience whose sole purpose is to

be entertained. The entertainment spot is thus used as a space to present a feminist agenda but in an entertaining way.

Spoken word can also be performed as a competition among the poets. In Kenya this event is referred to as “Poetry Slam Africa.” Somers-Willet (2005) refers to slam poetry as “a competitive version of poetry readings” where poets deliver their poems from memory and are not allowed to use props, costumes, or music during the performance. In this context, spoken word performances follow all the rules of a competition that must be adhered to by all the candidates. Nine contestants are selected to participate in the competition and they must have three poems each since the competition has three rounds and in each round one is expected to present a different poem from the previous ones. They are not allowed to use any audio visual material to aid in their performances. A panel of three judges is selected to judge the competition and crown the winner. In the first round of the competition all the nine contestants perform their pieces and are awarded marks. Three of the slammers with the least marks are eliminated in the first round leaving six to continue in the race. The remaining six contestants proceed to the second round where each one of them performs a new poem. The marks are awarded cumulatively from stage one. Three of the six slammers with the least marks are again eliminated leaving three to battle it out in the final round. The remaining three slammers perform another set of new poems and are awarded based on their cumulative marks. The poet with the most marks is crowned the slam queen or king. Ian Gwagi, the key organiser of the poetry slam revealed to me that the slams are performed quarterly where the winners of the first, second and third slams meet for the grand finale, which is the fourth slam where the winner is crowned king or queen and retains the title for a whole year.

During the 61st Poetry Slam Africa held at Alliance Francaise on 12th June 2016, Tess Aura emerged the winner due to her ability to capture the attention of the audience right from her first poem in which she began by saying, “I don’t know if you can tell/ but I got my hair done for this/ I was doing my make-up and trying to decide between the red and the purple lipstick/ that was laid to my palm check.” These words were said poetically causing the audience to marvel at the poet’s skill in incorporating our everyday speech into poetry. However the poet threw them off balance when she said, “But I need you guys to forget what I said/ because this is just a mike check.” The audience responded to this extra ordinary introduction by finger snapping and foot stomping, which is the acceptable way of applauding a poet in spoken word performances and especially during such competitions. In this particular poem the persona brings out the plight of women in the African society. She challenges the grand narrative that a woman’s worth can only be measured by her physical beauty. She opens the first stanza of the poem in a conversational tone but turns around and becomes satirical towards the society for placing a lot of emphasis on a woman’s outward appearance and ignoring other pertinent issues.

I don’t want you to get the wrong impression of me,
I don’t want you to think that am too confident or too cocky,
But am not too modest to notice that you can’t keep your eyes off me.
And not just my soul or my personality
But parts of my body that made me super religious
At the age of thirteen.

Just like her unexpected introduction, Tess Aura introduces another twist in her poem when she chooses to start off on a light note by addressing ordinary things like dressing that the society marginalises women about, to serious issues affecting women, like land ownership and female genital mutilation. The effect is felt in the response of the audience who at the

beginning are cheering her on as she talks about her body but as the poem progresses they are all quiet and attentive to the message of gender discrimination outlined in the following lines:

So tell me,
What parts of me should I keep covered
For you to treat me with the respect that I deserve?
And if a man is my only wealth
Then whose wife do I have to be
To gain not only access to but ownership of this land
That bears world's renowned tea planted and harvested by me
But my name appears nowhere on the title deed.
They say it takes a village
So how many of your sons do I have to bear
Before the village stops raising me like am your children's peers?
How many of your daughters
Should I talk through their rights of passage,
Slit them down cut them apart?

The tone of the poem changes from a humorous one at the beginning to a bitter one. The persona is bitter that she is not included in the ownership of property that she has actively participated in creating. Although the tea she has planted and harvested with her own hands is known the world over, she does not share in the benefits that such a venture brings forth because of her disadvantaged position as a woman. She is sarcastic of the society for placing a lot of importance on the boy child yet even after giving birth to boys the woman is still treated as a child. She criticizes the cultural practices that encourage female genital mutilation since it is a violation of the rights of a woman. Therefore the poet uses the competition as a space to challenge the meta narrative that women are inferior and advocates for equal rights for both men and women in society.

In an interview with Mufasa, one of the judges in this particular competition, I sought to establish what qualities they look for in a poet. He revealed to me that the winning poem must be authentic by relating to the poet's lived experiences. The poet must also be fluent in whatever language they choose to use and the words must flow naturally as if in a normal speech, as opposed to reciting. It is this element that distinguishes spoken word from other forms of poetry that emphasize on recitation. The ability of the poet to connect with the audience is also important as it gives him/her the much needed confidence during the performance.

3.7. Conclusion

Performance is one of the key features of spoken word without which the genre is non-existent. Although it is possible for spoken word to be written on the page, its effectiveness can only be achieved through an oral performance. The meaning of the text becomes more vivid when the words are given life in an oral presentation. The performance techniques employed by the poet are meant to assist the audience supplement their interpretation of the words in the poem hence improving their understanding.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

In this research I set out to examine how intertextuality and performance in spoken word in Kenya contribute to the interpretation of the text and the general aesthetic appeal. In the study of intertextuality I looked at how the poets make references to other texts including page poetry, the oral tradition, the novel, and other forms of oral poetry like Jazz, Hip-Hop and Dub to reinforce meaning in their texts. To achieve this, I analysed the use of allusion, pastiche, and parody in spoken word poetry. The study of performance of spoken word in Kenya involved an analysis of how the performance techniques, the role of the audience, context and space, contribute to the creation of meaning, as well as add to the general beauty of this genre.

Intertextuality is a dominant feature of spoken word in Kenya since the poets refer to other texts both in terms of form and content. This genre draws resources from the oral tradition by making use of the existing oral literature material such as folktales and fables, epic histories and narrations, proverbs and songs. One of the key observations made from this study is that spoken word greatly exploits oral tradition as observed in the case of “I Speak Continental” by Wanjiku Mwaura. This poem alludes to myths drawn from various African oral traditions to present the poet’s quest for cultural diversity by making allusion to the West, Central, South, and East African folklore. Namatsi Lukoye also makes use of the African oral tradition in her poem “Queen” in which she celebrates African women leaders by outlining their admirable qualities brought out through the great queens from Africa who have made a mark in history like Queen Makeda of Sheba, Nzinga of Matamba, Tiye the Nubian Queen, Amina of Zaria, and Nefertiti. This challenges the notion that the traditional African culture was oppressive to women and never allowed them to take up leadership positions. It also challenges the meta-narrative that women are incapable of providing good leadership.

The style and structure of the oral narrative is also employed in spoken word through pastiche. A good example is Briggiddia's poem entitled "Mamu Lizi". This poem incorporates elements of timelessness and a linear plot to tell the story of a brilliant young girl who ends up as a victim of domestic violence. Kennet B.'s spoken word poem entitled "Silent River" also makes use of the African oral tradition by making references to Professor Wangari Maathai for her role in environmental conservation in Kenya. This poem is a record of history about Wangari Maathai as a legendary figure and a resource to the African oral tradition. Therefore, in order to gain a better understanding of these poems and other similar ones it is important for the audience to be conversant with the African oral tradition.

The study also arrived at the conclusion that there is also an intersection between spoken word and the novel especially in terms of content since some of the poets make use of ideas from novels to enhance the interpretation of their poems. Mufasa's spoken word poem entitled "Son of a Woman" resonates with Charles Mangua's novel *Son of a Woman*, not just in terms of the title but also in the subject matter in the sense that both deal with the subject of single motherhood even though they view it from different points of view. Besides unlike Mangua, Mufasa uses the poem to present the plight of women in society by talking about domestic violence, HIV/AIDS and wife inheritance. Raya Wambui in her poem "I was not Made to Amuse" makes allusion to Maya Angelou's autobiographical work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, to present the challenges faced by upcoming poets which is similar to those that Maya Angelou went through as a young black poet in the United States of America.

Elsaphan Njora, in his spoken word poem entitled “Africa”, makes use of the saying “The darker the berry the sweeter the juice” which resonates with Wallace Thurman’s novel *The Blacker the Berry...* He uses Wallace Thurman’s novel *The Blacker the Berry...* to present his anti-racist stance by exposing the age old stereotype that Africa is a “dark continent” which is similar to the stigma that Emma Lou faces in the novel for being black. Njora uses this poem as a space to challenge the meta-narrative that blacks are inferior beings by focusing on the achievements made by Africans and urging them to recognize their strengths and shun any negative image propagated against their race.

Another element of intertextuality in spoken word can be seen in other forms of oral poetry like Jazz, Hip-Hop and Dub. These are brought out through code-switching, Rastafarianism, challenging of meta-narratives and performance. Some spoken word poets in Kenya employ the style of code-switching in their poems which is similar to Dub poetry. This has led to the use of a hybrid language commonly referred to as *sheng* in spoken word in Kenya, which echoes the use of the Jamaican Creole also known as *Patwa* or *Patois*, used in Dub poetry by poets like Linton Kwesi Jonson. This is evident in most poems by Teardrops and Dorphan.

In his poem entitled “Morphin”, Teardrops uses *Sheng* to express the plight of women who are victims of sexual violence. He feels that women can only liberate themselves from this form of oppression against them if they learn how to speak out against such violation of their rights. The use of *Sheng* in this poem is aimed at reaching women in urban centres from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are most vulnerable to such violence. Dorphan also uses *Sheng* in his poem entitled “Mum Aliishia” to talk about the plight of children who have never had the opportunity to experience the love of a mother due to the disintegration of family structures.

Namatsi Lukoye in her poem entitled “Polytricks” addresses the issue of divisive politics by referring to it as “politricks”, a word she coined on her own but which bears its origin in the Rastafari tradition. She coins the word to show her contempt towards such a vice in our society. Teardrops on the other hand, uses parody to ridicule drug abuse in one of his entitled poems. The Rastafarians embrace the use of marijuana which is considered necessary during the process of “granuation”, but Teardrops is quick to say in this poem that he does not subscribe to such an ideology that encourages people to abuse drugs and instead choses to talk about real issues facing the society like unemployment, immorality, drug abuse, and poverty. Imani Woomera in her spoken word poem entitled “Politics” uses the Rastafari tradition by drawing the imagery of Babylon to represent an oppressive regime which is an ideology enshrined in dub poetry.

Spoken word in Kenya also focuses on challenging of the meta-narratives, characteristic of Dub, Hip-Hop and Jazz poetry. Dan Oballa in his poem entitled “Do Not Say Bye to the Mau Mau” challenges the meta-narrative that Kenya is a free and independent state by pointing out that although it is fifty years after independence, the country still relies on developed countries for its sustenance and that those who took over power have become as oppressive as the colonial master. El-Poet in his poem entitled “Paranoid” and Raya Wambui in her poem entitled “Define and Conquer” challenge the dominant discourse in our society today that Islam is a misogynistic religion. They expose how the terror attacks have led many innocent Muslims and Somalis to be wrongfully accused of terrorism. They caution people not to allow the western world to control how they relate with each other. Similarly, Wanjiku Mwaura in her poem entitled “I Died” challenges the notion that some ethnic groups are inferior by exposing the ugly face of ethnic stereotyping when making references to the 2007/2008 post election violence in Kenya. Ngwatilo Mawiyoo too in her spoken word poem

entitled “Flag and Future” talks about political insecurity and challenges the notion that our national flag is a symbol of peace, love and unity due to the political instability experienced in the country. However, in as much as spoken word shares similar features with other artistic forms it still has features which are distinct and can only be realised through performance.

This study also arrived at the conclusion that performance is another key feature of spoken word without which this genre is non-existence. The element of performance in spoken word is not only necessary in enhancing the aesthetic value but also in influencing the interpretation of the poems. The poets employ several paralinguistic features and performance techniques to ensure that their intended meaning is captured by the audience. Raya wambui, in her poem entitled “You Work for Me” makes use of tonal variation, pitch and poignant pause to articulate her concerns about poor leadership in the country. She reminds the leaders that it is their duty to serve the citizens. Dorphan infuses music in his spoken word performances to influence the interpretation of his poems and also to enhance the aesthetic appeal. This is evident in his poem entitled “Najua” where parts of the poem are sang accompanied by musical instruments to create the pensive mood in the poem which helps the audience to visualize the many challenges faced by the lower class in the city. He also uses facial expression, gestures and body movement to emphasize on the theme of class struggle in the poem.

Mufasa, Teardrops, Juliani, Maji Maji and Sarabi employ the use of dramatization to influence the interpretation of their spoken word poem entitled “Tumechoka” which is acted out by the poets alongside other actors. This poem is a revolt against oppression by senior government officers as brought out through the dramatized version. The intersection between

poetry, music and drama captures the attention of the audience and also helps in exposing the kind of oppression that goes on in society in order to make them see the need for change.

Brigeddia mostly uses costume, body movement, and gestures to get the attention of his audience in most of his spoken word performances. During the performance of his poem entitled “special Dedication to Ladies” he makes use of his game ranger’s uniform to capture his audience then proceeds to involve them in the performance by requesting one lady in the audience to join him on stage while he performs the poem about love. The lady becomes the point of reference in the poem making it easy to understand the poem and at the same time provide entertainment given that the poem is performed in a comedy space.

The role of the audience in the performance of spoken word is also of utmost importance. Most of the spoken word poets agreed that their poems usually target a certain type of audience. Namatsi Lukoye’s poem “Queen” is mostly appreciated by women and men who appreciate the women in their lives. Raya Wambui’s “The Bull in a China Shop” targets those who are charged with the responsibility of protecting our wildlife from poachers because she appeals to the government to tighten laws concerning poaching. Therefore the audience determines the composition of a poem since most poets compose with a particular audience in mind.

The nature of the audience also helps the poet during the performance of the poem. A participatory audience adds to the general performance since it participates in the delivery of the poem. This is usually the case in most poems that infuse music in the performance like Dorphan’s “Najua” in which he usually encourages the audience to sing along. Teardrops and Jicho Pevu also involved the audience during the performance of their poem entitled “We

Will Not Forget You” in honour of the Garissa University Terror attack victims. The audience participated in the singing of a popular nursery rhyme entitled “Watoto Wangu Wee” to console the bereaved families that even though they have lost their loved ones, there is life after death and that God will avenge their deaths since He is more powerful than the Al-Shabaab militia.

Although the separate audience does not participate in the performance their reaction to the poet’s words reflects their reception of the message. During Mufasa’s performance of the poem “The First Time” at Alliance Francaise the audience remained silent throughout the performance but it was easy to tell from their reaction that they understood the pain of the persona who expresses his pain and sorrow after his girlfriend breaks up with him.

The use of technology in the delivery of spoken word poetry is slowly gaining root. This includes the use of You Tube, television and videos that involve a separate audience since it does not in any way participate in the actual performance of the poems. Kennet B.’s spoken word poem entitled “Green Talk” which talks about the effects of environmental degradation is recorded on DVDs exposing itself to a digital audience whose words and actions do not in any way affect the general performance. However, the production of the poem in this mode enhances its interpretation since the poet uses audio visual aids to ensure that his audience understands the destructive nature of human activities on the environment. While spoken word shares similar characteristics with other forms of oral poetry, it is in the articulation of the words that it becomes distinct as a genre because the words have to come out naturally as in normal speech and this can only be realised through performance.

Focusing on the study of intertextuality and performance in this genre, this research has attempted to describe the various ways through which a text creates meaning and how that meaning is interpreted by the audience. Therefore, the two features of spoken word are effective in unveiling the meaning of a text. As this study was limited to intertextuality and performance in spoken word in Kenya, there is still a broad space for further research in the area of spoken word. Future studies can focus on the challenging of metanarratives and the quest for urban youth identity in this genre, in addition to studying the images used by the poets to reflect on the social realities.

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Appendix I: Interview Schedule with the Spoken Word Poets

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

Stage name of the poet: Wanjiku Mwaura

Real name: Wanjiku Mwaura

Sex: Female

1. How would you define spoken word in your own words?
2. Do you think there is a difference between spoken word and rap? Mention any specific differences between spoken word and rap.
3. What inspired you to start composing spoken word poems?
4. Who is your role model in the poetry world? What about the literary world in general?
5. Why did you choose spoken word as a medium to articulate your concerns in society?
6. What do you think is your role as a poet to the community?
7. Do you think your poems have a positive impact in society? In what ways?
8. What was your defining moment as far as spoken word is concerned?
9. Who is your target audience?
10. What do you think attracts people to your performances?
11. Are there times when you feel you have not given the audience your best? Explain.
12. Have you ever participated in the Poetry Slam Africa? Tell me about it?
13. What motivated you to compose the spoken word poem entitled “I Speak Continental”?
14. In the poem you make references to various cultures from Africa. How did you learn about all these cultures?
15. Tell me something about your spoken word poem “I Died”, from your poetry anthology book entitled *The Flow of My soul*.

Stage name of the poet: Namatsi Lukoye

Real name: Jackline Joy Lukoye Namatsi

Sex: Female

1. How would you define spoken word in your own words?
2. Do you think there is a difference between spoken word and rap? Mention any specific differences between spoken word and rap.
3. What inspired you to start composing spoken word poems?
4. Who is your role model in the poetry world? What about the literary world in general?
5. Why did you choose spoken word as a medium to articulate your concerns in society?
6. What do you think is your role as a poet to the community?
7. Do you think your poems have a positive impact in society? In what ways?
8. What was your defining moment as far as spoken word is concerned?
9. Who is your target audience?
10. What do you think attracts people to your performances?
11. Are there times when you feel you have not given the audience your best? Explain.
12. Have you ever participated in the Poetry Slam Africa? Tell me about it?
13. What motivated you to compose the spoken word poem entitled “Queen”?
14. In the poem you make references to various African queens. Where did you learn about them?
15. Comment on your spoken word poem entitled “Politricks.”
16. What would you say influenced your idea of street performance?

Stage name of the poet: Brigeddia

Real name: Francis Onono

Sex: Male

1. How would you define spoken word in your own words?
2. Do you think there is a difference between spoken word and rap? Mention any specific differences between spoken word and rap.
3. What inspired you to start composing spoken word poems?
4. Who is your role model in the poetry world? What about the literary world in general?
5. Why did you choose spoken word as a medium to articulate your concerns in society?
6. What do you think is your role as a poet to the community?
7. Do you think your poems have a positive impact in society? In what ways?
8. What was your defining moment as far as spoken word is concerned?
9. Who is your target audience?
10. What do you think attracts people to your performances?
11. Are there times when you feel you have not given the audience your best? Explain.
12. Have you ever participated in the Poetry Slam Africa? Tell me about it?
13. What motivated you to compose the poem “Mamu Lizi”?
14. In the poem you use a narrative style that is characteristic of oral narratives. Tell me more about that.
15. Tell me something about your spoken word poem entitled “Special Dedication to Ladies” which you performed on “Churchil Live”.

Stage name of the poet: Kennet B.

Real name: Kennedy Leakey Odongo

Sex: Male

1. How would you define spoken word in your own words?
2. Do you think there is a difference between spoken word and rap? Mention any specific differences between spoken word and rap.
3. What inspired you to start composing spoken word poems?
4. Who is your role model in the poetry world? What about the literary world in general?
5. Why did you choose spoken word as a medium to articulate your concerns in society?
6. What do you think is your role as a poet to the community?
7. Do you think your poems have a positive impact in society? In what ways?
8. What was your defining moment as far as spoken word is concerned?
9. Who is your target audience?
10. What do you think attracts people to your performances?
11. Are there times when you feel you have not given the audience your best? Explain.
12. Have you ever participated in the Poetry Slam Africa? Tell me about it?
13. You have a mentorship programme for upcoming spoken word poets. What qualities do you emphasize on as a trainer?
14. What influenced your composition of the spoken word poems entitled “Silent River” and “Green Talk”?
15. In both poems you have infused spoken word with music. Explain.
16. Most of your poems are presented in video form. Explain the effectiveness of this technique.

Stage name of poet: Mufasa

Real Name: Ken Kibet

Sex: Male

1. How would you define spoken word in your own words?
2. Do you think there is a difference between spoken word and rap? Mention any specific differences between spoken word and rap.
3. What inspired you to start composing spoken word poems?
4. Who is your role model in the poetry world? What about the literary world in general?
5. Why did you choose spoken word as a medium to articulate your concerns in society?
6. What do you think is your role as a poet to the community?
7. Do you think your poems have a positive impact in society? In what ways?
8. What was your defining moment as far as spoken word is concerned?
9. Who is your target audience?
10. What do you think attracts people to your performances?
11. Are there times when you feel you have not given the audience your best? Explain.
12. Have you ever participated in the Poetry Slam Africa? Tell me about it?
13. As one of the judges during the Poetry Slam Africa, what qualities do you look for in a poet?
14. What inspired you to compose your spoken word poem entitled “Son of a woman”?
15. What informed your choice of the title “Son of a Woman”?
16. The title resembles Charles Mangua’s novel *Son of a Woman*. Were you in any way influenced by that novel?
17. What motivated you and the other artists to compose the poem “Tumechoka”?
18. The poem is dramatized and presented in video form. How effective is this strategy?

Stage name of poet: Raya Wambui

Real Name: Raya Wambui

Sex: Female

1. How would you define spoken word in your own words?
2. Do you think there is a difference between spoken word and rap? Mention any specific differences between spoken word and rap.
3. What inspired you to start composing spoken word poems?
4. Who is your role model in the poetry world? What about the literary world in general?
5. Why did you choose spoken word as a medium to articulate your concerns in society?
6. What do you think is your role as a poet to the community?
7. Do you think your poems have a positive impact in society? In what ways?
8. What was your defining moment as far as spoken word is concerned?
9. Who is your target audience?
10. What do you think attracts people to your performances?
11. Are there times when you feel you have not given the audience your best? Explain.
12. Have you ever participated in the Poetry Slam Africa? Tell me about it?
13. What inspired you to compose the spoken word poem “I was not Made to amuse”?
14. In the poem you make references to Maya Angelou’s *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings* and “Phenomenal Woman”. Explain
15. What motivated you to compose the poem “Define and Conquer”?
16. What influenced your composition of the poem “The Bull in a china Shop”?
17. You have been described as a revolutionary poet by various sources including *Badilisha Radio*. Tell me more about that.

Stage name of poet: Elsaphan Njora

Real Name: Elsaphan Njora

Sex: Male

1. How would you define spoken word in your own words?
2. Do you think there is a difference between spoken word and rap? Mention any specific differences between spoken word and rap.
3. What inspired you to start composing spoken word poems?
4. Who is your role model in the poetry world? What about the literary world in general?
5. Why did you choose spoken word as a medium to articulate your concerns in society?
6. What do you think is your role as a poet to the community?
7. Do you think your poems have a positive impact in society? In what ways?
8. What was your defining moment as far as spoken word is concerned?
9. Who is your target audience?
10. What do you think attracts people to your performances?
11. Are there times when you feel you have not given the audience your best? Explain.
12. Have you ever participated in the Poetry Slam Africa? Tell me about it?
13. You are the director of EOP Nation, a platform for spoken word poetry. Tell me more about it.
14. What inspired you to compose the poem “Africa”?
15. In the poem you use the following saying, “The darker the berry the sweeter the juice”. Explain.

Stage name of poet: Dorphan

Real Name: Dennis Mutuma Mutua

Sex: Male

1. How would you define spoken word in your own words?
2. Do you think there is a difference between spoken word and rap? Mention any specific differences between spoken word and rap.
3. What inspired you to start composing spoken word poems?
4. Who is your role model in the poetry world? What about the literary world in general?
5. Why did you choose spoken word as a medium to articulate your concerns in society?
6. What do you think is your role as a poet to the community?
7. Do you think your poems have a positive impact in society? In what ways?
8. What was your defining moment as far as spoken word is concerned?
9. Who is your target audience?
10. What do you think attracts people to your performances?
11. Are there times when you feel you have not given the audience your best? Explain.
12. Have you ever participated in the Poetry Slam Africa? Tell me about it.
13. What inspired you to compose the spoken word poem entitled “Mum Aliishia”?
14. What motivated you to compose the poem “Najua”?
15. You infuse music to your spoken word poems during most of your performances.
How effective is this technique?
16. Comment on your use of sheng in most of your spoken word poems.
17. You have been quoted as saying that you will keep killing your characters until something is done. Tell me more about that.
18. Do you consider yourself as a revolutionary poet? Explain.

Appendix II: Interview Schedule with the Audience

1. How often do you attend spoken word performances?
2. What specifically draws you to spoken word performances?
3. Which spoken word poet(s) appeals to you more? Give reasons.
4. What is unique about the spoken word poet that makes him/her stand out from the rest?
5. Some spoken word poets make references to other artistic works like the novel. Does that influence your understanding of their poems?
6. How do the issues raised by the spoken word poets relate to your personal experiences?
7. Do you think the poets have done enough to capture the concerns of many Kenyans?
8. Has spoken word changed the way you view the world?

Appendix III: The Spoken Word Poems

Brigeddia

Mamu Lizi

Ni kawaida kamanda anapolwasili
Kwenye jukwa,
Sheria na masharti hutumika,
Saluti ishara ya heshima,
Na salamu.

It is customary, when the commander arrives
on the podium,
Terms and conditions apply,
Salute, a sign of respect,
And greetings.

Alikua mtoto mzuri,
Mwenye asili ya mtaa wa Dandora,
Mtaani walimuita Ami,
Miye nilimwita Amina,
Aliitwa Amina Mamu Susu

She was a good child,
Who hailed from Dandora area,
She was fondly referred to as Ami,
I preferred to call her Amina,
She was known as Amina Mamu Susu.

Alizaliwa mnamo tarehe tisa mwezi wa tisa,
Mwisho wa hiyo karne enzi za babu,
Alivyolelewa alifunzwa heshima,
Maadili, mila na desturi za kijamii,
Kwa jumla, adabu.

She was born on the ninth day of the ninth month
End of that century during my grandfather's time
She was brought up to learn to respect others
and to embrace the culture and traditions of
Her community.
In general, etiquette.

Ni kweli, mtoto umleavyo
Ndivyo akuavyo
Kweli Amina alivyolelewa,
Alikuwa na ustaarabu.
Alikuwa mwandani wangu wa karibu,
Tulifanya vingi pamoja,
Kama ni lishe tulikula pamoja,
Alipenda sana kuwa mama,
Nilipenda kuwa baba,
Enzi za cha mama na cha baba.

It's true that the manner in which a child is raised
Determines how he/she grows up to be.
True, how Amina was raised,
She was raised like royalty.
She was my close friend,
Playing, we played together,
If it was food we ate together,
She cherished her role as a mother,
I cherished my role as a father,
Those days of "cha mama na cha baba."

Nakumbuka akifanya mtihani,
Alifanya vyemana kutuzwa
Na bodi ya elimu ya mkoa,
Hivyo akawa anajulikana mjini
Na hata vitongojini.

Alikuwa ni mwana wa tisa
Na wa mwisho
Kwa familia ya mzee Mshoki.
Alipo maliza shule ya upili,
Akafanya vyema akajiunga na chuo kikuu
Akawa tena si mtoto,
Akawa mzima,
Hivyo akiwa chuo kikuu.

Alimaliza na kuingia chuo kikuu vizuri
Baadaye akakutana naye bwana Musa,
Yule jamaa ambaye walipendana kidogo,
Na akawa tena ni ndege wa mwingine,
Singeweza kumfikia ilivyo desturi,
Ila tuliwasiliana kwa ujumbe mfupi,

Harafa za hapa kule
Na pia kwenye mtandao.

Ni kweli, safari huanza kwa hatua,
Na tayari safari ya ndoa,
Alikuwa ameianza Mamu na Musa.
Walipendana sana kwa dhati,
Ungewaona kwa mbali,
Ungalidhani labda ni siku zao
Zile za harusi za kila siku
Manake kwao penzi
Ndio ilikuwa nguvu.

I remember when she did her exams,
She performed well and received an award
From the provincial board of education
This made her famous in the city,
And also in the villages.

She was the ninth born in her family
And the last born
In the family of Mr. Mshoki.
When she completed secondary school
She performed well and joined the university
She was no longer a child,
She was now an adult,
While she was at the university.

She completed and got into the university properly
She later met Mr. Musa,
The guy whom she was in love with for a while
And she was now somebody else's bird,
I couldn't reach her given the customs,
We only communicated to each other through short
Messages.

Letters here and there
And also on the internet.

It's true, a journey starts with one step,
And already the marriage journey,
Had been started by Mamu and Musa.
They loved each other earnestly,
Had you seen them from a distance,
You could have thought it was their
Usual wedding days,
Meaning that to them love
Was strength.

Musa alimtunza Mamu,
Na Mamu alimpenda sana,
Ila hayawi hayawi huwa.

Penzi kati ya Lizi Mamu na Musa,
Ilianza kudidimia,
Musa akawa harudi mapema nyumbani,
Akawa hamsikizi Mamu nyumbani,
Mamu akawa anawaza,
Ni kipi kilimfanya mumewe?
Alijaribu akaongee naye,
Isiyo zidi baada ya miezi sita, tisa hivi,
Akawa tena si wa kurudi tu amechelewa
Ila aliondoka asubuhi,
Na kurudi baada ya masiku kama saba.
Akawa tena hamruhusu Mamu,
Kwenda kanisani.
Anasahau majukumu yake kama mume,
Halipi kodi,
Na kila alipouliza Mamu,
Alimgeuza mitungi kumpiga na kumponda,
Hata kumvunja mabavu.

Basi alivyojaribu sana Mamu,
Ilimfika mwisho akaamua kuondoka,
Na kutorokea mjini Mwanza,
Amini usiamini,
Kule Mwanza alimpata jamaa mmoja,
Mwarabu aliyekuwa na ustarabu,
Aliyempeleka zahanati na kumtibu,
Na kumlipia hata matibabu,
Hivyo akawa anasikia vizuri,

Musa took good care of Mamu,
And Mamu loved him very much,
However, whatever is anticipated
To happen, eventually happens.
The love between Lizi Mamu and Musa
started wearing out,
Musa stopped coming back home early
He could not heed to Mamu's words in the house
Mamu was in deep thoughts,
What had become of her husband?
She tried to talk to him.
Within six to nine months,
he could not only come back home late
He also left in the morning,
And came back after seven days.
He could no longer allow Mamu,
To go to church.
He forgot his responsibilities as a husband
He could not pay house rent,
Whenever Mamu asked about it,
He turned her into a drum, beating and crushing her
Even breaking her ribs.

Eventually, after Mamu tried hard,
She reached a point of no return where she decided
To leave,
And ran to the town of Mwanza,
Believe you me,
In Mwanza, she met a certain guy,
An Arab who seemed noble,
Who took her to hospital and treated her
And paid for her medication,
She was feeling better now,

Akapata nafuu akaanza vibarua,

Ili amlishe mwanawe,

Na pia amshukuru Maulana,

Kwa maisha.

Nilipokuwa starehe zangu,

Za kule Mwanza,

Nilikutana naye Lizi,

Aliponiona nilimpata akiuza njugu,

kwa madirisha ya gari,

Ndiposa apate riziki,

Ila alinikimbilia na kunikumbatia,

Huku machozi yakimtiririka,

Sikujuwa yalikuwa ya raha,

Ama labda yalikuwa chungu,

Ila maisha yalianza kumwendea mrama

Mamu Lizi.

Ila nina swali tu,

Ni nani kati yenyu,

Kwenye karne ya ishirini na moja,

Ana haki ya kumpiga,

Ama kumponda mumeo?

Kati ya wanaume wote,

Ni nani kati yenyu,

Atachukua mke wa mtu,

Mtoto wa mtu,

Na kujifanya mbele ya altari,

Kumvisha pete

Kwa jina la baba, la mwana, la roho mtakatifu,

Kisha baadaye kumsahau

Na kumfanya mitungi,

Ila sina jibu.

She was healed and started working as a casual laborer

So as to feed her child,

And also to thank God,

For life.

When I was out having fun,

In Mwanza,

I met Lizi,

When she saw me, she was selling groundnuts,

To motorists through the window,

In order to earn a living,

But she ran to me and hugged me,

With tears rolling down her cheeks,

I wasn't sure if they were tears of joy

Or tears of sadness,

But life was not kind to

Mamu Lizi.

But I have one question,

Who among you,

In the twenty first century,

Has a right to beat up,

Or maim the husband?

Among all men,

Who among you,

Will take someone's wife,

Someone's child,

And pretend before the altar,

And give her a ring

In the name of the father, the son, and the holy spirit

Then later forget her

And turn her into a drum,

But I don't have an answer.

Na kawaida kamanda anapomaliza,
Sheria na masharti zile zile,
Saluti ishara ya heshima na salamu.

Special Dedication to Ladies

Hata uwe mwafrika mkenya
Hata uwe ni mkaazi wa Thika
Na unaskiza ngoma za kitambo
Kama za Les Wanyika
Hata uwe umefika au unashika
Mrembo wewe ni mdelicate
Na ningependa kukuona ukioga
Na sabuni ya Protex ikuprotect
Coz unaeza jikata ukioga na sabuni ya panga.

Education is the key,
Najua umesoma history, Geography
Na sahi una digrii but napenda
The fact that unapenda vile niko
Juu nimesoma packages

Mrembo. You are the only package
Huwezi pata hata uende kwa computer school
Nyumba yangu ina madirisha mbili
Lakini nikikuona itakuwa na madirisha kumi
Juu simu yako ni ya Windows eight.
Nimeguza elements kadhaa
Like Sodium, Lithium, magnesium, aluminium,
Na hizo pium pium zingine
Lakini mrembo wewe nimdelicate,
Wewe ndio unaweza react na heart yangu
Juu wewe ndio solute mimi ni solvent,

Normally, when the commander is done,
The same terms and conditions apply,
Salute, a sign of respect and greetings.

Translation

Whether you are a Kenyan African
Whether you are a resident of Thika
And you listen to old age songs
Like those sang by Les Wanyika
Whether you have accomplished or impressed
Beautiful lady, you are delicate,
And I would like to see you take a bath
With Protex soap for protection
Because you can harm yourself if you bath with
Panga soap.

Education is the key,
I know you have studied History, Geography,
And now you have a degree but I like
The fact that you love me for me
Because I have studied packages

Beautiful lady, you are the only package,
You cannot easily find even in a computer school.
My house has two windows,
But when I see you, it will have ten windows,
Because your phone is a Windows eight make.
I have touched several elements,
Like sodium, magnesium, aluminium,
And all those other pium piums,
But beautiful lady, you are delicate,
You are the one who can react with my heart,
Because you are the solute and I am the solvent.

Sisi ndio solution. (applause)

We are the solution.

Mrembo wewe ni msoft kuliko Microsoft

Beautiful lady, you are softer than Microsoft,

You are so excellent kuliko Microsoft Excel

You are more excellent than Microsoft Excel,

You are the only woman who has the power

You are the only woman who has the power,

To get me on point kuliko Microsft power point

To get me on point than Microsoft Power point.

Mrembo, you are the only virus installed in me

Beautiful lady, you are the only virus installed in me,

Na hawawezi kukutoa hata wakuje na anti-virus.

And they cannot remove you even if they use an
Anti-virus.

Ila ni kawaida kamanda anapoondoka

It is customary that when the commander

Kwenye jukwaa

leaves the podium,

Sheria na masharti hutumika,

rules and regulations have to be applied,

Saluti, ishara ya heshima

Salute as a sign of respect,

Na salamu.

And greetings.

Dan Oballa

Do not Say Bye to the Mau Mau

It's fifty years after the imperial flag fell,

Yet we still struggle with matters of identity,

Who are we?

And even after the American USAID

Has filled our bellies with yellow maize,

Still we are oppressed with matters of hunger (echo)

And even after the Chinese have upgraded

Our highways to super highways

And the Russians have rushed in

And upgraded our local *muratina* brew

To where you view vodka brew,

Still we can't get drunk to retain our sobriety

And complain about the rising VAT.

Si ati mtu anafanyanga kazi ana pesa
(It's not that one who works has money)
Saa zingine anapatanga tu na zinamtoroka
(Sometimes he just gets it and it runs away from him)
Anapatanga tu na zinamtoroka
(he just gets it and the and it runs away from him)

So what should we celebrate in the fifty years of uhuru?
Why should we celebrate the fifty years of uhuru
When the inheritors of the independence struggle
Have left us no inheritance?
Why should I say good bye to the Mau Mau that fought for uhuru?
Why should I say good bye to the Mau Mau
When daily I wake up to headlines of scandals of millions lost,
The next day the office with evidence goes up in smoke,
And the next day a political party is on a million dollar campaign launch?
Why should I say good bye to the Mau Mau?

So why should I say good bye to the Mau Mau?
Yet I know the sound from the subaltern,
Has not been heard.
East or west, east is just east of west
And west is just west of east.
We are just caught up in the midst of some geopolitical squabbles
That we cannot even comprehend
Not yet uhuru (This comes from the audience)

It is not yet uhuru.
Because the only difference I know that exists
Between China and America
Is that the Chinese mkopo (loan)
Is accompanied by watu wa mkono
(Is accompanied by casual labourers).
Why should I say good bye to Mau Mau.

Why should I say good bye to Mau Mau
When as a young man
I can't buy a birthday gift for my girl
I keep postponing it and I have done so
Till now I have reached the lake.
The old guards in the system don't want us to be
The old guards are afraid of a future in a system
That they know has nothing for anyone outside it.
Ayaye! They designed it.
And that's why you have these companies
That make money as public utilities
Yet they spend public money like private nitty gritties.

Why should I say good bye to the Mau Mau
When the system that disowned my father disinherits the son
And confines my sister to the smell of onions
As she tracks the scent of her mother who was a cook?
So the son becomes father and daughter becomes mother.
I can't say good bye to the Mau Mau.

I cannot say good bye to the Mau Mau
Because I know down town Nairobi
There is a woman sitting on the cold concrete
Begging for money and food along Kwame Nkuruma Street.
She is out on the street because she has no home
She has no home because she has no money
She has no money because she has no job
She has no job because she has no education
She has no education because her parents
Had no money for an education.
And the parents had no money for an education
Because the parents had no jobs
And the parents had no jobs
Because the parents didn't go to school

And the parents didn't have education
And the parents didn't have education
Because the money that should have built a school in Oyani,
Took someone to a trip in Miami
Where he spent the money generously on a high class whore.
And the whore then gave the money to a pimp
And the pimp then gave the money to the ultimate pimp,
The US government.
And now fifty years later, nearly fifty years later,
The money is on its way back to Kenyan soil,
A grant loan for free primary education.
Why should I say good bye to Mau Mau?
West or east we are still in the midst of a struggle.

Song: Kuna moto moto wa uhuru hayaye,
Kuna moto moto mapinduzi hayaye
Moto itachoma hawa wafisadi hayaye
Moto itachoma hawa wakabila hayaye.

So when society struggle to be colonized
When society struggle to be colonized
The pilau dish cannot be overlooked
Because you see the diversity in the ingredients
That make up the pilau
Is the richness of its flavour
But the more heat you add on the pilau
The more they stick together
The ingredients stick together like the oppressed,
But should you add a lot of heat and a lot of pressure
Then the pilau will burn
And if the pilau burns,
It could cause indigestion to the system.
Do not say good bye to the Mau Mau,
Because the Mau Mau shall return.
Peace.

DORPHAN

Mum Aliishia

Niliulizia nikaambiwa mum aliishia,
Ilikuwa sad sikuimbiwa,
Juu mum aliishia.
Sitaki kujudge juu sijui reason mum aliishia.

Ni birthday yangu leo
Yet another reason
Ya kumiss mum this year.

Nakupeleka '92
Previous year nilikuwa only two,
Place ni Timau,
Base ni kambi ya karau,
Usiniulize ni how?
Chali ya mother tena alikuwa ni karau,
Hiyo ni after wameachana na mbuyu,
If ever washawahi kuwa pamoja,
Ama alikuwa tu blunder,
Under influence ya booze,
Kuhit under the belt,
After belt kuwa lose,
Kuanguka kwa toja,
Break up after breaking lose,
Juu ni mwezi moja after,
Na period imehata,
Saa hiyo mi ni embryo
Nilishaanza kuform ,
Impulse za mother kwa system,
Zinaniinform ni kubaya nje,

Translation

I inquired and was told that mum went away,
It was sad they didn't sing for me,
Because mum went away.
I don't want to judge because I don't know the
The reason why mum went away.
It's my birthday today,
Yet another reason,
Of missing mum this year.

I take you to '92
I was only two the previous year,
The place is Timau
Dwellings is a police camp,
Don't ask me how?
My mother's boyfriend was a cop,
That is after they separated with my dad,
That is if they were ever together,
Or she was just a blunder,
Under the influence of alcohol,
He hit under the belt,
After the belt became lose
The falling down of the trouser,
Break up after breaking lose,
Because it is one month later,
And the period has been missed,
By then I am an ebyro,
I had already started forming,
My mother's impulse in the system,
They inform me the outside is bad,

Chances za mbuyu kukubali responsibility
Bado ni finje finje,
Statistics zinapoint kwa possibility za mi
Kuraiziwa up na single mum,
Noise maker tangu speech bado hijafom,
But kwa uterus nimeshikilia ambical cord
Kama mic,
Nikitegea turn yangu ya kuperform,
Defying the short sight,
Ya kuchukuwa the easy way out,
Yenye ingeniwacha kwa paper bag
Somewhere kwa dumpsite.

Mother amechoose ku go strong,
About forty weeks down the line,
June first nineteen eighty nine,
Madaraka day imegeuka labour day,
Kemi tatu kwa hewa
Amebarikiwa na mvulana,
Nabelieve,
Hii ilikuwa ni furaha kubwa sana kwake,
Nomani ati yani dame
Amepata motto nje ya ndoa
Na plus anahustle,
But familia ya akina baba mototo,
Ina uwezo.
So unaelewa ilikuwa tu hivyo wise,
Kupatiana mototo kwa kina baba yake.

Only that decades later,
Huyu mototo ni mtu mzima,
Na bado anahangaika juu vile ingekuwa,
Kaa angebringiwa up na mathake,
Baada ya kugrow na mbuyu

The chances of my father accepting responsibility
Is still fifty, fifty.
Statistics point to the possibility of me
Being raised by a single mum,
A noise maker before even forming speech,
But in the uterus I have held on to the ambical cord
like a microphone,
As I wait for my turn to perform,
Defying the short sight,
Of taking the easy way out,
That would have left me in a paper bag
Somewhere in the dumpsite.

Mum has chosen to go strong,
About forty weeks down the line,
June first nineteen eighty nine,
Madaraka day turned into labour day,
Three kemi in the air,
She is blessed with a boy,
I believe
This was great joy to her,
The problem is that the girl
Had given birth out of wedlock,
And plus she is financially unstable
But the family of the child's father,
Is financially stable.
So you understand it was just wise,
To give out the child to the father's family.

Only that decades later,
This child is now a grown up,
And is still unsettled of what could have been,
If he had been raised by the mother,
After growing up with the father,

Hakuwahi get hata kujuana
Juu aliwacha uzazi ufanywe
Na mamana babake.

Still pictures kwa album hazitoshi,
Kushikanisha hizi dash memory,
Za abandoned too early,
Anawonder kaa atawahi get kurecover,
His hushed history.

Wakati while about za mother
Ni their skeletons,
Kaa ziko cemetery
No wonder sometimes yeye hufeel,
Like he is just another baby sitting,
Juu hata then mother akiwa
Baby sitting mostly,
Kuna dada yake mdogo aliwachiwa,
Maswali anazo tena kibao,
But alisha sare kusaka answers,
Just incase zikuwe zikuwe
Source ya more pain zikijibiwa

Niliuliza nikaambiwa mum aliishia
Ilikuwa sad suimbiwa juu mum aliishia
Ni birthday yangu leo,
Yet another reason ya kumiss mum this year.

Najua

Najua jua litawaka na jua litatua,
Najua kuna kiangazi na kuna time ya mvua
Najua dua la kuku halimgusi mwewe
Ata wakikushuku usijishuku wewe

He never got to interact
Because he left parenting to be done,
By his mother and his father.

Still pictures in the album are not enough,
To hold together these dash memories,
Of being abandoned too early,
He wonders if he will ever get to recover
His hushed history

A time when while abouts of mother
Is their skeletons,
If they are in the cemetery,
No wonder sometimes he feels,
Like he is just another baby sitting,
Because even then if mother is around
Baby sitting mostly,
There is his little sister who was left in His care,
She has plenty of questions
But she already stopped looking for answers,
Just incase they become
The source of more pain when answered

I asked and was told mum went away
It was sad they did not sing for me because mum
went away
It's my birthday today,
Yet another reason to miss mum this year.

Translation

I know the sun will shine and the sun will set,
I know there is drought and there is time for rain.
I know the kick of a hen cannot touch the hawk,
Even when they doubt you, don't doubt yourself,

Najua... najua...

Yeah!

Niliambiwa nitakuwa nikikua

Mi nakwambia utakuwa ukitaka kuwa

Anza sahi kutafuta three nje ya D

Baller uta'feed rims.

Nakumbuka nikiwa mtoi na big dreams

Ka kuonekana sura kwa big screens

Kuwa notoriously BIG name kwa big teams,

Nakumbuka niki'dream mi ni king na'live

kwa palace,

nikisorora dare

Nacheiki my secret admiration

kando na' imagine

yee ndio queen pale pale.

leo vacation tuko kwa beach Comoros

Tomorrow, honeymoon

tumeenda kutalii Paris,

Kuzinduka niko kwa mathree Utalii,

naelekea tao,

Saa hizo

nili'have kukaa stage masaa ka mbili

Juu nimepoteza mbao

ndio fare ishuke at least na mbao

Naenda ku'perform

event organizer hanilipi

Anadai kuni'appreciate

Na'hope afike at least kithao.

Hii ndio ile time ya mwezi,

si unajua vile ku uenda

Landlord kishaanza knock knock

kwa milango za hao,

I know... I know...

Yeah!

I was told I will grow when I grow

I tell you you will grow if you want to grow

Begin now to look for three outside The D

Baller you will feed rims.

I remember when I was a child with big dreams

Like my face appearing on big screens

Being notoriously BIG name on big teams

I remember dreaming I was king living in

a palace,

When I look around the classroom

I see my secret admiration

Beside I imagine

She is queen at that moment.

Today vacation we are on the beach in Comoros

Tomorrow, honeymoon

We've gone to tour Paris

Waking up I am in a *matatuat* at utalii,

Heading to town,

At that time

I had to spent two hours at the bus stage,

Because my twenty shillings was lost

So that the fare can go down at least by twenty shillings

I go to perform

The event organiser doesn't pay me

He claims to appreciate me

I hope he gives me at least one thousand.

This is that time of the month,

Don't you know how it goes?

When the landlord starts knock knock

on the doors of the others,

Najua nimekanyaga landmine,
nilishapitisha deadline.

Na'wish amesahau.

Najua hiyo rent nitalipa,
noma ni eti sijui ni how.

Najua jua litawaka na jua litatua,
Najua kuna kiangazi na kuna time ya mvua,
Najua dua la kuku halimgusi mwewe,
Ata wakikushuku usijishuku wewe,
Najua... najua...

Rush hour tic toc kwa city clock
Bado tic toc mkononi kwa mbota,
Dark hour meli ya success kwa dock
Bado haijatia nanga
But bila darkness siwezi ona nyota
So bado mi naota
Na bado tunaota.

Yeah, bado mi naota,
Ata ka jana kwa ndoto nimejiona mi ni star
Only to wake to the fact that jirani,
hanijui jina
Kisirani inaingia nataka ni'quit hii journey
But the star in me amelenga hawezi zima,
Ananikumbusha distance haizidi kina,
So bado mi naota,
Bado mi naota na sitachoka ku'wait,
Naota juu ya shibe
Time kila mtu atakuwa na reason
ya kuingia gym kukata weight

I know I have stepped on a landmine,
I have gone beyond the deadline.

I wish he has forgotten.

I know I will pay the rent
Problem is I don't know how.

I know the sun will shine and the sun will set
I know there is drought and there is time for rain,
I know the kick of a hen cannot touch the hawk,
Even when they doubt you, don't doubt yourself,
I know... I know...

Rush hour tick tock on the city clock
Still tick tock on the hand watch
Dark hour the ship of success in the dock
It has not yet docked
But without darkness I can't see the stars,
So am still dreaming
And we are still dreaming.

Yeah, am still dreaming,
Even if yesterday in my dreams I saw myself as a
star,
Only to wake up to the fact that my neighbour
doesn't know my name,
Bad luck comes in I want to quit this journey,
But the star in me has ignored she can't go off.
She reminds me that distance cannot go beyond
measure,
So am still dreaming,
Am still dreaming and I will not tire of waiting,
I dream about satisfaction
Time when everyone will have reason
To get to the gym and cut weight

naota juu ya day nitaamka nikose news
 bila story za ajali na vita,
 naota juu ya time ntakuwa
 napita mtaani usiku saa nne
 na same safe feeling
 ya kutembea mtaani mchana saa sita,
 naota juu ya wakati kila mtoto
 atakuwa na nafasi ya kukalia
 dawati na kuelimika na si kuenda
 kuchakura chakula kwa pipa.
 naota juu ya siku offense itakuwa taboo.
 ata game ya foota
 haitakuwa inahitaji goalkeeper
 Yeah, bado mi noata
 Bado mi naota na sitapoa,
 Nitaota mpaka nihakikishe mi na wewe,
 Sisi wote tumetoboa,
 Mi ni ule msee u'believe in commitment
 Na hii kwangu ni kama ndoa,
 Uliza mahali utasikia mahari nilishatoa,
 Najua nitatoboa, najua tutatoboa,
 Juu huyu poet ni kama Noah,
 Na hii piece ni redemption song,
 Imekuja kukomboa.

Najua jua litawaka na jua litatua,
 Najua kuna kiangazi na kuna time ya mvua,
 Najua dua la kuku halimngusi mwewe,
 Hata wakikushuku usijishuku wewe,
 Najua... najua...

Najua kila mtoto huwa na ndoto,
 Ndoto za ku'excel ka kuwa mkubwa

I dream of the day I will wake up and not get news
 Without stories of accidents and wars,
 I dream of the time when I will
 pass in the streets at ten in the night
 the same feeling
 Of walking in the streets at mid-day
 I dream of the time every child
 Will have the chance of sitting on
 A desk and get educated and not to go
 And search for food in dust bins.
 I dream of the day when offence will be taboo.
 Even the game of football
 Will not require a goalkeeper.
 Yeah, am still dreaming.
 Am still dreaming and I will not stop
 I will dream till I ensure you and I,
 All of us have succeeded,
 Am this guy who believes in commitment
 And to me this is like marriage,
 Ask somewhere you will hear dowry has already
 Been given.
 I know I will make it, I know I will make it,
 Because this poet is like Noah,
 And this piece is redemption song,
 It has come to redeem.

I know the sun will shine and the sun will set,
 I know there is drought and there is time for the rain,
 I know the kick of a hen cannot touch the hawk,
 Even if they doubt you, don't doubt yourself,
 I know... I know...

I know every child has a dream,
 Dreams to excel and become big

Uanze kuvaa shati XXL
Ndoto za kupata pesa wakuite sonko,
Ndoto za kuvusha familia msoto,
Kwanza vile we huumia
ukiona baba akipiga kokoto.
Ndoto za kushinda pia wewe,
hizo medali na tuzo
Ndoto za kuendesha pia wewe
hizo Ferrari na Muso,
Ndoto za ku'entertainkama Cane
Ulipuliwe baruti kwa wresso
Ndoto za kupigiwa saluti ka orezzo,
Ndoto za kuunganisha ka Martin Luther,
Watu wote waishi pamoja bila bugha,
Ndoto za kuhamazisha ka Jimmi Gathu,
Mwache mipango za kando nyinyi watu!
Najua hizi ndoto zitatimia
na ushuhuda utapeanwa na kiatu.

Najua jua litawaka na jua litatua ,
Najua kuna kiangazi na kuna time ya mvua,
Najua dua la kuku halingusi mwewe,
Hata wakikushuku usijishuku wewe
Najua... najua...

Rush hour tic toc kwa city clock
Bado tic toc mkononi kwa mbota,
Dark hour meli ya success kwa dock
Bado haijatia nanga
But bila darkness siwezi ona nyota,
So bado mi naota
Na bado tunaota.

And star putting on XXL
Deams of getting money so they call you "sonko",
Dreams of moving your family from poverty,
In fact the way you feel troubled
Seeing your dad mixing ballast.
Dreams of you too winning
Those gold medals and prizes,
Dreams of you too driving
Those Ferrari and Muso
Dreams of being entertaining like cane,
You receive praises in wrestling
Dreams to be saluted like the president,
Dreams to bring unity like MartinLuther,
All people to stay together without issues,
Dreams of awareness like Jimmy Gathu,
Leave clandestine relationships you people,
I know those dreams will be fulfilled
And the testimony will be given by the shoe.

I know the sun will shine and the sun will set,
I know there is drought and there is time for rain,
I know the kick of a hen cannot touch the hawk,
Even if they doubt you, don't doubt yourself
I know... I know...

Rush hour tick tock on the city clock
Still tick tock on the watch on my hand
Dark hour the ship of success on the dock
It has not yet docked
But without darkness I can't see the stars,
So am still dreaming
And we are still dreaming.

El Poet

Paranoid

A Teardrops, cold,
Rolled on the cheek tracks,
Bold on the outside,
Animal insight,
These sights, this site,
Snow this white,
Still, snow white,
Her face so white...
Life poisoned...
This is the story of life's paradox,
Low hums, measured breaths, I start this poem,
They said you have a weak character
If you did not come from Europe or America
We were inferior that even our dreams
Failed to match our superiors,
When we closed our eyes,
We saw shackles,
Chains and whips under our eyelid's interiors,
It's serious...how,
We went from learning in college,
To buying knowledge,
Paying homage to our egocentrism,
Ethnocentrism running deep in our blood
Streams, bad dream, world grim,
Facts seem, twisted.
Supreme regimes run this world.

I am paranoid, all these conspiracy theories,
in diaries of an innocent muslim
do seem to get under my skin
and are tearing every dermal layer,

I need every humble prayer,
Sample player to play the fusing amazing music,
Of my musings, cruising in my mind,
My central system, nervous,
Sending chills through my epithelial tissues,
Issues when I kiss my girl good bye
When I leave home
Because I've grown a tall goatee,
And I'm not near forty,
My position far from lofty,
Policemen, mostly the ones naughty
Stop me and force me
To produce my identification roughly...
“KIJANA WAPI KITAMBULISHO?
NA UNAFUGIA NANI NDEFU
NA HUJAFIKA MIAKA YA KUMEA MAFUZI?
UNAFANYIA KAZI ARSHAPAPU?
WE WARIA YA WAPI?

I am a tonne paranoid,
I beg you to see past my fault
Of wrongful assault,
Default my dreams of the bitterness
Of taking this poem with a grain of salt,
Halt my mixture of fear and anger,
Lock them in a vault,
Exalt me to your level of intelligence
For in as much as I'm Somali by origin,
I'm Kenyan by nationality.

So I hover to the sky feeling,
Relieved from the crust
Kneeling, dealing with awkward stares
From once upon a time, friend,

After the recent bombing trends
Because I'm suddenly a terrorist as my hair is soft,
My complexion suspicious
And my religion, Muslim.
Fear results to panic which results to ignorance
Which leads to irrationality.

So before you switch your mode to destroy,
Think of yourself as a decoy,
Deployed by western nations
To finish their kill ploys...
I am paranoid.

I can't seem to rest,
For I feel like the rest,
They are spying for the next gullible pest,
And I feel like they are using
The whole sat elite system
To guess the estimate of the size
Of the beating flesh that rest within my chest.

Arrest me if you want to
I feel like they are coming for me...
But armed with these neural linguistic, semantics,
Drastic and psychic prowess
I AM READY FOR THEM,
Or may be not...

I choose to sleep, to dream,
But these dreams haunt me,
I dream negatively,
In my dreams,
I sail beneath the dark streets of Gotham,
My safety lying on the back of a bat.

Shedding burning tears
Of a world in a mist of devastation,
Where the only hope to a new revolution
Is losing brothers and sisters to stampedes
And mass action protests,
We profess to protest and protect
Our lives only when we feel right
And so we get pinned down like flyers on boards.

But I chose to smile
Because the joker in this dark knight
Urges me to smile,
To keep smiling...in colours.
To smile when I bleed,
To smile when in need
To smile so that when freed,
From these burning chains and shackles,
We will be, joyously sad.

We will accept one another,
Wairimu will marry Omondi,
And Ahmed will be invited for tea every weekend.
For with love we get to feed the empty
Rumbling stomachs of a hundred tortured souls
That starve us of freedom.
And for the ones that lost their lives,
In the street parades and mosques and church crusades
When those animals, guns they sprayed, blew grenades...
I prayed.
May your souls rest in eternal peace.
And for these brutal animals,
May your soul rest in eternal piss,
From the kidneys of the children
You left without parents

And the parents you left childless.
God has plans for the heroes and the villains.

And lastly, let us use spoken word
To bridge the gap between the informed
And the ignorant who are swayed everyday
Into terrorist camps.
Peace, love, unity
And more peace, love and unity.

Alas, the brittle glass cuts through soils
And spoils of war,
Body recoils and toils in low,
Hums and measured breathes, I dream,
My pen bleeding on this empty desperate stage,
Creating this mental invisible connection with it,
So I pray not to wake up...
Let us all dream, but in my dream, I VENT!!!

(Extracted from: elpoet.blogspot.co.ke/2012/12/kwani-litfest-paranoid.html?m=1)

Elsaphan Njora

Africa

For many years this place
Was shamed as a dark continent
In many utterances it still is
While the world moved on in chorus,
We stuck to the past,
A path to independence was in knots.

Now we birth leaders to the free wold,
Oscar award winners on the first try
Africa, the new frontier

Ladies and gentlemen,
I present to you, the dark continent
After all the darker the berry
The sweeter the juice
With flavours the world is yet to abuse,
As present to you the sweeter shade
This dark continent.

After all, who said the dark is no light?
The darker the night the clearer the sky,
The clearer the sky the clearer the stars,
And who doesn't love a clear night with the stars?
Africa, that's what we all are.
All one billion sons and daughters and counting,
We are constellations all of us we are,
We have been through too much,
And more is to come,
Yet we will push this envelop
To burst in the seams,
With creativity to wow even the dullest of sins.

We are the leaders of our own destiny,
Oh yes we are, oh yes we can,
Oh yes we have and oh yes we will continue.
Let me tell you something,
The world is not ready
For what Africa has to offer,
That is why they will try
To push us to the curve
Giving us names and labels,
But we don't mind
After all royalty can never
Be referred to as commoners.

This is our time my fellow princes and princesses,
Take your arms of hope
And establish a dominion,
This is our time to rule
And when the nay sayers speak
Of their opinion,
Questioning our tenacity in our resolve
Respond like the resounding alarm
Of our drums in war. (pause)
What do you think?

(Njora is the founder and director of EOP NATION)

KENNET B.

Green Talk

The much talked of atmospheric crack
Is getting larger,
And this could be the beginning
Of the worst human witnessed natural disaster.
The non-wanted race 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,
How sad.

But sometimes I dream of a greener environment,
And I feel thrilled
Seeing seedlings being planted by kids.
Environmental concern is what makes I speak.
Mother nature's illness is almost becoming impossible to treat,
We need to insist on acting,
Before all the ecosystem fall in.

The rocks underneath are not resting in peace,
The ozone layer is depleting,
Scientists are giving briefings,
But the fear of how sad this earth will seize to be,
Is what makes us think it is a ...
We are in a catastrophic feat
The globe is gaining more heat,
Something strange is cycling upon,
Something strange is cycling upon,
Something strange is cycling upon,
From the epicentres the plate tectonic are reaping apart,
The home of our dreams.

Song: 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.

In deed there are this gradual repercussions,
That are worsening the humanitarian crisis
At the horn of Africa.
The MDGs will not rescue millions from dying thirsty,
Not unless tree planting becomes a mandatory responsibility,
Within each and every family.
And this should be done speedily.

Those who are booking space in space,
Already know that the earth is in a weary state.
Statements supporting this to appear in our daily press.
Let's now check keenly the current state of our state,
If the availability of free clean drinking water,
Has already been limited to the rich,

Then why don't we honestly unite
In reversing the angry reception
That the future
Has already decide for us?
The type of security that will be granted
To super market water shelves
Will be tighter than that of the current oil wells.
And after the introduction of the thirst quenching pills,
Our economic burden will be declared the heaviest,
Because the price of each and every tablet
Would be the cheapest.
Aquamist will only remain available at the ceremonies
Of future king and queens.
And if not so then as an executive brand of H2O.
Its bottles will remain locked in the cabinets of CEOs,
And it won't be news to hear that,
Something people thought that
After collapsing for a kilometre,
Tap water queue, the longest seen at the GWC
Or rather Government Water Centre.
Heed the prophesy of Kennet B.

Song: 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.

Amani

Akilini niko na waraka written,
In our own urban grammar,
But kwanza kabla sijaenda further,

Translation

In my mind I have a written epistle
In our own urban grammar,
But first before I go further,

Nawapigia asante kwa kunyamaza
Kwenye hii chapter nita-deal na amani,
Kama chanzo cha usalama,
So kama mlikuwa mumekosana,
Basi chukueni hii nafasi,
Kuongelešana pia mkiombana msamaha.

Ni bendera ya amani ndio tutaifwata,
Hebu salimia jirani yako ukimwambia amani,
Naye pia akujibu amani first
Before umwulize anaitwa nani.

Kutoka deep ndani ya ghetto,
Hadi ubabini mali watu-able
Hutuliza kila meal na apple
Its important peace ipewe chance
Resources i-distributiwe equitably to all
The disabled pia wasapotiwe
Bila getting tribal.
Mi sipendangi kuwa na ma-rival,
Hata water melon iko na many colours,
But they all combine in their different forms,
To make one big sweet ita
So sioni why our different tribe set,
Should stop us from building
One clean rich nation.

Vitality ya love inafaa ipreachiwe,
Na wisdom must be written
In the holier books of Quran and the Bible.
The writing that keep encouraging us
To share each and every little possession,
As we spell down to Sodom.

I thank you for being quiet.
In this chapter I will deal with peace,
As the essence of security,
So if you had personal differences,
Then take this opportunity,
To communicate and reconcile.

It's the flag of peace that we will follow,
Kindly greet your neighbour by saying peace
And let him too reply peace first
Before asking for his name.

From deep within the ghetto,
To the suburbs where the rich
Accompany every meal with an apple
It's important for peace to be given a chance
Resources to be equitably distributed to all
The disabled should also be supported
Without getting tribal.
Personally I don't like keeping rivals
Even water melon has many colours,
But they all combine in their different forms
To make one big sweet –ita.
So I don't see why our different tribe set,
Should stop us from building
One clean rich nation.

The vitality of love should be preached,
And wisdom must be written
In the holier books of Quran and the Bible.
The writing that keep encouraging us
To share each and every little possession,
As we spell down to Sodom.

Whoever sacrifices for love,
Should be given his/her standing ovation.
Naomba moto takatifu ichome
Greed and corruption.
Kama sote tumeshiba
Niambieni ni nani atakuwa na shida?
Na inajulikana wazi ati bila njaa
Amani mtaani hutungarisha kaa taa.
Na kaa unakataa
Basi wewe ndio unajinyima chance inayofaa,

Hebu salimia jirani wako
Ukimwambia amani
Naye akujibu amani first
Before umwulize anaitwa nani.

Si munaona wisdom ndani ya teaching
Ndio inaleta peace everlasting?
Hebu sasa saidia jirani anayelia
Hana any kwa sahani,
Na uone vile mbegu ya Amani inamea
Ni kaa imepandwa ni shambani.
Kukataa hadi mume ni roho safi
Na kama sijalemewa ni gharama
Mbona nikitupe unachokitaka?
Then more peace itakuwa there?
Lakini usipoongea
Mimi nitajuaje eti unaumia?
Nami nikinyamaza
Nani atanisikiza?
Na vile duniani watu
Wanakimbizana na mapelka
Hadi gizani ndani ya ndinga.

Whoever sacrifices for love,
Should be given his/her standing ovation.
I pray for the holy fire to burn
Greed and corruption.
If we are all satisfied
Tell me who will have a problem?
And it's common knowledge that without hunger
Peace In our estates will light us like a lamp.
And if you refuse
Then you are the one denying yourself a well
deserved chance.

Kindly greet your neighbour
Telling him/her peace
Let him/her reply peace too first
Before you ask for his/her name.

Don't you see wisdom in teaching
Is what brings everlasting peace?
Kindly now assist a neighbour who is crying
He doesn't have anything on his plate,
And see how the seed of peace grows
Like it has been planted in a farm.
To refuse a husband is good will
And if am not burdened with expenses
If I already know that if you get it
Then there will be more peace?
But if you don't talk
How will I know that you are suffering?
And if I too keep quiet
Who will listen to me?
And yet in the world people are
Chasing after mapelka
Till dark inside vehicles.

Hebu salimia jira wako
Ukimwambia Amani
Naye pia akwambie amani first
Before umwulize anaitwa nani.
Pokea ku-share ku-spare
Kumwagia mbolea tunaowalea
Is an adventure word pursuing with prayer.

And finally before nishuke jukwani,
Mbona tusianze kusalimiana “hi”
Tukijuliana hali
Au kuna mtu ana-deny?
Kama hakuna basi let’s all stand up
And feel free to visit every part of this nation
Tukipanda mbegu ya Amani.
But before tuanze safari
Hebu salimia jirani wako
ukimwambia Amani
naye pia akujibu Amani
before umwulize anaitwa nani.

Silent River

(In memory of Prof. Wangari Maathai)

The humming bird has flown away,
Far far away,
Leaving behind the living files,
That will forever hold memories,
In the land where she belong.
Another related breaking news is that,
The fire in the forest is rapidly
Spreading towards our doorstep.

Kindly greet your neighbour
Telling him peace
And let him too tell you peace first
Before asking for his/her name.
Receive to share to spare
Pouring fertilizer to those we raise
Is an adventure word pursuing with prayer.

And finally before I leave the podium
Why don’t we start saying “hi”
As we check on each other
Or is there someone who is of a different opinion?
If there is none, then let’s all stand up
And feel free to visit every part of this nation
As we plant the seed of peace.
But before we start the journey
Kindly greet your neighbour
Telling him peace
And let him too reply peace
Before asking for his /her name.

Song: River, river,
Oh I remember,
When you used to be,
A silent river.

I here am asking
Those who are still cutting down trees
Up in the hills,
Are you aware that the cry
Of the remaining birds
Are not the sweetest songs
That you used to dance?
But are the mourning melodies
Dedicated to the miserable globe
Spinning away towards a road
The dirge that the tea leaves are singing
Is in the wind that is seeking
Some more of those that are wilting.

Song: River river,
Oh I remember,
When you used to be
A silent river.

Moshi ya makaa bado inaonekana tena milimani
Ni ukweli tusipojihadhari 2030 itafika
Kaa vision bado iko mbali.
Si utani juu hata maji ya mother nature
Tayari yanakauka duniani
Misitu zinageuzwa viwanja vya mifupa
Oh no my poor homeless birds,
Ni ukweli walimwengu hawana huruma.

Charcoal smoke can still be seen again in
Mountains,
It's true if we don't take care 2030 will reach
When the vision is still far.
It's no joke because even mother nature's
Water
Is already drying up
Forests are turned into fields of bones
Oh no my poor homeless birds,
It's true Human beings have no mercy.

Song: River river

Oh I remember

When you used to be

A silent river.

It is sad to see the strings

That hold our ecosystem zikikatika.

Naona picha ya future mama mazingira

Alituachia ikikaribia enyi walimwengu

Arise and change the concept of our protest

And let the placards read:

“No more cutting of trees,”

Instead of: “No more increment of salaries,”

Because after all

There is no tomorrow we are saving for,

If we cannot volunteer

In curing our environment today.

This is a debt that we will surely have to pay.

It is sad to see the strings

That hold our ecosystem break.

I see the picture of future mother environment

The one she left for us drawing near you humans

Song: River river,

Oh I remember

When you used to be

A silent river.

Where else shall we run for cover

When every other hiding place

Is already experiencing the serious impacts

Of the natural disasters

That are striking at their higher notes.

The polar bears are sinking

The ozone layer is thinning

Thunderous lightning are striking

And all the other natural water levels are shrinking.

Ni nini tuta-do

Ili spirits za mama trees

Zi rest in peace?

As a button is received to win a race,

In whose complexion she believed,

And I still ask

Ni lini tutawacha kuangamiza mazingira

Which is now bleeding, mourning,

Seeking to be healed,

After the departure of mama mazingira

Mother nature will always remember you,

By your name, Hon. Wangari Maathai.

what will we do

so that the spirits of mother trees

May rest in peace?

When will we stop destroying the environment

After the departure of mother environment,

Song: River, river,

Oh I remember,

When you used to be,

A silent river.

River, river,

Oh I remember,

When you used to be,

A silent river.

Mufasa

MUFASA

Son of a Woman

Take me back take me back,

Take me way back,

Make me a foetus in my mother's womb,

And her pregnant again.

Just take me way way back,

Take me to the day

My father already with another wife,

Asked my mother to move in with him.

Then take me with him.
I wanna ask him if he wants my mother
Because can't live without her or he can have her.
And take me through his life
When he was a kid,
When he was young
When he was growing up.
I wanna know if I am my father
Or if I am nothing like my father,
Coz I have looked in the mirror
And I him.
But may be perhaps the blame is on him
Because he didn't stay long enough in my life.

See when I was a kid
My father was the strongest man in the whole town,
But I trusted undertaker more than I trusted my dad.
You see I trusted undertaker to win more fights
Than I trusted my dad.
Am from Andy
As I grew up I knew Bond & the whisky
Before James Bond was my favourite actor.
And I remember as a kid eating soil was normal,
Throwing spoons was cool,
And to top it all soaking bread in water was epic.
But when I finally grew up
I preferred the mum that slapped me
When I had soil on my hands
Than the dad that said, "Let him be."
But now I am grown alright?
I am a man alright but still
I am a son of a woman.
A black woman.
Black because she is too

I am a son of a woman, a black woman.
This woman I call mama she is strong,
And I am not talking muscles here
But even if I was she is stronger than that
Who made a girl pregnant and ran away.

I am a son of wangari Maathai,
A son of the forest mama Africa,
I have got paws for hands,
I push away negativity with so much force,
I am a lion on toes.
A lion today because yesterday
My mother did a test
And
I told her about my bad days
But she never told me about her sleepless night,
And I am a son of a band
The nib on your biro pens
I am one shaped up by your handwriting,
I am not for education, simple,
Because my mother chose to go
To the boxing ring and face Mike Tyson.
She was on her
So all my years I cannot forget
I am a son of a woman
Who fought for education
Who starved so I could be educated.

And I am a son of a voice,
A voice of a woman a voice of Fatuma
Single mother living positively with HIV
That she did not seek to have
When she chose to love a man
Who did his manly duties alright?

He went out and brought home food and HIV,
So she made him food to eat
While he made her take ARV pills after those meals.

Yes this is for a woman, alright?
This is for the woman whose husband has never hit her,
But don't tell her she doesn't know violence
Coz her husband actually pushed her aside
By sleeping around with younger women,
When her body was disfigured by giving birth
To the four kids they have.

This is for that woman in Ahero with muscles on her eyes,
Because she has managed to push back tears,
So that children cannot see her pain,
Because it hurt when her husband died,
It hurt when she was forced to be inherited
By her late husband's brother.
It hurt.

I know of men who fight with their fists,
I know of soldiers with guns, pistols that fit,
I know of people who run away from battles with their feet,
And I know of a woman, a simple woman,
But who in life has fought more battles than
We don't fight as we know,
And I know I am also a son of a man.
A man who asked what my was,
When I was in form three.
And I know of a man living on a fifth floor,
Who will not see my point of view,
But let me insist,
God made man first,
But God made woman to last.

The First Time

You always sat in front of me, in class,
If you ever asked me to watch your back,
I will tell you it will not be the first time, I do that,
You, you made men in our class politicians,
And made yourself politics
So they couldn't keep you off their mouth.
I made myself a clerk
So I could just sit there
Watch you watch them, and read.

So the first time you asked me, I was confused
The first time you asked me to enter your world,
I was confused,
I quickly took off my shoes,
Didn't know if I was supposed to,
But I told myself if your world
Was anything like your neck or your eyes,
With sunshine that swallows the movements
In my capillaries just to hold me in shock,
Then I had to.

Of course your words were not always in black and white,
But I understood you when you said
You will name the crooked parts of me
Cross and keep them in my diary as badly parts of me.
So I extended my arms like roots,
And told you I would hold you down,
And for those three years you were here
We never talked about Valentines.
I mean what is 14th on a February?
When I could leave you breathless on 13th and 10th and 1st of July.

You left in September,
And October and November were enough
To make my inside change from Amazon to Alaska.
Just when my skin had started to whisper in Brazilian.

Two weeks, two weeks after you left,
You didn't break my heart,
My heart was too surprised to break.
At least not immediately
I had tattooed your life in my body
Those hot showers and scrubbing myself
Would not rub off your memory
Your voice was still a scar,
I couldn't trust on my skin
Forget the bruises your goodbye left me.

If what we shared was true,
It would have been enough to give you the strength
At least to pick up your phone
To drag me through my blindness
Because I swear I smell weakness
When you couldn't lift your phone to answer my calls,
But I called your name anyway,
Even though it didn't slip through my tongue like it just did
Instead it moon walked out
As if to ask me "Who's bad?"
If you would have taught me how to fall for you
Because now...(I don't know what's up today).

MUFASA, TEARDROPS, JULIANI, SARABI AND MAJI MAJI

Tumchoka

Kenya fifty plus one na bado tuko minus,	Kenya is fifty plus one and yet we are still minus,
Juu kuna watu Fulani hawatu-mind us,	Because there are certain people who don't care for us,
Wananchi tuna-mind	citizens we mind,
mbona walafi watuongoza?	Why are the greedy leading us?
Wanatutawala juu wametugawanya.	They rule over us because they have divided us.

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!

Tumchoka kuibiwa,	We are tired of being stolen from,
Tumchoka kuigizwa,	We are tired of dramatization,
Tumchoka	We are tired,
Kupewa ahadi	Of being given promises,
Kunyimwa miradi,	Denied projects,
Ooh ooh aah aah aah	Ooh ooh aah aah aah
Wananchi tunang'ang'ana	Citizens we are scrambling
Kila siku tunapambana,	Everyday we are struggling,
Na tumchoooka!	And we are tired!
Wananchi tunang'ang'ana	Citizens we are scrambling,
Kila siku tunapambana.	Every day we are struggling.

I wonder kama Turkana kuna bar,
Kama iko ni moja, inaitwa baa la njaa,
Sunday best ya hustler pajama kwa mtoi wa prezii,
Mifuko za waheshimiwa ni kama amboseli,
Zimejaa na mandovu,
Mifuko za wananchi ni kama akili ya mheshimiwa,
Hazinanga kakitu.

Hizi vidole zimekonda kwa njaa
Zitastrangle shingo zimenona kwa kunyakua.
Imefika point tunachagua machozi
Ya tear gas kupigania haki
Ama ya mtoto tukikosa doh ya hosi,
Hao wako huko wakigonganisha glasi,
Wakigawanya kandarasi,
Pate tenda bila utendakazi.

M: Miaka nenda miaka rudi stori ni vile

P: Tumechoka

M: Ukibeba mzigo kila siku one day I say,

P: Utachoka

M: So we have to push for change

P: Tumechoka

M: First I have to change myself

P: Nimechoka

M: Nachukua hatua

P: Nimechoka

M: I hope tuko pamoja wewe na wewe aiseh!

P: Ooh ooh aah

NAMATSI LUKOYE

Queen

(Namatsi Lukoye ft Val and Raggz)

Song: Elelele elelele...

Uwezo ninao wa kufanya nitakacho,
Kiongozi naonyasha njia ya kustawi.

There is a queen inside me,
Yearning to shine,
Queen makeda of Sheba, deep inside,
Comfortable in her skin, size and shape,
Needs no assuring, she knows she is it,
Past the make-up, her beauty is skin deep,
It's her light, just look in her eyes,
It's her heart, the warmth it has,
It's her feet, the strength they have,
That makes her stand, as the world shakes,

Song: Ni mwanamke shupavu,
Mwanamke mvumilivu,
Yeye kiongozi,
Mwanamke mlinzi.

Nzinga, queen of Matamba,
It's her might, oh she is a mountain,
A flowing river, that souls confide in,
Jabber, it's the confidence in her stride.
Tie the Nubian queen,
Black and beautiful, and shape with pride,
A master in the home, and a slave for love,
She is a winner of hearts, this queen inside,
I need to find, because I want to be her.

Song: Eleleelele

Lelelelele

Ieieie

Aah.

There is a queen inside me, of charm and worth,
Cleopatra, beauty doesn't come perfectly designed
From a golden rib.

She takes no less, no compromise,
She knows her place, and rules it right,
It's her uniqueness, that makes them bow.

Amina queen of Zaria, she is proud to be different,
Beyond doubt, she is reason,
The whisper of love, the slap of treason,
The great

Song: Eeéh eeéh

Malikia,

Mimi malikia.

The simple woman, when she falls,
She flips the world, upside down,
It doesn't suppress, she blocks it out,
So it doesn't distress.

Nefertiti, the queen,
It's her time, her poetry her words of encouragement,
She keeps going, she keeps moving,
Keeps going, keeps showing,
Such a spirit, you cannot break her down,
She keeps moving, she keeps going,
There is a queen inside me, I need to find,
To make her rise, because I really need to be her.

Song: wanamke mrembo kupindukia

Mwanamke kiongozi,
Mwanamke mvumilivu,
Eeieeh,
Maikia malikia.

Politricks

The horsemen are on the door knocking,
Tell me did you see their horses,
Or greed has blinded you
From seeing them plant
Seeds of hate and hunger.

Translation

Nani kama sisi tunalowa kwa yote
Holy tricks ikawa politricks,
But hawa ticks wametunyonya sana damu
Nasi bado tutamuinua tu yule wetu,
Ili pia nasi tule,
Basi sisi wote kupe.

Who is like us who can get wet in all situations
Holy tricks have become politricks,
But these ticks have sucked our blood too much
But we will still uplift just our own,
So that we can also eat,
Then we are all fleas

Impunity and greed knows of no boundaries or treaties,
But gunshots and spillings of bloodspots
From killings wars and stealing of state worth in
That one man can sit on the throne
And one state can raise its economy
We are boxing our own shadows
Instead of letting them walk
Listening to the wrong people give us the talk
I tell you the only thing that makes us different
Is who drives the benz and who counts the cents
But our all society is bent
Who do we expect to correct this dent
But the rich man knows this
The poor man fights it

But the truth remain to be
That the rich man's justice
Is another poor man's dream.

RAYA WAMBUI

I was not Made to Amuse

One day they will ask me for my autograph,
May my blush never subside
One day, they will ask me for an interview,
Honoured that I will take the time,
To allow myself to be unscrewed.
In an attempt to keep their audience glued,
There are questions designed to amuse.
“And Coming Up Next! Just For You!”
They package publicity to make it personal.
Their lies are intravenously slipped, into
Free water, flavouring our coffee.

Then there are questions they will not ask.
They will paint my face, to reinforce the mask.
“When did you start writing?”
Is approved by the editor.
Why didn't you stop? Is not.
So I will answer now, for the questions,
They will pretend, they forgot.
I couldn't stop writing, when Daddy was impressed.
I couldn't stop writing, when Mama taught me that;
Practice makes perfect,
And didn't teach me how to settle for less.
I couldn't stop, when my geekyness meant that cool kids,
Wouldn't miss a chance to laugh at my best.
I couldn't stop, when there was paper and pen, in front of me,
Although I was supposed to be studying, for some French test.

I couldn't stop, when I grew up in an age,
Where writing a love letter means your desperate.
So I have a chest of poems to crushes who crushed me
When all I had was a nervous smile and shakey legs.
I couldn't stop, when I couldn't cry in public
About a statutory rape, that would never shame the culprit.
I couldn't stop when Maya taught me,
That the caged bird sings!
When I discovered that I too am a phenomenal woman.
I knew
It was possible to speak in a voice that would announce for billions.
That, lit a fire, that would not accept minimum.
So I write, though the night, drafts and drafts,
Hundreds of poems that may never be quite right, serve as practice,
For that one piece.
That one immortal piece,
Is the treasure, by which I will measure
My success, when my hair rests,
On a pillow, wood encased.
They will ask, "What made you a success?"
They will not be able to ask, what stopped me!
Of course, this world is filled with excuses we use to sit and have fits,
About how successful people owe us their success.
So I made a list.
All the things that could have stopped me,
But kept me going instead.
I was too young.
I didn't have the right dress.
I'm the wrong colour to be identified with
I can't try to out shine whoever's coming next.
I didn't have the time,
Stage fright shakes my bone to my neck.
They don't understand me, and if I speak my mind,
I might as well be getting undressed.

It's too hard.
It doesn't pay.
I am before, and after my time.
I don't feel like getting out of bed today.
Those are all the things I could say,
If I never push myself, scare myself, work myself,
To a point where any camera would be bothered to record what I say.

They will ask,
"How did you fall upon exposure?"
They don't want to know about the times before I learnt to shout,
Above the drunken hums,
That weren't bothered to listen to spoken word.
When collouses deformed my middle finger,
I just changed the way I wrote.
They want to know about my rise to fame,
Not about the time I was under the herd,
Crouching, cowering, from the stampede
That forms crowds,
In this disinterested world.

They want to see a smiling face,
A two dimensional role model.
They don't understand, my hurdles scarred my knees,
And made me stronger, bolder.
The beauty bin truth has to be sought for.
The curvature of welts from life's daggers,
Hold in them the secrets to true success.
But to stop, the 'beautiful', 'amusing doll'
From making anyone else, feel less,
We have to apply mascara, foundation,
Smooth away, any formative facual lines that would confess,
That endless comfort zones, in themselves concede,
Any real shot at victory.

And I would hate to see a day when there is footage of me,
Where I cannot be seen, for my
Wholly human, perfectly imperfect being,
Who wears her crown of blood and sweat, in bead,
Proudly.

Define and Conquer

To be Kenyan is to smell the scent of the dust,
That's jumping up to meet the rain that's coming.
To be Kenyan is to celebrate the clouds,
Knowing behind them the sun is rising,
And with their marriage,
Comes the promise of milk, of honey,
Because to be Kenyan is not to survive,
To be Kenyan is to surprise.

I'll be honest,
Art café is not exactly my cup of tea,
And I could never understand
How so many cars wore red and white stickers,
Why market for free?
I guess I kind of scoffed at the security checks,
Until militants attacked a playground.

Yes, we were shot,
Yes. We are wounded,
NO. We are not falling,
We can't let on radical group,
Force a xenophobic dawning.
We built the bullet glass barricades
Which held up for several days!
If we start hating all outsiders
Then they win.
That's regressive change.

Do not think that blind hate is not blind.
We must seek to define
What they try to devide.

To be Kenyan is to see beauty in curves,
Which frame the colours around,
misemo za lesa.

To be Kenyan is to mourn out loud, to cry in ululations
As exclamations that the ones we lay to rest
Have found the afterlife.
Because to be Kenyan is not to survive,
To be Kenyan is not to hide,
To be Kenyan is to be pride.

Time makes its changes to faces,
Through phases, past places
Within which all wounds try to be healed.
We used to know death is coming
When an owl is heard.
Now we read abuses in three languages
From Muhammed Kamau's twitter bird.

We scream, hushed insults, at the government,
That should have known an attack was pending!
But what we're forgetting is that it always was.
These cowards' scare tactics
Is to keep on threatening.
What we can't let them threaten is our unity,
Our worth!

Trust me, I get it.
It is difficult to define identity
When you're mixed up.

But that's just it, our diversity is who we are!
And I know we're not quite arm in arm.
Nobody wants to be surprised by harm,
Racial and ethnic profiling is in our blood,
But we cannot let them take our hospitality!
Period.

In some places, our people were met by One book, One God and spices.
In some places our people were met with One book, One God and riffles.
All with slavery up their sleeves,
Perceived a human of a different breed,
With currencies of cowrie beads,
Which used to glitter like litter
Our beaches!
We are rich beyond riches!

To be Kenyan is to smile,
With every part of your being,
Forgetting the fact that your back is aching.
When you're Kenyan, every tree has meaning.
Terere, mchicha, fall like manna, dropped by God's winged messengers.
The coconut and mango tree, model our generosity,
The cassava, the guava, our children's dreams,
Tell tales of plenty and harmony,
Because to be Kenyan is not to survive,
To be Kenyan is not just to live and abide,
To be Kenyan
Is to give something small not to bribe,
To be Kenyan is not to swallow lies,
To be Kenyan is to see the honey through the hive!
To love, and give thanks for life,
To see fish and dive.
To be Kenyan is to thrive!

(Uploaded by Goethe-Institut Sub-Saharan Africa. Published on 29 October 2013)

You Work for Me

You work for me.
And am tired of seeing my countrymen bleeding
For the sake of your fees.
See, you work for me,
But I cannot believe in your incompetent grinning,
At my nation's needs.
You work for me
Inadequately.
Selfishly stabbing our unity
Spitting at the beauty and diversity,
Disrespectfully rubbing dirt in the wounds
That it should be your duty to heal,
For our children's prosperity.
Don't we drive on the same roads?
You'd rather take on loans?
Or aren't you here too?
Do you work for me?
Not the other way round?
When you mess up, its your job to with shame,
Face the ground
To get up and run, when any warning bells sound.
Not measure your cocks for some heat beaten crowd.
You don't care what parties I go to,
Why should I care the other way round?
Which schools will you build? Where and how?
Cant you feel the vibrations? My lakes suffocation?
Can't you see your reflection? Before we all drown?

You work for me.
Do your job! Get it right
My land is filled with resources,
Inspiring!
Do the job you've got now,

Before you start applying,
For promotions, with notions
Of wasting more of my time.

You work for me.
Just incase you forgot it.
My anger is past the point where I lost it.
The time has now come.
To get real.
Or forfeit.

The Bull in a China Shop

If I respect your opinion
And you respect mine,
We'll do just fine,
Discourse leads to compromise in time,
There is seldom need for a bull in a china shop,
Force, facing fragility brings progress
To a full stop.
Before its had a chance to be heard.

Though too far from here to hear,
There is a herd,
One of those members is fallen and butchered,
Before thirty six pounds of heart
Reaches full stop.

Over eleven million Kenyan shillings
For one kilo of horn,
And a maximum possible fine of one million Kenyan shillings.
I guess certain risks in the industry are real,
But pay someone for the dirty work.
And it's literally a steal.

Mombasa,
City *ya raha*,
Is the port of the East Coast,
But we're leaving it to Malaysia
To catch our smuggling boats,
In the name of hard worked for,
Soap stone goddesses,
Whose images are actually carved out of carcasses,
Form where they once came.

Again there is no need
To help a fool in a china shop.
But these smugglers raid, rape our service sector,
Which is sixty three percent of our trade.
All they need to consider is a source
For gun powder implements,
So we are implicate in gigantic profit
Which knowingly impoverishes
The black, the red, the green and the white.
This game of horns and tusks,
That an entire nation
Is geared to achieve.

Our three tonne mothers,
Are being cut open,
Before gestation completion,
Crushing beneath them,
The frenzy archaic loss
On which they are leaning.

We are custodians of national treasure,
The loss of which immeasurable.
It takes one point eight years to make a baby elephant,
And that's something
None of us can do.

So before us seems lightly,
Two thousands twenty fines,
The population through
We will stop allowing any parts
Of our majestic bows and power
From finding their tombs
In any Chinese shops.
There is never a need
For a bull in a china shop.
(Performed at "Poetry Africa 2014)

TEARDROPS

MORPHINE

Translation

If every child husema babake ni hero,
then mbona chances za mabuda

kud defend daughters wao zimekuwa ni zero?
if wanyama hawajawai

what the abuse of young ones entails,
it shows vile humans

wako worse than animals,

chenye wanalack ni long ears and tails.

Real men ni wenye wanajua
kuimba lullaby to their daughters
Hadi wafall asleep,
si wenye wanasleep with them.

Sahi Maria amejaribu
kuoga na kila detergent

If every child says her father is her hero,
then why are the chances of fathers

Defending their daughters at zero?
If animals don't know

what the abuse of young ones entails,
It shows how humans

Are worse than animals,

What they lack is long ears and tails.

Real men are those who know
to sing lullaby to their daughters,
Until they fall asleep,
Not those who sleep with them.

Right now Maria has tried
To bath with every detergent,

But none of them inawaeza
Wash away her stain.
Amejaribu kumeza kila pain killer
But sio kila pain killer hukill kila pain
So sahi ako kwa nyumba,
Na the only thing anasikia
Ni footsteps za passer-by,
Zikifade away with her dignity
Kama the last stanza ya lullaby.
Alinajisiwa na ubikira ulienda,
Hata bila kusema good bye.

So sahizi her world is dark,
Haina hata moon, stars ama firefly.
Inside her kuna life inagrow,
Na each and every time inamove
Each and every time inagrow,
Inamremind of her darkest hour.

Alikuwa flower,
Before wa take away her petals,
Na kumnyang'anya her pistil,
Na sasa chenye alimuacha nayo ni stigma.
Shame yenye anafeel ni mzito,
Ni kama alimeza fish ratili mzima na scales,

So hii life iko ndani yake inamgwara,
Ni kama amemeza tilapia mbichi ya 10kgs
Ikiwa pamoja na scales.

Anafeel so neglected,
Ni kama products kwa showroom

But none of them can
Wash away her stain.
She has tried to swallow every pain killer,
But not all pain killers can kill pain.
So now she is in the house,
And the only thing she hears,
Are the footsteps of a passer-by
As they fade away with her dignity,
Like the last stanza of a lullaby.
She was raped and her virginity ended
Without even saying good bye.

So right now her world is dark,
It doesn't even have the moon, stars or firefly.
Inside her there is a life growing,
And each and every time it moves,
Each and every time it grows,
It reminds her of her darkest hour.

She was a flower,
Before they took away her petals,
And snatched her pistil,
And now what he left her is stigma.
The shame that she feels is heavy,
It is like he swallowed a kilo of fish together
with its scales,

So the life inside her is scratching
It's like she has swallowed a whole
Tilapia that is still raw and weighs ten kgs
together with its scales.

She feels so neglected,
it's like products in the showroom

Na zimekosa sales.
Ako chini ya maji kama sea shells
But one day anahope ataenda juu ya maji

Kama Madagascar na Seychelles.

So sahizi kuna Teardrops za silver,
Zinashed from her eyes,
Her heart is as hard as ice,
Her world is so cold kama kingdom
Ya the so called East Moon.
Anasmile but hiyo smile ni painful si genuine.

Anameza mate but mate yake ni bitter
Kama Mr. Piriton na Quinine.
So sahi, popote ye hutembea

Anafeel ni kama ulimwengu mzima
Umeshamuona uchi.
Anawish kama kungekuwa na uwezekano,
Fashion houses za Dolce , Gabana na Gucci
Zingecombine na jua kali sector

Na zitengenezee kila mwanamke panty za chuma
Kama zile za Robocop
If that is the only way
tungeprotect their virginity.
Anawish kama kungekuwa na uwezekano Securicor,

And they don't have sales.
She is under the water like sea shells,
But one day she hopes she will rise above
The water
Like Madagascar and Seychelles

So right now there are Teardrops of silver,
Shedding from her eyes,
Her heart is as hard as ice,
Her world is so cold like kingdom
Of the so called East Moon.
She smiles but that smile is painful not
genuine
She swallows saliva but it is bitter
Like Mr. Piriton and quinine.
So right now wherever she goes to
She feels like the whole world
Has already seen her naked.
She wishes if it was possible,
fashion houses of Dolce, Gabana and Gucci
Could have combined with the jua kali
sector,
And make for every woman a metallic
panty like that of Robocop.
If that is the only way
We can protect their virginity.
She wishes if there was a possibility
Securicor,

God angecreate binadamu na security code,

Kuconnect na their dignity.

So sahi ako silent

but silence yake speaks volumes

Sahi ako silent but silence yake

Iko more than a hundred sirens.

Sahi ako silent

But silence yake ni powerful

Kuliko redio milioni moja

Zimewashwa zote at the same time

With a whole volume.

So sahizi ako silent

But her silence ni expensive

Cause ni in voice

Na in voice hiyo hushinda imejicurse,

Na kama curse word ndio password

To happiness na freedom ya kujiexpress,

Then nitamfunza kucurse

Nataka kumfunza kucurse na words

Zenye zitaingiza njeve

God could have created humans with

A security code,

To connect with their dignity.

So right now she is silent

But her silence speaks volumes.

right now she is silent but her silence

Is more than a hundred sirens.

Right now she is silent

But her silence is more powerful

Than one million radios

Switched on at the same time

With a whole volume.

So right now she is silent

But her silence is expensive,

Because it is in voice

And that in voice keeps cursing

Itself.

And if curse word is the pass word

To happiness and freedom to

Express oneself,

Then I will teach her to curse

I want to teach her to curse with words

That will bring in cold,

Hadi ziwache ulimwengu mzima ikiwa na mist.

Nataka kumfunza kucurse

Na words zenye ziko na moto,

Zitachoma hata masikio za mapriest.

Nataka kumfunza kucurse

Na words zenye zitabring

Sanity na conscience ndani ya brain na hearts

Za hao wanaume wako na roho kama beasts.

Nataka kumfunza words kama

“No means no”.

Nataka kumfunza words kama

“You should know how to defend yourself.”

Nataka kumfunza words from

Right to left kama Bible.

Nataka kumfunza words kama

Left to right kama Quran.

Nataka kumfunza kuspeak

So speak baby speak!

Speak ‘cause your word iko powerful

Kuliko shouts zenye ziliangusha wall ya Jericho.

Speak baby speak

Until they leave the whole world with

Mist.

I want to teach her to curse

With words that have fire,

They will burn even ears of the priests,

I want to teach her to curse

With words that will bring

Sanity and conscience inside the brain

And hearts

Of those men who have the hearts of

Beasts.

I want to teach her words like

“No means no.”

I want to teach her words like

“You should know how to defend

Yourself.”

I want to teach her words from

Right to left like the Bible.

I want to teach her words like

Left to right like Quran.

I want to teach her to speak

So speak baby speak!

Speak because your word is powerful

Than the shouts that brought down the

Wall of Jericho.

Speak baby speak

'cause words zako ziko na energy
Kuliko ile imekuwa created
Kati ya nywele na jelly comb.
Speak baby speak
'cause ukinguruma,
Jungle mzima inago silent
Na hata simba anaingiza mkia
katikati ya miguu.

Speak baby speak 'cause wewe
Ndio mouth piece ya millions,
Millions of women wenye wanakufa
Ndani kwa ndani ya pain.
Speak baby speak
Ushaconquer pain,
Wewe ni morphine .
Speak baby speak
And your pain, your agony, your fears, fail,

Chukua the last lane na uzipigilie kwa coffin.
Speak baby speak,
ushaconquer pain,
Wewe ni morphin.

Teardrops

I swear by the living God

I swear by the living god
That everything I shall speak before you
Shall be the truth just the truth, only the truth,
So help me God.

Because your words have energy
Than the one created
Between the hair and the jelly comb.
Speak baby speak
Because when you roar,
The whole jungle goes silent
And even the lion puts its tail
Between its legs.

Speak baby speak because you
Are the mouthpiece of millions,
Millions of women who die
Inside by inside of pain.
Speak baby speak
You have conquered pain,
You are morphine.
Speak baby speak
And your pain, your agony, your
Fears, fail,
Take the last lane and drive it in the Coffin.
Speak baby speak,
You have conquered pain,
You are morphine.

‘Cause mi hukuwa inspired na watoto na walevi

‘Cause ni hao pekee huongea ukweli.

Hao wengine wote hata mapoets na mapastor

Ni matapeli

‘Cause hao huongea na maparable na mahumour,

Hushikanishi unabaki umeng’oa

Kama mkaazi wa kibera na reli.

Kuongea ukweli si kupenda kwangu,

Ni instincts zo hunipush.

Na kama words zangu zinakera kama

George W. BushMbele ya manews reporter,

Toa viatu urushe zifly kuanguka dush.

Juu najua words nina bongwa

Hazikolinked na rules zenye ziliandikwa

Na Heile Selasie

Inspiration zilitoka kwa mkono ya kushoto

Yenye imelala kwa ash tray or the burning bush.

Si mununuzi na mwuzaji wote watabeba hii msalaba

Juu bila mnunuzi si daughter wa wenyewe

Hangeitwa kahaba.

Judgement day inacome.

Because am inspired by children and drunkards

Because it is only them who speak the truth

All the others including poets and pastors

Are con-men.

Because they talk in parables and humour

You don’t understand you are only left to fail

Like a Kibera resident with the railway.

Speaking the truth is not my wish

Its instincts that push me

If my words are annoying like

George W. Bush before the news reporters,

Remove your shoes and throw them and let

Them fly and fall *dush*.

Because I know the words am saying

are not linked with the rules written

Down by Haile Selassie,

inspiration came from the left hand

That has slept in the ashtray or the burning

Bush.

The buyer and the seller will both carry the

Cross,

Because without the buyer someone’s

daughter would not be called a prostitute.

Judgement day is coming.

Hiyo siku vitanda vitasimama kama ma eye witness.	That day beds will stand as eye witnesses
Kupata kazi Kenya ni kifo,	Getting a job in Kenya is death,
That's why pages za vacancy	That's why the vacancy pages
Hupatikana huko nyuma ya gazeti karibu na obituary,	Are found at the back of newspapers
	Near the obituary.
Ndio maana percentage ya unemployment	That's why the unemployment percentage
Haitawahi decrease.	Will never decrease.
Wasiwahi kuringia ati wako na university degrees,	Let them not brag to you that they have
	University degrees,
Wambieni at the moment tuko na degrees	Tell them at the moment we have degrees
But zo hu'end up zikifanya kazi chini ya makwapa.	But they end up working under the armpits.
Si huwa zinakula jasho za watu?	Don't they eat people's sweat?
Wengi wanataka kuona the almighty	Many want to see the almighty
But none ako ready kuwa maiti.	But none is ready to be a corpse.
Sisi wote tunaogopa adhabu ya graves.	All of us fear the penance of the grave.
Wengi wako na masters but they are still slaves.	Many have masters but they are still slaves.
Ukipata peas usikule yote even jesus saves.	When you get peas don't eat it all even
	Jesus saves.
Imagine una gift tena talanta na umekalia.	Imagine you have a gift and talent and you
	Are not using them.
Boda boda hajawahi kanyaga	<i>Boda boda</i> has never stepped at the
Doorstep ya universityama college	doorstep of the university or college
But si zina karia?	But don't they have carriers?
We kutokanyaga class one isiwahi kuwa barrier	Your not stepping in class one should not
	Be a barrier

Ya wewe kutopata first class.

Na siringi ni vile mwalimu wangu wa high school

Aliniambia “Teardrops take notes”,

That’s why situmiangi mashilingi.

If sex sells Bill Gates angekuwa porn star,

Utaexpect aje mtoi agrow into an angel

And the first drink alikunywa after kuzaliwa
ni monster?

I never touch drugs

But Wangari Maathai you are my heroine.

Wengi ni waloose.

Si kila mtu mwenye anaishi Taveta nimitatita.

Consequences za fegi ni heavier usidanganwe.
na lighter

Kama kusmoke weed ingekuwa part of human culture,

Si basi watoi wa marasta wangezaliwa na madready,

But lips zemeparara, macho za red

Wanafanana na mapeddy.

Mtaani maboy wamegeuka macaterpillar za grady

Of you not getting first class.

And am not boasting it’s just that my

High school teacher

Told me “Teardrops take notes”,

That’s why I don’t use shillings.

If sex sells Bill Gates would have

Been a porn star,

How do you expect a child to grow

Into an angel

And the first drink he took was after
Birth was “Monster”?

I never touch drugs

But Wangari Maathai you are my heroine.

Many are loose.

Not everyone who stays in Taveta is a Taita.

Consequences of cigarettes are heavier don’t
Be deceived by the lighter.

If smoking weed would be part of
Human culture,

Then the children of rastas would
Have been born with dreadlocks.

But lips are dry, red eyes

They look like peddlers.

On the streets boys have turned into

Ni wa greedy	Grading caterpillars, they are greedy.
Boys wamekaa kwa bench wanachew big G na matawi,	Boys are on the bench chewing big G And leaves.
Wana blood stains za green	They have green blood stains
haziwezi fight ugonjwa yoyote labda uchawi.	That cannot fight any disease may be witchcraft.
So brother ingiza njeve coz hii bangi pia veve	So brother, get cold because this Marijuana is also miraa
Ndio ilifanya maboy na mabudaa Coast	that which made boys and fathers At the Coast
Kukataa kupeleka word mimeve,	To refuse to take word mimeve
So wamekaa beach wamepenya	So the women at the beach have Squeezed to enter the mouth of the fish
kuingia kwa mdomo ya samaki,	They waiting to enter in the hands of Real scale.
Wanangoja kuingia kwa mikono ya mizani ya haki.	
Kukuona ukiangamia ndio mimi sitaki.	Seeing you getting destroyed is what I Don't want.
'Cause mdomo wangu ulicomment kuspeak neon	Because my mouth commented to speak neon
So huwezi nipata na mvuka nachana	so you cannot get me chewing on miraa
Meno ndio ziko shaggy	It is the teeth that are shaggy
Nachana na ukipatikana nitasema	I chew on them and when am found out I I will say
"It wasn't me, uliza Shaggy."	"It wasn't me, ask Shaggy."
'Cause nowadays vitu zinago messy	Because nowadays things things go messy
Kwa wachawi giza ni night dress.	To the witches darkness is the night dress

Maboy mtaani wameweka base.
Niambie kuna raha kama maboys wa Meru
Kwa nyumba hawana kioo,
Reflections zao wanaziona kwa miraa
'Cause kuzaliwa ghetto na uzeeke
ni kama wild beasts
Zikitoka Masaai Mara zikivuka Serengeti,
Juu mihadarati, pombe, ni kama jaw za crocodile,
Zitakumanga, zikutafune halafu zikuteme
Kama toxins za mvuka.
Mimi nadreamia kufanya ghetto iwe clean
Clean like anybody's business,
Bila msee kunifanya matoxins za mahooker,
Na si lazima nikuchape na mawe
Ndio useme nimerocker fella,
Nitakunyeshea chini ya umbrella,
Tulianza kuchora mistari kombo kombo
kama msikari kombo.

Boys in the streets have kept base
Tell me is there joy when the boys of Meru
In the house they do not have a mirror
they see their reflections on miraa
Because being born in the ghetto and get old
Is like wild beasts
when leaving Masaai Mara crossing
Serengeti,
Because drugs, alcohol, are like the jaws of a
crocodile
They will eat you, they will chew you then
They will spit you.
Ike the toxins of miraa.
Personally am dreaming of making the
Ghetto clean
Clean like anybody's business,
without anyone making me the hooker's
Toxins,
And it's not a must I beat you with stones
So that you can say I have Rocker fella
I will beat you under an umbrella
we started drawing crooked lines like
Msikari kombo.

TEARDROPS AND JICHO PEVU

We Will Not Forget You

Watoto wangu weeh,
Wee
Watoto wangu weeh,
Wee,
Watoto wangu weeh
Wee.

Nime'come kuwagotea souls zimelost
Ziki'gamble pata potea,
Binadamu ame'go wild,
Wame'lose values na morality za life,
Tuko in ku'strive na ambayo
Nimekuinulia high five.
We ume'drop pen na umeniinulia bunduki,

God ni m'powerful, Al-Shabaab ni nini?

Watoto wangu wee,
Wee,
Watoto wangu wee
Wee.

Waambieni that wame'kill 147,
But waambieni tuna'believe in one God,
Mwenye ako powerful kuliko AK-47,
Coz kenye iko behind John 3:16,
Ni powerful kuliko AK-47 na M-16,
God tuna'believe ni m'powerful,
Al-Shabaab ni nini?

Translation

My children weeh
Weeh
My children weeh,
Weeh
My children weeh
Weeh.

I have come to salute the lost souls
As they gamble "pata potea"
Humans have gone wild,
They have lost values and morality of life
We are working to strive which
I have lifted for you high five.
You have dropped a pen and lifted a gun

God is powerful, What is al-Shabaab?

My children wee
Wee
My children weee
Wee.

Tell them that they have killed forty seven,
But tell them we believe in one God,
Who is powerful than AK-47,
Because what is behind John 3:16,
Is more powerful than AK-47 and M-16,
The God that we believe is powerful,
What is Al-Shabaab?

Watoto wangu wee,
Wee,
Watoto wangu wee,
Wee,
Watoto wangu wee,
Wee.

Kisura unaonekana umejipanga,
Kumbe kinyumenyume we
Hutembea kama umebeba panga,
Mvumilivu amekuwa mchuzi,
Hataki kudishi mbivu,
Anataka apewe machungwa,
Ndio at least im' release maumivu.

Kitabia amekumbwa na uchovu,
Kimwili anatembea na maovu,
Ati hiki, alah, hiki,
Huwezi niambia anything
Kama huwezi tuliza alah hiki,
Na kama hunitii
Ni haja gani tuwe na black,
Kama symbol ya humanity?

Watoto wangu wee,
Wee
Watoto wangu wee
Wee.

God ni m'powerful Al-Shabaab ni nini?
Waambieni tulikuwa na mtoi kutoka coast,
Walichukua risasi
wakaeka bullet in their head,
Ika'make news bulletin

My children wee,
Wee,
My children wee,
Wee,
My children wee,
Wee.

Your face shows that you are organised,
But secretly you
Walk while carrying a panga,
The patient one has become soup
He doesn't want to eat the ripe
He wants to be given oranges
So that at least it can release her from pain.

Behaviourwise she is faced with tediousness,
Bodywise he walks with evil intention,
that this, *alah* this,
You can't tell me anything
If you can't suppress *alah* this
And if you don't obey me
Why should we have black,
As a symbol of humanity?

My children wee,
Wee,
My children wee,
Wee.

God is powerful, what is Al-Shabaab?
Tell them we had a child from Coast,
They took a bullet
They put a bullet in their head,
It made news bulletin

but mtoi ali'survive,
Ndio God tuna'believe in ni m'powerful,

Al-Shabaab ni nini?

Waambieni,
waambieni that God tuna'believe in,
Ni kama Bruno Moores,
Anaweza shika hand grenade.

Waambieni,
waambieni, God tuna'believe in,
Anajua that terrorism na corruption,
Corruption is the mother of terrorism,
'Cause ni hiyo ime'allow al-Shabaab

kuingia kwa border zetu,
Washavuka border
na hawawezi nunua Jaguar.

Watoto wangu wee,
Wee,
Watoto wangu wee,
Wee.

Umoja ni saa zile tuko united,
Tuna'embrace love kwa jamii
iko full of hatred,
Umoja ni kutabasamu kwa mema na mazuri,
Ku'inspire dunia ka kina Ngugi na Ali mazrui,

Umoja si kumwaga the blood shed,
In return u'expect roses za red,
Juu macho yako ina vitu rosy.
Kama peace ni dawa,

But the child survived
that's why the God we believe in is
Powerful,

What is Al-Sbabaab?

Tell them,
Tell them that the God we believe in,
Is like Bruno Moores,
He can catch a hand grenade.

Tell them,
Tell them, The God we believe in,
Knows that terrorism and corruption,
Corruption is the mother of terrorism,
Because it is that which has allowed
Al-Shabaab

To infiltrate our borders,
They have already crossed the border
And they cannot buy a Jaguar.

My children wee,
Wee,
My children wee,
Wee.

Unity is when we are united,
We embrace love in a family
That's full of hatred,
Unity is to smile in kindness and goodness
To inspire the world like Ngugi and Ali
Mazrui,

Unity is not the shedding of blood,
In return you expect red roses,
Because your eyes have got rosy things.
If peace is medicine,

Nimekubali kumeza mara moja,
Ndio ni'speak louder than words.

Watoto wangu wee,
Wee,
Watoto wangu wee,
Wee.

Revolution.
Revolution itaanza na mimba ya tribalism

Ikifanyiwa abortion,
Revolution itaanza na sisi kutobaguana na rangi,

Na at last wanawake weusi
Watajivunia kujipaka kiwi kama lotion.
Revolution itaanza na ma'watchmen
Wakiwa wamesimama kwa milango za bank,
Na wa'realise hawana hata Twitter accounts.

Revolution itaanza na ma'beggar,
Wakitingizia matajiri mabega,
Wakiwaambia "Keep your coins",
We want real change.
Haja gani kwa twitter una'follow Bill Gates,

But in real life unakuwa followed back
Na bills kwa gate?

Revolution itaanza na machokoraa,

Wakituapproach na business proposals,

I have accepted at once,
So that I can speak louder than words.

My children wee,
Wee,
My children wee,
Wee.

Revolution.
Revolution will start with the pregnancy of
Tribalism
Incurring an abortion,
Revolution will start with us not
Discriminating each other on racial lines
And at last black women
Will be proud to apply Kiwi as lotion.
Revolution will start with the watchmen
While standing at the bank doors,
And realizing that they don't even have
Twitter accounts.

Revolution will start with beggars,
When they shrug their shoulders to the rich
Telling them "Keep your coins",
We want real change.
Why should you follow Bill Gates on
Twitter,
But in real life you are followed back
With bills at the gate?

Revolution will start with the street
Urchins,
When they approach us with business
Proposals,

Za multi billions dollars.
 Revolution itaanza na ma'hawkers,
 Waki'run streets za jiji
 Wakiwa wamevaa ma'white collars.
 Revolution itaanza na mafundi wa viatu,
 Waki'repair our torn souls.
 Revolution itaanza na words za poets,

 Zikitoka na vidonda,
 'Cause throat imejaa na tonsils.
 Revolution itaanza na ma'conductor,
 Wakigonga milango za ma'three,
 Na rhythm na sound ya drum
 Yenye ina'demand na ina'dream kuwa free.
 Revolution itaanza na wananchi,
 Wakijua cha thamani ni mme na Kenya ni mkewe.

 Revolution itaanza na kuku ikichinjwa shingo

 Halafu vifaranga wake watakuwa adopted na mwewe.
 Revolution itaanza na sisi, mimi, na wewe.

 Revolution itaanza na music, chants na slogans

 Kama; "A people united shall never be defeated"
 "A people united shall never be defeated",
 "A people united shall never be defeated".

 Revolution itaanza kwa streets,
 Revolution itaanza na the poor ku'get
 Empowered not empooed,
 Revolution itaanza na middle class,
 Waki'graduate to masters.
 Revolution itaanza na ma'leaders,

Of multi-billion dollars.
 Revolution will start with the hawkers,
 When they run the streets of the city
 In white collars.
 Revolution will start with the cobblers,
 When they repair our torn souls.
 Revolution will start with the words of
 Poets,
 Coming out with wounds,
 Because their throat is full of tonsils.
 Revolution will start with conductors,
 When knocking doors of *Matatus*
 With the rhythm and sound of a drum
 That demands and dreams to be free.
 Revolution will start with citizens,
 Knowing what is precious is a husband
 And Kenya is not the wife.
 Revolution will start with the hen being
 Slaughtered,
 And her chicks adopted by the hawk.
 Revolution will start with us, me and
 You.
 Revolution will start with music, chants
 And slogans like;
 "A people united shall never be defeated"
 "A People united shall never be defeated"
 "A People united shall never be defeated".

 Revolution will start on the streets,
 Revolution will start with the poor getting
 Empowered not empooed,
 Revolution will start with the middle class
 Graduating to Masters.
 Revolution will start with leaders,

Wakianza ku'speak no to the mass
 But for the mass kama kasisi kwa misa.
 Revolution itaanza not na dead beats,
 But na heart beat zetu ziki'bang
 On our chest kama feast ya Guerrilla war
 Ku'protect territory.
 Revolution itaanza na daughter wetu
 Turkana waki'plead na feathers under them,
 'Cause hawawezi kuafford sanitary.
 Misitu zimekuwa the dormitories.

 Revolution itaanza na sisi kujua that
 Community ya Wagemu haikusifiwa
 So tembo haikutiliwa maji.
 Ona sasa muratina
 inatenganisha familia Karatina.

 Revolution itaanza na sisi tuki'realize,
 That since independence hadi wa leo
 Bado ma'youth wanajingage na wizi wa mabavu,

 Since 1963 hadi waleo bado freedom ni costly,

 Ukishikwa ni lazima uhongane
 ndio uwachiliwe free.
 Revolution itaanza na sisi kupata sight

 Ya kutenganisha words za ku'incite,
 Na words za insight.

 Revolution itaanaz na mapoet
 Wakienda hadi kwa head phones za ma'bank,

When they start to speak not to the mass
 But for the mass like in a church service.
 Revolution will start not with the dead beats,
 But with our heart beats banging
 On our chest like the feast of Guerilla war
 To protect territory.
 Revolution will start with our daughters
 In Turkana pleading with feathers under them
 Because they can't afford sanitary.
 The bushes are the dormitories.

 Revolution will start with us knowing that
 The Community of the Wagemu wasn't
 praised
 So water was not added to the brew.
 See now, *muratina*
 Is dividing family members in Karatina.

 Revolution will start with us realizing
 That since independence up to today
 The youths are still engaging in robbery
 With violence,
 Since 1963 till today still freedom is
 Costly,
 If you are arrested you have to bribe
 so as to be set free.
 Revolution will start with us getting the
 sight
 Of separating words that can incite,
 And words with insight.

 Revolution will start with the poets
 Going to the headphones of banks

Na kuwaambia it's about time,
Waache kusikiza ngoma za akina Uwizi Kalifa,

Na muanze kusikiza poetry yetu
Tunabonga kuhusu wizi wa taifa.

Revolution itanza na live bands,
Hart-the-Band na Sarabi.

Revolution itanza na ma'hustler,
Ma'sufferer na mababi.

Revolution itanza na wasanii.

Revolution itanza na karatasi na kalamu,

Na damu ya binadamu yenye
Ilimwagika independence
Itatumika kama wino.

Revolution itanza na ma'dancer,
Wakitap dance to songs of Lawino.
Revolution itanza na music, chants na slogans.

Revolution itanza na Kamau na Jelimo

Wakioana alafu mtoi wao ataitwa Awino,

Revolution itanza tukitema mate kwa mchanga

Halafu tutazitenganisha na udongo,

Alafu tutazi'smear

kwa macho ya vipofu na chongo

Not only kuwafungua macho

Bali kuwafunguwa ubongo.

Revolution itanza na sisi,

Revolution itanza na revelation.

And telling then it's about time,
They stopped listening to the music of
Uwizi Kalifa

And start listening to our poetry

We are talking of national theft.

Revolution will start with live bands,
Hart-the Band and Sarabi.

Revolution will start with hustlers,
The sufferers and the rich.

Revolution will start with artists.

Revolution will start with pen and
Paper,

With human blood that
was shed during independence
Used as ink.

Revolution will start with dancers,
Dancing to Songs of Lawino.
Revolution will start with music, chants
And slogans.

Revolution will start with Kamau and
Jelimo

Marrying then their child named Awino.

Revolution will start when we spit in the
sand

Then we separate it from the soil,

And then we will smear them

On the eyes of the blind and the one-eyed

Not only to open their eyes

But to open their brain.

Revolution will start with us,

Revolution will start with revelation.

Hiyo time less
Tume'spend hapa ni timeless.
Tumejua hii life ni drama,
Kiswahili na English ni grammar,
But Sheng ndio lugha ya mama,
Na ukidhani mimi wazimu,
Like father like son,
Then God must be crazy,
Shukrani sana.

That less time
We have spent here is timeless.
We know this life is drama,
Kiswahili and English is grammar,
But Sheng is my mother tongue,
And if you think am crazy,
Like father like son,
Then God must be crazy.
Thank you so much.

Wanjiku Mwaura

I speak Continental

I speak continental
Converse the language of poetry
Found across the continents
Speak of words always normally heard,
Listen,
Listen to the vigorous dance of my hips
As I move my feet
To the Ashanti drums, to the Ashanti drums, to the Ashanti drums,
Transported to West Africa, I meet Obwoshi,
goddess of the biggest river in Ibuza,
Who punishes all who flaunt traditions,
Gives them leprosy.
I learn of tongues I didn't know like "ikaru" is morning in Yoruba.
I wanna speak continental.

I speak continental,
Move my feet to the Lingala beat,
From the Congo hit and the tropical trees
Where spirits live...
And just dance.
But this language of poetry,

It's more than just dance,
I wanna speak of the Fon people of Benin,
Tale of Gu, the oldest son of the creator,
Between sun and moon,
Then where? Found in Sudan?
Blame death on a hyena.
I wanna introduce the Shango,
The Yoruba storm god,
Who if now was thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands
Of years ago,
May be this kind of rains
That we get nowadays,
Would be him trying to tell us something,
Something that we keep being told
By meteorologists about the weather, climate change,
Something to show that he is mad.

I wanna speak of the bushmen,
Who believe the dead become stars,
And that, that would explain why
Every night I watch the sky,
I feel at piece.
Some nights I think they even speak from
Letters of the black canvas of the sky,
Spelling out my destiny as I read.

I wanna speak of the Swahili, coastal Kenya,
Move meticulously slowly,
Letting soft Taarab music
Course down my bones
Taking away the seed of life,
Reminding me what truly counts.

I speak of people,

I speak of culture,

I speak of the art of speaking about culture.

(Extracted from “The Trend: Great Poets perform on the Trend”. NTV-Kenya)