

**REPRESENTATIONS OF YOUTH SUBALTERNITY IN SELECTED KENYAN
SPOKEN WORD POETRY**

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**A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirement for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Literature of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology.**

OCTOBER 2025

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work prepared with no other than the indicated sources and support and has not been presented elsewhere for a degree or any other award.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my husband, Mr. Patrick Ligami, for the conducive environment and moral support during the entire period of research. To my children for their unwavering support and encouragement during my studies. To Becky Namachanja, Ebby Shamala, Ian Fuchingo, Daniel Oweki and Sylvia Omung'ala for their moral support.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how selected Kenyan spoken word poets give voice to the concerns of the youth. It explores how the youth use spoken word poetry to confront stereotypes of young people by trying to reach the broader listening public through politically and socially relevant poems. The study is guided by the following objectives: to explicate factors that make spoken word poetry more accessible and easily appropriated by subaltern groups amplifying the performance of their experiences; to investigate the recurring themes highlighting the fluidity of subaltern identities amongst Kenyan youths revealing resistance, and; to interrogate spoken word's poetic dialogic conversations woven with other voices, enriching meaning within existing canons. The study analyses the works of selected spoken word poets examining how formal, stylistic, and performance techniques chosen by the selected artists facilitate the representation of the realities of Kenyan youth. To this end, the form of the text is read through the lens of formalism, the concept of literariness by Jakobson to articulate the experiences of young people and to offer resistance. While the thematic issues are analyzed by Spivak's concept of subalternity to inform how young people navigate limitations imposed on them. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism creates spaces of resistance and collective identity formation. The study uses qualitative research approaches to gather textual data from the selected texts. Therefore, the paradigms, methods and other methodological considerations are in line with qualitative methods. The significance of this study lies in its ability to raise awareness of a genre that can be used as a tool for pedagogy and adopted by the youth for talent promotion, making fascinating interventions in the study of spoken word as an art form and the way it is interpreted. It significantly contributes to knowledge about how cultural, creative industries can promote youth economic empowerment, hence informing policy in this area on county and national level and promotion activities targeting the youths. The study found out that spoken word poetry provides a vital platform for Kenyan youth to articulate their subaltern experiences, challenge dominant discourses, and envision alternative futures.

Operational definitions of terms

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words, creating a sense of emphasis and connection.

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds within words, creating a sense of musicality and resonance.

Dialogism means that meaning is not inherent in a word or utterance but arises from the interaction between different voices and perspectives. Utterances are shaped by existing, continuous chains of conversation. That no utterance is ever truly original or self-contained. The utterance inevitably echoes, reflects and refutes previous statements.

Hegemony This is a term coined by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) to describe how the state and ruling capitalist class - the bourgeoisie - use cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalistic societies. The bourgeoisie in Gramsci's view develops a hegemonic culture using ideology rather than violence, economic force, or coercion.

Hybridity Bhabha (1994) contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the "Third space of enunciation (p. 37). Bhabha explains that cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical "purity" of cultures untenable. Hybridity therefore simply means a mixture of East and Western cultures.

Hyperbole is the exaggeration for emphasis or effect.

Irony is a statement that means the opposite of what it appears to say. By employing these devices, poets draw attention to the language itself, making it more noticeable and memorable. This

heightened awareness of language is what characterizes the poetic function and distinguishes literary texts from ordinary discourse.

Metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things, revealing a hidden similarity.

Meter is a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that creates rhythm and emphasizes certain words or phrases.

Rhyme is the repetition of similar sounds at the end of words or lines, creating a sense of musicality and connection.

Simile is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things using “like” or “as.”

Personification: Giving human qualities to inanimate objects or abstract concepts.

Slam Poetry Helen Gregory (2008), defines slam poetry as a kind of oral poetry competition in which poets are expected to perform their work before a live audience. They are then scored on the quality of their writing and performance, by judges who are typically and randomly selected from the audience (p.2).

Spoken word Eleveld (2003) Sparks & Grochowski (2002), Weinstein (2010) as cited in Jenkins (2014) define spoken word as a term that describes poems that are read and/ or performed before an audience (p.8)

Subaltern Spivak borrowed the term subaltern from Antonio Gramsci to refer to a simply means a mixture of east and western cultures. In the context of this study the hybrid is mixed cultures. Unrepresented group of people in society (Gramsci 55). These unrepresented people are oppressed subjects or more generally those of inferior rank (p. 283). This study

defines Kenyan youth as a subaltern because they are separated from main public discourses.

Transgressive Politics refers to political action and discourse that intentionally challenges, disrupts, and seeks to redefine established norms, values, power structures, and boundaries within a given socio-political context.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

CBC Competency-Based Curriculum

ESRC Economics and Research Council

HIV Human Immunodeficiency Virus

US United States

UN United Nations

SWP Spoken Word Project

SWN Spoken Word Namibia

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This study examines how spoken word poetry serves as an alternative site for the production of agency amongst the youth. This study is premised on the assumption that Kenyan youths; are often excluded from different processes of national development. This not only overlooks the capacity of youths to function as worthwhile agents in national building projects and rhetoric, but it also leads to the dismissal of the realities of youth within national debate. This marginalization of Kenyan youth is what informs their categorization as subaltern because they are segregated.

The notion of the subaltern was first introduced by the Italian Marxist political activist Antonio Gramsci (1971). He used this word to refer to any “low rank” person or group of people who suffer from hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation. The only groups Gramsci had in mind at that time were the workers and peasants who were oppressed and discriminated by the leader of the National fascist party, Benito Mussolini and his agents (Elhabib, 2011 p. 2).

Gramsci (1971) designed a plan composed of six steps on how the subaltern groups are created, maintained and dismantled. They are formed by firstly, changes taking place in economic production; secondly, their active or passive affiliation to dominant political formations and their attempts to influence their programs ; thirdly, the birth of new parties and dominant groups which are mainly created for the subjugation and maintenance of the subaltern; fourthly, the formations which the subaltern group themselves make to vindicate limited rights; fifthly, new formations which maintain the subaltern groups autonomy within old frameworks, sixthly,

those formations may help to affirm their entire autonomy. These steps cumulatively locate the subaltern as lacking access to the social and cultural instructions of their state (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 56, 58). From Gramsci's perspective, the only possible way for the subaltern to reach the state of freedom is through a "permanent" victory which necessarily guarantees a dismantling of the master/slave pattern. This dismantling is realized within Gramsci's theoretical framework by releasing the subordinated consciousness of non-elite groups from the cultural hegemony exercised by the ruling classes. This situation applies to Kenya because the youth are segregated.

Spivak (2008) appropriates the term to refer to the marginalized group of people in a colonized or post-colonial society. This is a unique group with context specific realities conditioned by colonial heritage and its attendants such as neo-colonialism. Be it as may be, Spivak's tightening of this notion is however what is adopted in this study as the framing of the Kenyan youth as a subaltern group. Spivak posits that the barriers that the subaltern faces in an attempt to speak out their views render them voiceless because they are not only considered the other, but through economic processes and their "exotification," they are relegated to the margins of society (Spivak, 2008, p. 89).

In her legendary essay, "Can the subaltern speak?" Spivak (1988) interrogates the historical and ideological factors that obstruct the possibility of being heard, this study notes that the Kenyan youth have been deprived of voice by hegemonic powers and they need a space through which they can speak. This research demonstrates that spoken word poetry paves way for the subaltern youth to air their issues and lets them freely speak for themselves. As a result of the revolutionary insurgence of spoken word poetry, this study argues that the genre is a fertile site that facilitates the youth to voice their realities. Thus, subalterns are the people silenced in the administration of the country states that they constitute. Their voice can be heard by means of their own political actions effected in protest against discourse of mainstream development.

They can create their own, indigenous forms of modernization and development (De Jong, Sarah, 2016).

The study is framed within Spivak's post-colonial concept of subalternity (Spivak, 2008, p. 89). Spivak defines the subaltern as those individuals or groups of people who inhabit the periphery and suffer the burden of being politically subjugated and cannot access the state and suffer the burden of difference in a capitalist state that promises equality yet withholds it at every turn (Spivak, 2008, p. 283). This study considers the youth as a subaltern category because they are kept outside national debates in Kenya (Mbweli, 2017) and their realities not considered as important.

Studies show that many youths in Kenya are Subaltern; because they are relegated to the periphery as they are unemployed, face urban crime, poverty and general stagnation in life (Waswalla, 2013). As a result of this, the youth push back through creative enterprise such as spoken word. The twenty first century has witnessed a wave of resistance from spoken word artists to address the issues affecting the youth (Kesseling, 2005). Kenya's youth have launched initiatives through social networks such as spoken word poetry to reclaim their individual and collective dignity and to redefine their role in society. These initiatives have thrived through various platforms including Fatuma's voice, which uses art in terms of spoken word and music to encourage communication. Other spoken word platforms include *Kwani*, Open Mic, and Poetry After Lunch (PAL) hosted by: - Kennet B. at the Kenya National Theatre (Waliaula, 2001). Spoken word poetry has existed in Kenya since the 1950s. As much as many people view it as a form of entertainment, artists also make use of its resources to articulate their concerns in society (Waliaula, 2001). Spoken word artistry has seen immense growth in Kenya and is slowly becoming a major site of activism Akinyi (2021).

In Kenya, spoken word poetry grew significantly between the late 1990s and early 2000s. This was through organizations and creative hubs such as *Kwani* Open mic, Slam Africa,

Wamaathai's, Paza Sauti, Kenya, Anika, Fatuma's Voice, Sauti Sada, and Wenyewe Poetry. Spoken word has been a means of communication, where poets speak about societal issues affecting young people in Kenya and by extension Africa. Some of the known spoken word poets in Kenya are Namatsi, Lukoye, Raya, Wambui, Wanjiku, Mwaura, Teardrops, Mufasa (Akinyi, 2021).

Through their performances, the study envisions Kenyan spoken word artists as producing the marginal voices of others, particularly the youth alongside theirs. To this end, this research posits that when a group of people is muffled yet they are an important part of the community, they identify and define means with which to be heard. In most cases, the voices of these individuals exist but in alternative spaces where their agency thrives, as in the case of spoken word poetry performance. Yanofsky Nosson, et.al. (2006), note that as the youth engage in individual identity formation and define their values to the world around them, slam/spoken word poetry has the potential to act as a vehicle for that exploration. Apart from identity negotiation, spoken word poetry and its performance are therapeutic. The challenges that characterize urban youth existence can sometimes be traumatic, and this calls for much-needed therapy and an artistic response to redress this trauma at an individual, generation, and national level (Nosson, et al., 2006, pp.339-342).

This study therefore foregrounds the workings of spoken word to open up spaces for the youths to be heard. The study is interested in interrogating the ways that art form does this leading to disruption of hegemony. The focus of the study is on spoken word poetry, a sub-genre of poetry that is increasingly gaining critical attention, the manifestation of its revolutionary capacities is something that needs more exploration. The study's pronouncement is made given Ekesa's (2014) observation that criticism of spoken word poetry has been neglected in scholarly circles and its inclusion to the literal canon is wanting (pp. 7-8).

Spoken word poetry as a genre has its origins in African oral traditions (Aptowicz 2007; Fisher, 2003). The traditional African oral performance practices were transferred to America during slavery (Banks, Wallace, 2002, p. 43). These practices manifest in slavery narratives which were used to construct identities by using language and discourses as sites of resistance and interaction (Jenkins, 2013) notes that there was a spillover of African oral traditions, in African American writing as individuals who were removed from slavery began including aspects of African oral traditions in their texts.

The development of blues music overlaps with that of the Harlem Renaissance and Jazz poetry, which again incorporated African poetic oral forms (Sacha, 1991). Jenkins notes that the blues singers used instrumental verses to connect their emotions with sounds and language through the use of syncopation similar to that used in jazz poetry (2013, p. 52). This study observes that different structural and discursive different features of jazz filter and merge in this new genre referred to as spoken word poetry.

Traditional oral poetry is composed and transmitted without the aid of writing. It is sometimes considered to include any poetry which is performed live (Eduado, 2014). In many cultures, oral poetry overlaps with or is identical with song (Jones, 1996). Oral poetry is also performed by other means such as talking drums in some African cultures (Hither, 1988). While oral poetry exists clearly within oral cultures, it can survive and indeed flourish in highly literate cultures (Houghton, 2005). Much oral poetry is memorized verbatim through precise wording, particularly of words that are not essential to sense or meter. Oral poetry also changes from one performance to another (Rubadiri, 1995). Holanda (1966), contends that prominent examples of memorized oral poetry are some nursery rhymes and ballads.

Spoken word poetry is a contemporary sub-genre of oral poetry that is diverse and comprises of literal, cultural, and musical movements (Jenkins, 2013). This genre borrows many of its attributes from other discourses and genres but places its emphasis on the spoken word poet's

delivery of his or her texts. Spoken word poetry places emphasis on rhythm, repetition, and intonation during delivery. Similar poetic forms such as page poetry, performance poetry, and slam poetry are written in everyday language for the audience to enjoy or interpret (Sparks, Barbara, Grochowsky, Chad, 2002). At this juncture, let us try to understand spoken word poetry by contrasting it with related genres such as page poetry.

To begin with, spoken word poetry is written to be performed or spoken aloud, while page poetry is written specifically for the page (reading). Further, spoken word poetry is more accessible to the average audience than page poetry because not many people sit down to read books of poetry but many are willing to listen and watch works of art like spoken word poetry specifically if they are catchy (Jentil, 2014; Goody, 1989). Secondly, spoken word poetry is different from slam poetry, in the sense that, slam is a competitive version of spoken word poetry and requires poets to keep their poetry to three-minute performances without the use of props or any other devices. Audience members are then required to score the performance on a scale of 1 to 10 (Nelim, 2017; Jentil, 2014). Generally, performance poetry is a term that can be used for all poetry that was written to be performed instead of being published in written form (Jentil, 2014).

Performance poetry is poetry that mobilizes, not a reading voice, but a speaking voice that puts words in contact with music, non-musical sounds, visual elements, and theatrical devices (Jenkins, 2013, p.10) This aspect of intermediality that accompanies performance poetry means that both spoken word poetry and performance poetry are meant for the stage and may include the use of music and visual representations during a performance. Spoken word poetry, on the other hand, can be written on the page, unlike performance poetry. Each of these forms of poetry has its roots in oral traditions (Goody, 1987; Strachar & Terry, 2000). The temporality of spoken word poetry has been noted.

Dyson, and Kenclath (2005) argue that spoken word poetry is situationally constructed. They add that spoken word poets present diversity in their texts through the use of voice intonation, gestures, and repetition. Spoken word poetry also merges spaces between oral and written forms of creative expression by moving the spoken word poet's voice from the paper through his or her body to stage thus serving as a bridge connecting the lived experiences and social realities of individuals through discourse (Dyson, 2005, p. 152). Spoken word further produces texts which are written to be performed through a combination of storytelling, poetry, and musicality (Jenkins, 2013 p. 10). According to Jenkins, such texts that typically use the first-person pronoun are delivered from the poet's point of view. The text often includes current events and delivers social commentaries (Dyson, 2005).

As highlighted above, regardless of the difference that characterizes individual sub-genres of poetry, poetry is universally characterized by the use of language in its most precise and perfect manner. Ongeti (2015) contends that poetry is the language chosen and organized with great care and skill. It is presented in a language that is highly symbolic and precise. Usually, a poet has a little space to articulate their message therefore they must be concise in language use. In poetry, language is used in a way distinctly different from any use in everyday discourse. The actual forms of words, their varied and acoustic qualities, the very shape and sound of the poem have an importance which may not be separated from the poem itself (Oriko, 2018). Oriko (2018) observes that in poetry, there is a compression of language to portray meaning. Hence, in written poetry, there is a hidden meaning between lines. A poem can be read multiple times and every time, you can find different meanings to the same poem.

Spoken word poetry differs from written poetry because spoken word poetry is more liberal in language use. Wheeler (2005) contends that spoken word poetry is written with the audience in mind and their reactions. There are no hidden meanings. Unlike written poetry, spoken word poetry has less to do with the physical appearance of words on the page, what is called

graphological aesthetics, and more to do with phonesthetics or aesthetics of sound (Jenkins, 2014).

(Webster, 2017) opines that spoken word poetry gives the marginalized communities a voice that destroys hegemonic barriers. Marginalized communities can access an audience immediately without gatekeepers and additional layers of editors, publishers, casting agents, and directors; you can simply write and then stand up in front of your community and say it. People whose ideas or opinions are not reflected in mainstream media outlets resort to this opportunity afforded by spoken word poetry to be heard. The mode of transmission is also far-reaching. For instance, when a spoken word artist performs at a live event, the performance can be video-recorded and transmitted digitally via You-Tube and suddenly someone from a remote region can be heard by millions (Webster, 2017, p. 3) her motivation to foster spoken word poetry is inspired by the desire to create opportunities for people who would not ordinarily have been accorded the space to voice their experiences, to be heard.

As noted earlier, the assumption informing this study is that the youth in Kenya are segregated and marginalized. My definition of the youth is per Article 55 of The Kenyan Constitution that defines the youth as those aged between 18 and 35 years. Despite the youth comprising the highest percentage of the Kenyan population (Mbweli, 2017), they are nevertheless overlooked in mainstream conversations about the nation. Most Kenyan youth are unemployed, a situation that makes them feel disadvantaged in terms of access to opportunities and political representation.

(Mbweli, 2017) posits that there are 500,000 youths who graduate from various tertiary institutions yearly, ready to enter the job market but due to the slow economic growth, corruption, nepotism, and demand for experience by potential employers, 75% remain unemployed. It is on the strength of these findings that this study considers the youth as subalterns as they are not given equal chances with other groups to access opportunities in life.

The youth encounter many issues that barricade them from participating in national development. These barriers also gag them and they fail to express their issues. This scenario forces them to look for alternative avenues through which they can express their issues. Thuo states that young people need a youth branded platform from where they can speak powerfully, take appropriate action, and inspire the belief that will have a catalytic impact all over the country through youth-led development activities. Due to the prevalent social, economic, and psychological pressures, Kenya's urban youth have launched initiatives and avenues through social networks to enable them to reclaim their individual and collective dignity, to redefine their role and relevance in local, national, regional, and global realms (Ojwang, Benson, 2005). We consider spoken word poetry as one that fosters social networks amongst youth which produces ground for personal and collective engagement with national debates.

With the increasing freedoms of expression in Kenya brought about by the new constitution after successive totalitarian governments, spoken word platforms provide hospitable spaces for artists to vent creatively. They have gained popularity in Nairobi. In addition to events and festivals, such as *Kwani?* litfest, *Story Moja's* Hay festival, and *Jukwaani*, artists and audiences enjoy a range of venues across the city that consistently host performances from Tuesday at Silver birds, poets club poetry (Dagoretti corner), and Saturdays with poetry at Discovery (Koinange street) to the monthly *Kwani?* Open mic (Kaunda Street) and *Wamathan* spoken word (Utalii Lane) (Muguti, Mwiti 2015)

I consider the composition and performance of spoken word poetry as an art of expression.

Spoken word poetry is a sub-genre that is diverse and comprises of literal, cultural, and musical movements (Jenkins, 2013). This genre borrows many of its attributes from other discourses and genres but places its emphasis on the spoken word poet's delivery of his or her texts. Spoken word poetry places emphasis on rhythm, repetition, and intonation during delivery. Similar poetic forms such as page poetry, performance poetry, and slam poetry are written in

everyday language for the audience to enjoy or interpret (Sparks, Barbara, Grochowsky, Chad, 2002). At this juncture, I try to understand spoken word poetry by contrasting it with related genres such as page poetry.

Indeed, there have been a considerable number of surveys conducted, as well as reports and studies published that invariably conclude there are factors that define the marginality faced by the Kenyan youth, which include: unemployment, marginalization, harassment by the police and impediments in accessing essential facilities and services such as education and health care (Mutuku, 2009, Njonjo 2010). Karimi (2006) argues that the youth are faced with a lot of challenges like unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, early pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, crime among others. Further, as a marginalized category, Kenyan youth have been locked outside public debates on national matters (Karimi, 2016).

Due to their marginalization, these youths fail to find space within societal canons to unmask their issues. One instance of this marginalization that became public is the 2024 and finance Bill protests of June-July 2024. The most obvious means through which the youth noted their discontent with being erased from national discourse was protest. Granted, spoken word emerged as a space where they also engaged in discourses about the finance Bill and other issues of national concern (Ngugi & Ogwa,2024). Therefore, this research set out to construct multiple meanings that Kenyan youth attach to various national issues that they go through because spoken word poetry is a space in which the youth talk about issues affecting them. The study analyzed how spoken word poets produce a voice for the youth, by articulating their challenges.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Critical studies on youth subalternity is diverse and multi-disciplinary, encompassing fields such as sociology, anthropology, political science and cultural studies. However, there is a notable lack of research on the representation of youth subalternity in literature and culture,

particularly in the context of spoken word poetry in Kenya. This thesis fills this gap by providing detailed analysis of selected spoken word poems that engage with youth subalternity in Kenya. This study attempts to answer the questions on marginality and representation in spoken word poetry in Kenya with focus on youth subalternity.

This study examines how selected Kenyan spoken word poets give voice to the concerns of the youth. It explores how the youth use spoken word poetry to confront stereotypes of young people by trying to reach the broader listening public through politically and socially relevant poems. The youths tend to raise issues that affect them such as unemployment, identity crisis, gender discrimination, dysfunctional families' poverty and corruption (Muiya, 2014). The youth feel oppressed because the political class does not give them the space to express their concerns (Karani, 2007). As a consequence, there is a collective feeling of suppression leading to identification of alternative avenues to express their concerns.

This study, further explores how the youth find agency through performing their subalternity in informal, transgressive spaces of congregation, particularly in urban centers. One of the popular inventive means of expressing themselves is spoken word poetry. The study analyses the works by Wairimu, Teardrops, Mufasa, Briggedia, and Mumbi who are some of the composers of spoken word poetry.

1.3 General objective of the study

The overall aim of the study is to appraise articulation of the subaltern Kenyan youth's realities through selected spoken word poetry.

1.3.1 The specific objectives are: -

- i. To examine artistic strategies of spoken word poetry that make it more accessible and easily appropriated by subaltern groups in Kenya.

- ii. To interrogate the way spoken-word poetry in Kenya frames fluidity of subaltern identities amongst Kenyan youth.
- iii. To elucidate spoken word's dialogic conversations woven with other voices that make the youth gain access to public discourse.

1.4. Research questions:

- i. What artistic strategies are appropriated by the subaltern groups in the delivery of spoken word poetry in Kenya?
- ii. How do Kenyan spoken word poetry artists produce a voice for the youth through spoken word poetry as they negotiate the issues of subaltern fluid identities?
- iii. In what way does the dialogic nature of woven voices make the youth access public discourse?

1.5 Scope of the study

This study focused on an examination of how the Kenyan youths that have been reduced to subaltern social status are able to articulate their voice through spoken word poetry by selected Kenyan spoken word poetry artists: Brigadier, Mumbi, Teardrops, Mufasa, and Wairimu. The five artists were chosen because of their focus on youth issues and their contribution towards the growth of spoken word poetry performances in Kenya. The data was collected from YouTube. I analyzed five poems by each artist which gives a total of twenty-five spoken word poems. The data was collected from March to June 2025. The data was analyzed through content analysis method. It is possible that other pieces by the same artists were available but were not collected.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The study carried out qualitative research based on video clips uploaded on YouTube by the selected artists. In this age of digital advancement, YouTube comments bridged this gap. YouTube as a medium is interactive in this manner. This study is limited to the selected five artists only. Although the Kenyan spoken word scene has artists running in the hundreds, this study only focused on these five for a sustained in-depth inquiry. Another limitation is that some aspects like the backgrounds of the artists are not considered because the backgrounds do not form part of this study. Further, any developments that occurred to the spoken word poetry scene in Kenya after data collection was not considered due to limitations of time. The findings of the study can be applied to any emergent developments in terms of context and form.

1.7 Justification for the study

This research is timely because spoken word poetry continues to gain popularity amongst the Kenyan youth. As noted earlier, Kenyan youth make up the highest percentage of the Kenyan population. However, a large percentage of this population feels disadvantaged in terms of access to opportunities, representation, and participation in national debates (Mbweli, 2019). This reality reinforces the argument that youth are marginalized in mainstream public discourses which undermine their agency and denies them a platform from which to ventilate their issues.

Therefore, this study analyzed how the youth manipulate spoken word poetry into a platform of transgressive politics. Further, this study investigated how spoken word performances are alternative spaces that Kenyan youth use to contest their marginalization. In addition, the study examined the extent to which the language used: -particularly the stylistic choices made by the artist, unveil the most pressing issues that afflict the youth. Last but not least, this study

explored ways in which spoken word texts, artists, and performance open up spaces for debates about how spoken word is conceptualized in the literary canon.

Most studies in popular culture tend to foreground popular music (Wanjala & Kebaya, 2017) examined the role of music in the formation and shaping of identity and found out that pop music as a genre, has had the greatest appeal and impact to the majority of the Kenyan youth. (Ngugi, 2017) argues that popular culture has changed the literary scene in Africa and Kenya with popular culture being embraced by the youth in all spheres of life. He notes that the literary scene we are dealing with is an Africa/Kenya who we are not used to seeing. It is not the Africa of the Egungun masks and divination, of teeming wildlife, of the Maasai herdsman standing on one leg silhouetted against the setting sun in an African Savannah of tall grass and acacia. This Africa/Kenya is the product of globalization, media freedom, and a certain resurgence of pride in things Kenyan, a kind of new Negritude (Ngugi, 2017, P. 3).

This study expanded appreciation of this new negritude through spoken word poetry. Unlike most studies on popular culture that have concentrated on music, spoken word poetry, has attracted little scholarly attention. The trend in scholarships is that most studies focus on textual analyses that explore literariness, while this study deviated by extending beyond this text – specific exploration into sociological dynamics of spoken word poetry as a tool of protest and counter- discourse. This study also creates awareness of the possibility of spoken word poetry providing an alternative space, from the literal canon, for the Kenyan youth to articulate their challenges.

1.8 Significance of the study

The study adds to literary discourse by exploring how the youth in Kenya have been reduced to subaltern social category due to complex and multi-faceted marginalization, and how spoken word poetry enables them ventilate their issues. Spoken word poetry is presently viewed as a

revolutionary tool for the youth who are the main participants in this category to navigate their issues (Gichohi, 2014, p. 13).

This research illuminates the unique ways in which young, subaltern Kenyans negotiate their identities, articulate their struggles, and engage in critical dialogue with power structures. *This study* delves into the multifaceted significance of this study, highlighting its contributions to literary scholarship, subaltern studies, sociological understanding of youth in Kenya, and the broader field of human rights and social justice advocacy.

Firstly, this research significantly contributes to literary scholarship by expanding the canon to include spoken word poetry as a legitimate and valuable form of literary expression. Traditionally, literary analysis has often privileged written texts, neglecting the rich oral traditions that thrive in many cultures, including Kenya. Spoken word poetry, with its inherent performance element and direct engagement with audiences, offers a dynamic and accessible platform for marginalized voices to be heard (Brown, 2019). By applying Jakobson's theory of literariness, this study analyzes the poetic devices, rhetorical strategies, and aesthetic qualities employed by young Kenyan spoken word artists, demonstrating the artistic merit and complexity of their work. This challenges conventional notions of what constitutes "literature" and opens new avenues for appreciating the diverse forms of creative expression that exist beyond the written page (Ndlovu, 2020). Moreover, researching the use of language and performance in spoken word poetry sheds light on how young artists are innovating Kenyan literary traditions, crafting new genres, and incorporating indigenous languages and cultural references into their work, thus enriching the literary landscape of the nation.

Secondly, this study offers a crucial contribution to the field of subaltern studies by providing nuanced insights into the lived realities and struggles of Kenyan youth who experience marginalization. Spivak's concept of the subaltern, referring to those who are excluded from

dominant social, political, and economic structures, is central to understanding the power dynamics that silence and oppress these young individuals. Through an analysis of their spoken word poetry, this research gives voice to the voiceless, amplifies the perspectives of those who are often overlooked or misrepresented in mainstream narratives (Chawla, 2021). By exploring themes such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, tribalism, and gender inequality as portrayed in their poems, the study sheds light on the systemic barriers that hinder the progress and well-being of these young Kenyans. Furthermore, it investigates the ways in which these young artists negotiate their subalternity, challenging dominant ideologies and constructing alternative narratives of resistance and resilience. By engaging with Spivak's critique of representation, the research is also mindful of the challenges inherent in speaking "for" the subaltern, prioritizing the agency and self-representation of the poets themselves.

Furthermore, the research leverages Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to emphasize the dynamic and interactive nature of spoken word poetry as a form of communication and social engagement. Bakhtin's ideas highlight that meaning is not fixed, but rather emerges through the interaction of multiple voices and perspectives (Jones, 2018). This study analyzes the ways in which young Kenyan spoken word artists engage in dialogue with their audiences, with each other, and with the broader socio-political context. By examining the use of call-and-response techniques, collaborative performances, and online platforms, the research demonstrates how spoken word poetry creates spaces for open discussion, critical reflection, and collective action. Moreover, it explores how these young artists use their poetry to challenge dominant discourses, critique power structures, and advocate for social change. By highlighting the dialogic nature of their work, the study underscores the power of spoken word poetry to foster social cohesion, promote civic engagement, and empower marginalized communities.

Beyond its contributions to literary and theoretical scholarship, this study holds significant implications for the sociological understanding of youth in Kenya. It offers a window into the social, economic, and political realities faced by young Kenyans today, providing valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and social workers (Oduor, 2022). By analyzing the recurring themes and concerns expressed in their poetry, the research identifies the key challenges and opportunities facing young people in Kenya, informing the development of targeted interventions and policies aimed at addressing their needs and promoting their well-being. For example, the study will reveal the prevalence of mental health issues among marginalized youth or the impact of social media on their identity formation, thus highlighting the need for increased access to mental health services and media literacy programs. Moreover, the research illuminates the ways in which young Kenyans are using their creativity and entrepreneurial skills to overcome adversity and create opportunities for themselves and their communities. This can inspire and inform initiatives that support youth entrepreneurship, innovation, and leadership development.

The study also has profound implications for the field of human rights and social justice advocacy. By amplifying the voices of marginalized youth, the research raises awareness about the injustices they face and advocate for their rights to be respected and protected. Spoken word poetry serves as a powerful tool for social change, mobilizing communities and inspiring action towards a more just and equitable society (Kiilu, 2023). By documenting the struggles and aspirations of these young artists, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the root causes of inequality and discrimination of youth in Kenya. Furthermore, it can inform the development of effective advocacy strategies and interventions aimed at combating these injustices. For instance, the study revealed the systemic discrimination faced by young women or LGBTQ+ individuals in Kenya, thus empowering advocacy groups to lobby for legal reforms and social policies that protect their rights.

In addition, it is important to note that by analyzing spoken word poetry as a form of resistance, the study provides valuable insights into the ways in which marginalized youth are challenging oppressive systems and demanding social change. Their poetry serves as a catalyst for collective action, inspiring others to join their struggle and fight for a more just and equitable society. This has potential to have an impact in the policy sector because the findings may call for governments to listen to the young generation. By emphasizing the agency and resilience of these young artists, the research challenges dominant narratives of victimhood and hopelessness, promoting a more positive and empowering image of youth in Kenya. Therefore, it encourages investment in youth development programs and initiatives that support their empowerment and leadership.

Moreover, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of marginalization in Kenya. Young people often experience multiple forms of discrimination based on their gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and other factors. By analyzing how these different forms of marginalization intersect and compound each other, the research informs the development of more effective and targeted interventions. For example, the study reveals the specific challenges faced by young women from marginalized ethnic groups or LGBTQ+ individuals from low-income backgrounds, thus highlighting the need for intersectional approaches to social justice advocacy.

In addition to its practical implications, this study also holds significant theoretical value. By engaging with the works of Jakobson, Spivak, and Bakhtin, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the concepts of literariness, subalternity, and dialogism. It challenges existing theoretical frameworks and offers new insights into the ways in which these concepts operate in specific cultural and historical contexts. For example, the study reveals the limitations of

applying Western-centric theories of subalternity to the Kenyan context or offer a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between language, power, and identity.

Furthermore, the research contributes to a broader dialogue about the role of art and culture in social and political transformation. By demonstrating the power of spoken word poetry to challenge dominant narratives, inspire social action, and promote social justice, the study encourages a more critical and engaged approach to the study of art and culture. It also inspires other researchers and artists to explore the potential of creative expression as a tool for social change.

In conclusion, this study is significant for its potential to advance literary scholarship, deepen our understanding of subalternity, inform sociological analyses of Kenyan youth, and advocate for human rights and social justice. By analyzing spoken word poetry through the lenses of Jakobson's literariness, Spivak's subalternity, and Bakhtin's dialogism, this research promises to illuminate the unique experiences and expressions of marginalized young Kenyans, challenge dominant narratives, and contribute to a more just and equitable society. This study goes beyond academic exercise, offering a platform for the voices of the unheard and working towards a future where all young Kenyans have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential. It is therefore a timely and essential contribution to the ongoing efforts to build a more inclusive and democratic Kenya.

1.9 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviewed literature on voicing of the youth subalternity in spoken word poetry, as well as literary-critical perspectives on spoken word poetry in Kenya. The formal components under discussion are on the stylistic techniques employed in spoken word poetry and

intertextuality. This was necessary as it brought out the aesthetic components of spoken word poetry and shows how the genre carries some characteristics of other forms.

1.9.1 Literature review on spoken word poetry and the negotiation of youth identities

As noted in the background to this study, spoken word poetry artists in Kenya construct a voice for the subaltern Kenyan youth to negotiate issues to do with their identities. (Dundes, 1984) posits that while the word identity derives from Latin *idem* meaning “the same”, it is obvious from scholarly discussions that “identity” depends as much upon differences as upon similarities. Identity is a “self-reflective and self-conscious projection of shared and remembered symbols, myths, traditions, religion, history, language, food, clothing, and such other factors. It is also an affirmation of difference because when I know who I am, I also know who I am not or how I am different from others” (Kelly, p. 32). Identity may mean different things to different persons. To create an identity is a part of the essential business of an artist. This study argues that spoken word artists through their art re-produce identities for the youth. This is because youth identities are marginalized and silenced within public discourse, thus spoken word poetry provides an avenue for a holistic production which renders them visible. This study agreed with Dundes’s (1984) and Person’s (2010) views on identities and seeks to analyze how the Kenyan youth produce hybrid identities for themselves through spoken word poetry.

Michalko (2012) examined the effect of spoken word poetry on the development of voice in writing. The voice is about the self (identity) in writing. Through surveys, observations, interviews and authentic work completed by participants, she found out that the rise of spoken word poetry in the classroom impacts the development of voice in writing. She suggested that teachers should incorporate spoken word poetry into their writing curriculum. She observed that spoken word poetry is a writing tool that helps students breed confidence and discover

their self- identities through the act of writing. As much as Michalko studied the individual voice in writing constructed through spoken word poetry, this study aims at analyzing how a collective voice through spoken word poetry for the youth is manifested as opposed to Michalko's voice in writing, but a collective national voice that accords the youth a platform through which they can participate in national voice and break loose from a stand point of marginalization.

Owiti and Orwa (2018) conducted research focusing on about 7,000 individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 were interviewed in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Uganda. The study found out that youth constructed their identity along four dimensions: age, nationality, faith, and family. The ordering of identity was as follows: country, religion, gender, and age. Owiti and Orwa (2018) noted that while rank ordering was observed in identity among East African youth, such identities were not static. East African youth were indeed configuring their identities or the essence of who they are between age 18 and 35 years, which was perhaps related to progressive developmental shifts and life-stage needs associated with a transition out of the youth age band. While Owiti and Orwa aimed at understanding how youth identify themselves and what values and norms shape and influence them, the current study explains how issues of fluid identities among the youth are voiced through spoken word poetry in Kenya.

Waiyala and Kebaya (2016) argued that through popular music two facets of youth identity in Kenya emerge; fostered identity and referential identity. Fostered identity refers to the identity imposed on the youth, while referential identity refers to that identity that the youth themselves forge. While Waiyala and Kebaya (2016) looked at the role of music in the formation and shaping of identity among the Kenyan youth, this study expands on their research by looking at how these formed identities are voiced through spoken word poetry. This study creates an experiment in the problematization of identities among the youth by providing a space different

from the literary canon, for the youth to freely speak about their identities, as other genres are crowded by gate keepers.

Kahyana (2014) examined how selected Ugandan literary texts portray construction, and negotiations of national identities as they intersect with overlapping and cross-cutting identities like race, ethnicity, gender, religions denomination, and political affiliation. He examined the portrayal of how various borders (internal and external, social-cultural and geographical) are navigated in particular literary texts in order to construct, reconstruct and perform (Trans) national identity. Using key events in Uganda's history, for instance colonialism, decolonization, expulsion and civil war, Kahyana investigated how selected writers narrate using these events in their constructions of Uganda (Trans) national identities. He was guided by Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia. Bakhtin's proposed that novel is a site for dialogic interaction of multiple languages and speeches exposing a particular world view or ideology enabled him to create co-ordination between literary texts and the nation. He therefore argued that Ugandan national identity is constructed by the existence of these very identities that overlap with it, Kahyana (2014). Unlike Kahyana(2014) who examines identities of a nation, this study examined the identity of an individual group within the nation. The study used Homi Bhabha's argument that identity is not static, but ever changing depending on the circumstances, therefore producing a hybrid identity. While Kahyana adopts Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, where he argues that, the national identity of Uganda is constructed by existence of various identities from races, ethnic groups, genders, religions, and denominations that overlap with each other. This study aims to examine how spoken word poetry reveals the youth identity that is in a state of flux.

Okemwa (2017), describes how the open-mic performance poetry sub-genre engages various verbal inflections in (re) presenting our everyday issues in life. Okemwa argues that open-mic performances in Kenya have prompted performance poets in Kenya to construct their own

identities as artists. He further proposes that these poets strive to define a uniquely open-mic poetry sub-genre in Kenya, while capitalizing on benefits that this emerging art brings to them in (re) presenting societal concerns. This research is partly similar to that of Okemwa (2017) because it also addresses societal concerns but differs from Okemwa's study in that, while Okemwa looks at open-mic sub-genre in Kenya and how it shapes the identities of the youth, this study is concerned with how the Kenyan spoken word poems produce a voice for the marginalized youths and how this group can be engaged in productive national debates on issues affecting them.

1.9.2 Literature review on works that address social issues in the society

Camangian (2008), examined the impact of performance poetry unit on students; critical thinking, literacy and voice from the perspective of a teacher/ researcher in an urban classroom. He used the critical and the performance aspects of spoken word poetry in a South Los Angeles High School composition classroom. Through empowering students to examine issues of privilege, social control and oppression in U.S society; he concluded that spoken word poetry can be used as a tool for creating student-centered, critical discursive spaces in schools. This study however differs from Camangian's study in that, as much as he uses students as a study tool, this study uses spoken word artists as creators of critical spaces in the nation. As Camangian's study aims to find out how spoken word poetry can be used as a tool for curriculum instruction, this study on the other hand uses spoken word poetry as a tool that creates a platform for the Kenyan youth to participate in national debates.

Ellis (2021), argues that spoken word poetry has given voice to many view points, but perhaps the most significant impact has been on young feminists. Ellis notes that one in three Namibian women between the ages of 15 and 49 reported having experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence from their spouse. He observes that gender-based violence and to a lesser

extent other forms of discrimination against women, have become a regular part of the Namibian political scene. He notes that in his research, poets, especially women poets, have responded to this social context by highlighting violence and bodily autonomy as central concerns. The contemporary spoken word poets have placed gender-based violence and bodily autonomy as central concerns. In his study, Ellis also found out that spoken word poetry is a space in which young urban Namibians feel they can discuss ideas freely. The study notes that The Spoken word Namibia (SWN) organization was started by students and young professionals in Windhoek. He notes that spaces, like *Windhoek Open mike Night and the Gathering* have developed all along a similar model. While Ellis looks at how spoken word poetry can be used to challenge gender-based violence, this study majorly focus on how the same form of poetry can be used to fight any form of oppression against the youth.

Alfonso and Fontanilla (2015), examined the potential of spoken word poetry to instigate social change by addressing pressing social realities. They delve into the social impact of spoken word poetry in terms of how artists touch on issues such as oppression, poverty, and gentrification (Alfonso & Fontanilla,2015, p.5). Their study opines that spoken word poetry is a mechanism that can bring change in society and lead to an innate desire to rectify systems of oppression. While Alfonso and Fontanilla aim at examining how spoken word poetry can be used to bring change in society, this study focuses on the same issues but through the voice of the youth and the major issues affecting them.

Kempe (2012) notes that there have been a considerable number of surveys conducted and studies published that invariably conclude that there are persistent risks and challenges faced by the Kenyan youth, which includes unemployment, marginalization, poverty, and impediments in accessing essential facilities and services (corruption). In his study Noor (2018), interrogated how corruption affects the youth in Kenya and found out that corruption leads to unemployment, poverty and a state of political turmoil and instability (Noor,2018, p.

40). This study fills the gap of raising the issues raised by the youth by voicing them through spoken word poetry.

Wanjohi (2014) carried out research to establish the issues facing the Kenyan youth in the 21st century, he found out that the key issue facing the youth in Kenya in the 21st century is unemployment. He noted that according to international Labor Organization (2010) findings, the youth unemployment issue is a global issue that is prevalent in both developed and developing economies. However, he argues that the problem is much more acute in developing economies like Kenya which are still trying to address other economic, social, and political concerns. This study focuses on the challenges faced by youth but foregrounds the voice of the Kenyan youth and proposes that corruption leads to unemployment and poverty, which leads to Kenyan youth being restless and seeking for an avenue with which to vent their restlessness, and such like an avenue is spoken word poetry.

Waliaula (2018) undertook to define spoken word poetry through comparing spoken word selected works of two poets, one from America and the other from Kenya. She explored the recurring themes in the poems and how the poets have chosen to address them. She avers that spoken word poetry has in the recent years adopted quite a number of unique features and as much as it qualifies to be a genre of poetry, it is considered to be diverse in nature because it borrows a lot of features from other forms of art. She majorly analyzed the similarities and differences between their chosen poems to show that every artist has a unique way on how they address certain issues affecting society. She argues that spoken word poetry is recognized as a movement that encourages empowerment of the youth and also targets to address issues that affect society. She concluded that spoken word poetry has been neglected and ignored in the field of literary critical literatures, in spite of it being a voice of different marginalized groups, by being a platform for addressing certain issues affecting society. This study on the other hand only handles one group of the marginalized, which is the youth. The youth are treated as a

subaltern category who in order to participate in national discourse, need a radical voice and this voice is found in spoken word poetry. This study does not just foreground the youths' realities but explores how through spoken word poetry the Kenyan youth participate in national discourses.

Owuor (2021) argues that taxation in Kenya may make one to consider this country to be hell (p. 4). He further says that Kenya is among the most overtaxed countries in the world. Owuor argues that justice is for the rich. He posits that the poor people pay taxes, yet the rich find means and evade payment of taxes. This study analyses the tax issue is to be an outcome of corruption. In his study, Owuor observes that each year the prestigious universities in Kenya churn out so many graduates who have been given power to read and to do so many things that appertains to their degrees, yet these people remain unemployed and the only job they get is looking for a job (Owuor, 2021, p. 5). According to the study, this is a state of joblessness or unemployment. In his study, Owuor also finds out that the political elites play with the law, as they can buy justice, yet the poor people suffer for they are jailed because they cannot buy justice (p. 6). As much as Owuor's study, discusses aspects of poverty, unemployment and corruption, this study takes cognizant of the fact that these aspects occur in Kenya. This study delves further on how these issues are brought to the public limelight. The research advances the debate on corruption and show how the youth can use their own creativity to fight this vice.

In yet another study, Ekesa (2020), explores the relationship between work and leisure in the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya. She examines the representation of labor and leisure in the creative industry of spoken word poetry in Kenya. She avers that, the majority of spoken word artists, start off by staging performances in order to execute their talents and entertain the audience without financial gain. Yet when they become popular, they make the performances to be alternative sources of income. As much as Ekesa looks at spoken word as a form of entertainment and as an alternative source of income, this study does not go for the

entertainment aspect of the poems but looks at the spoken word poetry as a form of social commentary.

Isler et.al (2015), investigated on how spoken word poetry is a promising approach, to HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, as it has the potential to encourage dialogue among and within communities and address the development and implementation of the Spoken Word Project (SWP), an HIV/AIDS pilot intervention in North Carolina designed to improve HIV-related attitudes and self-efficacy and decrease stigma through the use of spoken poetry. They concluded that spoken word poetry has the ability to build upon local resources, generate community reflection, and engage a board spectrum of performers and audiences. The researchers also found out that the effect of stigma and limited community conversations about HIV in rural communities can be abated through the use of spoken word poetry. This study notes that even though the field of spoken word poetry is rich in its uses in creating awareness on deadly diseases, this study differs from Isler et al (2015) because it discusses issues like unemployment, poverty and corruption on a national platform.

Mathia (2019) in her research argues that the youth constitute a significant proposition essential for economic growth and development. She records that the youth struggle to find relevance in a society that offers disappointing employment and life prospects, undermines their self-expression, and systematically marginalizes its citizens. She avers that policies that address youth aspirations have mostly faltered. Further, she states that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially goal 10, crystalizes the expectations of young Africans by advocating “social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity or other status (UN –SDGs). She further argues that the African Unions Agenda 2063 underscores the importance of promoting rights of the young people and meeting their needs in all their diversity’ (AU, 2006). Her study found out that the youth are excluded from both local and foreign policy matters. This study on the other hand expands on her study by

interrogating how far the spoken word poetry by Kenyan youth poets provide a platform for the youths to air their grievances and create a source for self-expression and addressing their pressing issues.

1.9.3 Literature review on the literariness of spoken word poetry.

Onyando (2007) posits that in literary terms, poetry is what is written in verse and employs elements of personification and metaphor as opposed to prose, which may not employ these elements.

Githuanja (2007) defines poetry as repetitive, has rhythm and intonation. Rhythm can be said to mean an ordered recurrent, alternation of strong and weak elements, in the flow of sound and silence in speech an example is an iambic rhythm (Liddell & Scott 1996). Generally, rhythm means a movement marked by the regulated succession of strong and weak elements or opposite or different conditions (Anon, 1971).

Oriko (2018) in her study, states that, a poem has rhythm from which a reader or listener draws pleasure. She further says that generally, a poem is characterized by specific elements that make it succinct and enjoyable; these elements of poetry which make it different from prose are rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, metaphor, imagery, symbolism among others (p. 23). She further argues that the elements of poetry draw on the human senses of sight, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting. In her study, she notes that rhythm is present whenever anything recurs more regularly. The current study builds on Oriko (2018) by examining specific ways in which these rhythmic elements manifests in spoken word poetry and the resultant effect in relation to issues explored.

In foregrounding stylistic performance of spoken word poetry, Muleka (2014) states that tone is used to refer to the quality of voice, especially expressing a particular emotion, such as mockery, adoration, skepticism, and so on; while intonation is the rise and fall of the voice in

speaking. Muleka argues that the two elements are extremely important in determining the meaning of words, phrases, tone units, and even whole sentences. He points out that an oral literature performance compares with a stage play in which the performance has to support his/her words with the movement of the body and the control of the voice to make an effective impression (Muleka, 2014, p.155).

Repetition is a major device used in spoken word poetry. Muleka argues that repetition is a crucial element in poetry, it makes the emphasis of significant points and highlights a pressing need, thereby focusing the message of the poet. Further, repetition achieves its identity through applying the unique features of alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, etc (p.157). This study foregrounds rhythm, repetition, and intonation to produce the voice of subalternity of the youth in spoken word poetry. These features make spoken word poetry lively, danceable, and therefore makes it more appropriate for a youth audience.

Tiffany considers how the design, layout, and purpose of a venue; the geographical setting, or the mood/ atmosphere are all salient influences on the performance act of “place making.” She employs thematic, discourse, as well as interactionist approaches to verbal art as performance to create a thick description of spoken word poetry and highlight place making as an empowering linguistic social act. In her research, Tiffany foregrounds the importance of the physical venue that spoken word poetry takes place at, which is very attractive to the youth, while this study focuses on spoken word poetry as an instrument of agency amongst the youth for the youth to create space to discuss their issues. This study does not focus on the physical space of performance like Tiffany’s, this study considers the spaces as being crowded by the literary canon, so the youth have to fight to create their own space through spoken word poetry.

Mwiti (2014) evaluates the literariness of Mochama’s spoken word poetry. He examines the general stylistic character of Tony Mochama’s poetry. The study established that Mochama integrates various stylistic devices in his fresh articulation of the modern issues in society.

Mwiti also establishes that Mochama uses repetition as a stylistic device in his spoken word poetry. This study explains that repetition is the regular recurrence of an idea, sound, word, phrase, line or even a whole stanza for emphasis. Mwiti opines that there are many instances of repetition: such as general repetitions of words and phrases, refrains, alliteration and assonance, consonance and rhyme (pp. 34-39). This research posits that forms of repetitions create rhythm which is a dominant feature of spoken word poetry. Critically, this study argues that what differentiates poetry from natural language is the use of language differently from natural speech; natural language is defamiliarized through figures of sound and sense like imagery, personification, and metaphor (Tyson, Lois 2006). When composers of spoken word poetry use stylistic devices to create certain effects and enhance aesthetic functioning, this study terms such usage of the language as the creation of beauty which makes spoken word poetry more accessible and appropriated by the youth.

Akinyi (2018) looks at factors that influence Mufasa's performance of spoken word poetry and how the poet uses literary techniques to enhance the interpretation of his content, aesthetic value and the quality of performance. Her study establishes that performance is an integral aspect of spoken word poetry as it is what distinguishes oral poetry from, the written form. Akinyi (2021) establishes that performance of spoken word poetry apart from enhancing aesthetic appeal also aids in interpretation of poetry content. She concludes that Mufasa incorporates performance techniques like gestures, repetition, tonal variation, pauses, and pitch to ensure that his intended message is rightfully understood and interpreted. This study apart from assessing performance techniques, goes deeper into studying intertextuality in spoken word poetry and how this intertextuality contributes in bringing out meaning in the selected poetry texts.

Ekesa (2014) investigates the role of intertextuality and performance in the creation of meaning and aesthetic in the spoken word poetry from fourteen Kenyan artists. Her study established

that spoken word poetry is diverse in nature, because it incorporates other forms like the novel, forms of traditional oral poetry like jazz, hip-hop, and dub. She establishes that spoken word poetry is embedded in other forms and cannot be studied in isolation. She asserts that these other forms play a major role in the interpretation of the text. She finds out that spoken word poetry has unique features which separate it from other genres. These unique features are mainly realized through performance. She argues that the manner in which spoken word poetry is articulated distinguishes it from the rest. While Ekese's study deals with intertextuality and performance in the creation of meaning and aesthetic appeal, this study takes note of intertextuality in spoken word poetry but the focus of the study is majorly in repetition and stressing of certain words to put emphasis on issues that affect the youths.

1.9.4 Literature Review on Intertextuality in spoken word poetry

The term intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva (1980). She defines intertextuality as "the transportation of one (or several) sign system(s) into another" (p. 60) "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (p. 37). Every text is connected to other texts by citations, quotations, allusions, borrowings, adaptations, appropriations, parody, pastiche, irritation, and the like. Every text is in a dialogical relationship with other texts. Intertextuality is at times referred to as pastiche. The American Heritage Dictionary defines pastiche as "a word or style produced by borrowing fragments, ingredients or motifs from various sources". It may seem surprising that such a statement needs to be repeated in this age of interconnectedness, where dominant popular images are those of endlessly connected threads. But we still need to be reminded that single events and single literature cannot be understood without reference to other events and other literatures.

Kristeva a literary theorist believed that there is a cohesive force in the literature that connects all the various traditions, past and present. She further explains that intertextuality is an

expression of the complicated dependence of literary works on all the literature that has come before them. In this study, intertextuality is important in understanding how spoken word poets parody the lies told by the ruling class and how the youth survive on false hope as they create their own jobs.

Finnegan (2005) notes that contrary to what was being believed, oral performance does always emerge in the mix-and-match variability of composition in the movement of delivery (p. 168). Middleton (2005) posits that written and oral forms can overlap and intermingle, and are related in a manifold and variegated ways, rather than existing as distinctive modes, having hard-edged properties (p. 169) Spoken word poetry is a performance art that intermingles with African oral tradition. This study also looks at how oral tradition influences the composition of spoken word poetry.

May and Harris (2020) examined the assertion that world literature is in danger of becoming a closed system. They assert that emergent African literary forms are often excluded from the world of literature, precisely because they demand methods of reading that challenge this anticipatory logic. The anticipatory African literatures that are circulating in African urban spaces as “African street literatures,” three such street forms are; - ephemeral print literature, flash fiction, and spoken word poetry. In all these forms, the literary form registers its situatedness and as such its location is co-constructive of the field of the literary text. The researchers suggest that texts should be read in a way of reading context, material form, co-determining, without losing attention to the literariness of the text under examination. This study avers that, when we keep literatures to reading of books and sticking to the literary canon, literature will soon become a closed system. When we support spoken word, as an emerging literary canon, the youth become attracted to the genre because of stylistic features like metaphor, alliteration and assonance, and also opening up performance spaces where performance can be done anywhere, even on the streets.

Jenkins (2013) argues that performers of spoken word poetry use storytelling, an aspect of African oral traditions, as a basis for generating knowledge through the re-articulating of their lived experiences and social realities for their listeners or audiences (p. 36). She further notes that by drawing on African oral traditions, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry emerges through conversations with larger societal discourse in which spoken word poets emerge as a new generation of storytellers (p. 37). Apart from African oral traditions, spoken word poetry artists also borrow from hip-hop to compose and deliver their pieces. Jenkins further explains that since the inception of hip hop in the 1970s the genre has mixed music and poetry as part of the artists' narratives of lived experiences and social realities derived from their daily lives. Being contemporary griots, metaphorically, rappers are very close relatives of spoken word poets who also relay cultural and political information to their listeners and audiences (p. 70). This study looks at the spoken word poets as the modern griots and their role as educators of the society and social commentators.

Apart from oral tradition, hip hop, and written poetry, spoken word artists also borrow from blues. Chinitz (1996) defines a blues poem as one that regardless of form, utilizes the themes, motifs, language (p. 44), Chinitz explains that Langstone Hughes was attracted to the blues particularly by what the music represented to him: an expression of the resilience and tragedy of the African American lower class. Chinitz further argues that Langstone Hughes used blues to express disenfranchisement of the African American masses and the various frustrations it engendered demanded indirect outlets supplied by the subculture. This, therefore, means that blues is a very rich source for spoken word poetry to borrow from. This study operates on the basis that spoken word poetry compositions and performance rely heavily on other genres as blues, hip hop and African oral traditions, to compose and perform spoken word poetry. Just as blues the spoken word poetry are analyzed as texts that give voice to the disenfranchised minority (youth) in Kenya.

Blues as argued by scholars is an African American music genre, originated in the black communities of the Deep South at the end of the nineteenth centuries (Jenkins, 2014). This genre is a mixture of spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts, chants, and narrated ballads developed during slavery, which expanded into the Blues and its varied musical stylizations (p. 49). Bolden (2004) maintained that blues were instrumental in the development of black poetry and black *Sheng*' and code-mixing culture as sites for resistance. Bolden (1998), argues that while examining the process of creative process in the blues tradition, we can observe a strategy among the poets that bears close resemblance. More specifically, this study identifies three main bodies of blues poetics riff upon, that is, mimic black oral forms, some poets fuse their dedication to *Sheng*' and code-mixing culture with a concern for literary conversations; and some poets incarnate that "All Blues' charts the infusion of new forms like spoken word poetry into American literary discourse. My argument is that spoken word poets in Kenya have heavily borrowed from blues to compose their texts. The study looks at the power of words in bringing about changes in the society. While looking at the aspect of intertextuality, the study ignores the entertainment aspect of the poetry but highlights the main concerns of the youth.

Abdon (2010) assesses the definition of spoken word poetry that challenges the view that sees it as something different from 'poetry; and as a mirror subgenre produced by marginal writers in sites unworthy of academic investigation. His study maintains that spoken word poetry is poetry inscribed with textual and extra - textual elements, and because of its multimodal "nature" versatility, and sensitivity towards youth culture - it is particularly fit to be discussed and taught in South African multicultural English classrooms, particularly at a time when the decolonization of knowledge stands at the core of the discourse on contemporary South African culture. Abdon's (2010) study majorly looks at spoken word as something different from poetry and as a mirror subgenre produced by marginal writers in sites unworthy of academic investigation, this study looks at spoken word poetry as something worth to be studied for it

passes information that is relevant to the community. The study agrees with Abdon's view that the same poetry can be studied in classroom.

Okoye and Ugwu (2021) attempted to trace the influences, interactions, confluences and developmental trajectories that links the ancient art of oral chants, poetry, minstrelsy, and the contemporary and modernist spoken word verifications in practice today in Nigeria, Africa. Okoye and Ugwu studies audience, form, content, and intent as pivotal factors in the different epochs, that separate the ancient precursors and spoken word poetry through ethnographic and qualitative approaches and textual analyses. Modern spoken word poets were studied. The duo established that traditional forms have built a formidable bulwark of elements and standards that give rise to spoken word poetry. Through studying two spoken word poets, they established that oral tradition through adequate metamorphoses augmented a post-colonial tenor and relevance. This study on the other hand does not focus on the rise of spoken word poetry but focuses on how spoken word poetry produces space for the subaltern youth to speak out issues that affect them, majorly, producing a voice for the subaltern groups to be heard.

Yao (2020) looks at the history of contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry by tracing the link between the art and traditional African oral poetry. In his research, he attempts to identify and examine various features of traditional African oral poetry that are present in contemporary time. He wanted to arouse more scholarly interest in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry in academia and also encourage the use of the art to teach Ghanaian history, culture and traditions in schools. This study on the other hand does not focus on the history of spoken word but delves into the contemporary features that assist the youth in creating space that guide them in airing their views.

1.10 Theoretical framework

This thesis analyses how young, marginalized voices in Kenya utilize spoken word to articulate their experiences of marginalization, resistance, and identity formation. To achieve this, the thesis employs three key theoretical lenses: Jakobson's concept of literariness, Spivak's concept of the subaltern, and Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. This section delves into each theory, outlining its core tenets and demonstrating its relevance to the study of Kenyan spoken word poetry as a medium for expressing youth subalternity. It also explores the interconnections between these theoretical concepts, highlighting how they complement and enrich each other in providing a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play within the chosen corpus of poetry.

1.10.1 Jakobson and the Concept of Literariness: Defining the Poetic Space

Jakobson (1960), a prominent figure in Russian Formalism and structural linguistics, revolutionized the study of literature by shifting the focus from the author's intention or the historical context to the inherent properties of the text itself. His concept of "literariness" (or "literaturnost") is central to understanding how a text functions as a work of art. He argued that literariness is what makes a given work a literary work (Jakobson, 1921). It is the distinguishing feature that separates poetry and other forms of art from ordinary language.

For Jakobson, the essence of literariness lies in the "poetic function" of language. This function is characterized by a focus on the message itself, rather than simply using language as a transparent tool for communication. In ordinary language, the primary function is communication, and the focus is on the referent (the object or idea being referred to). However, in poetry, the focus shifts to the sign itself, to the way the words are arranged, their sounds, rhythms, and connotations. This foregrounding of the sign is what Jakobson calls the "dominant" in a literary work (Jakobson, 1935).

The poetic function operates by disrupting and deviating from the norms of everyday language.

This can be achieved through various linguistic devices, including:

1.10.3 Relevance to Kenyan Spoken Word Poetry

Jakobson's concept of literariness is highly relevant to the study of Kenyan spoken word poetry for several reasons: **Performance and Orality:** Spoken word poetry is inherently performative, and its impact relies heavily on the poet's voice, rhythm, and delivery. The emphasis on sound, intonation, and physical presence amplifies the poetic function of language, making the formal elements of the poem more prominent. The oral nature of this poetry tradition highlights the importance of rhyme, rhythm, and other sound devices in creating a memorable and engaging experience for the audience.

Innovation and Experimentation: Kenyan spoken word poets often experiment with language, blending English, Swahili, and various indigenous languages. They use slang, code-switching, and neologisms to create a unique linguistic style that reflects the hybridity of their cultural experiences. This linguistic innovation further enhances the poetic function, drawing attention to the creative possibilities of language.

Challenging Traditional Poetic Forms: Spoken word poetry often breaks away from traditional poetic forms and structures, embracing a more fluid and improvisational style. This rejection of conventional norms is itself a form of literariness, as it highlights the poet's conscious manipulation of language and form. **Social Commentary:** Kenyan spoken word poetry frequently addresses social and political issues, using poetic devices to amplify their message and engage the audience. By making the language itself a site of resistance and critique, poets can challenge dominant ideologies and promote social change.

Creating a Unique Kenyan Identity: Through the blending of languages, the use of local references, and the exploration of uniquely Kenyan experiences, spoken word poets contribute to the creation of a distinct Kenyan literary voice. This contributes to the ongoing process of defining what constitutes “Kenyan literature” in a globalized world. By analyzing the formal elements of Kenyan spoken word poetry through the lens of Jakobson’s theory, the thesis can demonstrate how these poets are consciously crafting literary works that challenge conventional notions of poetry and create a powerful and engaging medium for expressing their perspectives.

1.10.4 Spivak and the Subaltern: Giving Voice to the Voiceless

Spivak, a postcolonial theorist and literary critic, is best known for her work on the concept of the subaltern. The term “subaltern,” borrowed from Antonio Gramsci, refers to marginalized groups who are excluded from the dominant power structures of society and lack access to representation. Spivak’s work focuses on the challenges of representing the subaltern, particularly in the context of postcolonial studies (Spivak, 1988).

Can the Subaltern Speak?

Spivak’s most famous essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), explores the question of whether marginalized groups can truly express themselves and be heard within dominant systems of representation. She argues that the subaltern is often silenced or misrepresented by those in power, and that their voices are filtered through the lens of colonial or patriarchal ideologies.

Spivak critiques the tendency of Western intellectuals to speak for the subaltern, arguing that this paternalistic approach often reinforces existing power imbalances and prevents the subaltern from speaking for themselves. She also examines the complexities of subaltern

agency, noting that even when marginalized groups appear to be speaking, their voices may be shaped by the very systems that oppress them.

Spivak's concept of the subaltern is closely tied to the concept of intersectionality, which recognizes that individuals can experience multiple forms of marginalization based on their race, class, gender, sexuality, and other social categories. The subaltern is not a monolithic group but rather a diverse collection of individuals with varying experiences and perspectives. Spivak's work emphasizes the importance of understanding the specific historical and social contexts that shape the experiences of different subaltern groups.

Spivak's concept of the subaltern provides a crucial framework for understanding the experiences of young, marginalized Kenyans who use spoken word poetry as a platform for self-expression. The thesis used Spivak's work to analyze how these poets: **Challenge Dominant Narratives:** Spoken word poetry provides a space for young Kenyans to challenge dominant narratives about their lives and communities. They can use their poetry to critique social injustices, expose corruption, and advocate for social change.

Give Voice to the Voiceless: Spoken word poetry can amplify the voices of those who are often silenced or ignored by mainstream media and political institutions. By sharing their personal stories and perspectives, these poets can bring attention to the struggles and aspirations of marginalized communities. **Reclaim Agency:** By using their own voices to express their experiences, young Kenyans can reclaim agency and resist being defined by others. Spoken word poetry allows them to assert their identities, challenge stereotypes, and create their own narratives. **Negotiate Hybrid Identities:** Many young Kenyans navigate complex identities that are shaped by their cultural heritage, their experiences of globalization, and their interactions with various social groups. Spoken word poetry provides a space for them to explore these hybrid identities and express their unique perspectives.

Spoken word poetry can also be used to critique neo-colonial forces that continue to shape Kenyan society. Poets can expose the ways in which Western economic and cultural influences perpetuate inequality and marginalization. By applying Spivak's concept of the subaltern to the study of Kenyan spoken word poetry, the thesis sheds light on the complex dynamics of power, representation, and resistance that are at play in this vibrant and dynamic art form. It allows for a deeper understanding of how these young artists are not only giving voice to their experiences but also challenging the very structures that seek to silence them.

1.10.7 Bakhtin and Dialogism: The Interplay of Voices

Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher, literary critic, and semiotician, developed the concept of dialogism to describe the inherently interactive and relational nature of language and meaning. Bakhtin argued that all language is dialogic, meaning that it is always produced in response to and in anticipation of other voices (1981).

Heteroglossia and Carnival:

Two key concepts in Bakhtin's theory of dialogism are heteroglossia and carnival. Heteroglossia refers to the multiplicity of voices and languages that exist within a given society. Bakhtin argued that language is not a unified system but rather a constantly evolving collection of dialects, jargons, and social languages. Carnival, on the other hand, is a social and cultural event that subverts and challenges dominant norms and hierarchies. Bakhtin saw carnival as a space where different voices and perspectives could clash and interact, creating a sense of liberation and possibility.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism is highly relevant to the study of Kenyan spoken word poetry for several reasons. Firstly, there is interplay of Languages: Kenyan spoken word poetry often blends English, Swahili, and various indigenous languages, creating a rich and complex

linguistic landscape. This multilingualism reflects the heteroglossia of Kenyan society and creates a dialogic space where different languages and cultures can interact. The Dialogue with Tradition: Spoken word poetry often engages in a dialogue with traditional forms of Kenyan oral literature, such as songs, proverbs, and folktales. By incorporating elements of these traditions into their work, poets can create a sense of continuity with the past while also innovating and experimenting with new forms of expression. Social and Political Dialogue: Kenyan spoken word poetry frequently addresses social and political issues, creating a dialogue between the poet, the audience, and the wider community. By sharing their perspectives on these issues, poets can stimulate debate and promote social change.

The Dialogue with Global Influences: Kenyan spoken word poetry is also influenced by global trends and movements, such as hip-hop, slam poetry, and social justice activism. This creates a dialogue between local and global perspectives, enriching the art form and connecting it to a wider network of artists and activists. Audience Participation: Spoken word poetry performances often involve audience participation, creating a dynamic and interactive space where different voices can be heard. This participatory aspect of spoken word poetry reinforces its dialogic nature and makes it a powerful tool for community building and social engagement.

By applying Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to the study of Kenyan spoken word poetry, the thesis analyses how these poets create a space for dialogue, debate, and social change. It demonstrates how their work is not only a reflection of their own experiences but also a response to and engagement with the wider social and cultural context.

1.10.9 Interconnections and Synthesis: A Holistic Theoretical Framework

While Jakobson, Spivak, and Bakhtin offer distinct theoretical frameworks, their concepts are interconnected and can be synthesized to create a more holistic understanding of Kenyan spoken word poetry. Jakobson's concept of literariness provides the tools to analyze the formal

elements of spoken word poetry, while Spivak's concept of the subaltern helps to understand the social and political context in which this poetry is produced. By combining these two theories, the thesis can demonstrate how Kenyan spoken word poets use poetic devices to amplify the voices of marginalized communities and challenge dominant narratives. The *how* (literariness) serves the *why* (subalternity).

Spivak's concept of the subaltern highlights the challenges of representing marginalized groups, while Bakhtin's concept of dialogism emphasizes the importance of creating spaces for dialogue and debate. By combining these two theories, the thesis analyses how Kenyan spoken word poetry creates a platform for diverse voices to be heard and for social and political change to be promoted. Spivak identifies the silenced, while Bakhtin provides a framework for understanding how these voices can enter into dialogue.

Jakobson's focus on the poetic function and Bakhtin's emphasis on the interplay of voices reveal how language is both a carefully constructed artefact and a social construct. This synthesis helps to understand how the poetic devices used by Kenyan spoken word artists not only enhance the aesthetic quality of their work but also contribute to the creation of a dialogic space where different perspectives can be shared and debated. The *how* of poetic construction (literariness) is inextricable from the *how* of social interaction (dialogism).

These three theories, when considered together, offer a powerful and nuanced lens for analyzing Kenyan spoken word poetry. Jakobson provides the tools to analyze the formal elements of the poetry, Spivak provides a framework for understanding the social and political context in which it is produced, and Bakhtin provides a perspective on the dialogic nature of language and meaning. By integrating these three theories, the thesis offers a comprehensive and insightful analysis of Kenyan spoken word poetry as a form of artistic expression, social commentary, and cultural resistance.

The theoretical framework outlined above informs the methodology employed in the thesis. The methodology involves: Textual Analysis: Close readings of selected spoken word poems focusing on the use of poetic devices (Jakobson), the representation of subaltern experiences (Spivak), and the interplay of voices and perspectives (Bakhtin). Performance Analysis: Analysis of recorded performances of spoken word poetry, paying attention to the poet's delivery, the audience's response, and the overall performative context. Contextual Analysis: Examination of the social, political, and cultural context in which the poems are produced and performed. Comparative Analysis: Comparison of different poems and performances to identify patterns, trends, and variations in the representation of youth subalternity. The application of this framework involves selecting a representative corpus of Kenyan spoken word poetry. This selection considers the diversity of voices, themes, and styles within the Kenyan spoken word scene. The analysis then proceeds by examining each poem and performance through the lens of the three theories, noting how each theory illuminates different aspects of the work.

1.10.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis is underpinned by a robust theoretical framework that integrates Jakobson's concept of literariness, Spivak's concept of the subaltern, and Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. This framework allows for a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of how young, marginalized Kenyans use spoken word poetry to articulate their experiences, challenge dominant narratives, and create a space for dialogue and social change. By combining these three theories, the thesis offers a powerful and insightful perspective on the complex dynamics of power, representation, and resistance that are at play in this vibrant and dynamic art form. The findings contribute significantly to the fields of Kenyan literature, postcolonial studies, youth studies, and performance studies. This research not only illuminates the specific context of Kenyan youth subalternity but also offers broader insights into the power of art to challenge

injustice and promote social transformation. Ultimately, this thesis amplifies the voices of those who are often unheard and contributes to a more just and equitable world.

1.11 METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodological framework that was followed in conducting this study. It was divided into two broad sections. The first one outlined the philosophical assumptions that justified the selected topic and theories. The second part highlighted the specific methods used in conducting the research. In part one, the study discussed the three philosophical paradigms, ontology, epistemology, and axiology which guide this study, while part two outlines the methods of inquiry chosen, sampling techniques to be followed, the data collection techniques and instruments, and lastly data analysis methods.

1.11.1 Research paradigms/philosophical assumptions

The conceptualization of this research is informed by the following philosophical paradigms: ontology, epistemology and axiology. Slevitch (2011) defines ontology as the study of reality or things comprising reality. This involves exploring the form and nature of reality and therefore, “how things really are” and how things really work (Gumba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 83). Ontology informs on the perception of reality. This study adopted a qualitative ontological approach because the purpose of this study is to examine how issues faced by Kenyan youth are voiced in spoken word poems by Kenyan youth artists. The goal of this inquiry is therefore to examine how Kenyan youths have been reduced to a subaltern category by the acuteness of the marginalization that they experience, for purposes of understanding how they negotiate this marginalization.

Considering that this is a qualitative study, the study followed a subjectivist/relativist ontological paradigm. Relativism acknowledges that no single position in truth exists and that reality is a matter of individual perception and human understanding. This means our historical

background, society, cultural context and other social factors determine how we construct and interpret the situations we interact with.

In terms of epistemological perspective, this research was informed by interpretive constructivism. The choice was guided by the assumption that the interpretive constructivist epistemological paradigm is the most appropriate because it operates under the basic principle that reality is socially constructed. This standpoint is relativist positivist because we consider reality as constructed by each individual but dependent on human consciousness. In other words, the study sought an understanding of experiences of Kenyan youth as represented in spoken word poetry by the selected spoken word Kenyan poets for purposes of understanding the meanings they ascribe to which are socially and historically constructed.

Ultimately, the axiological philosophical assumption is Aristotelian, which is to say that the main significance of this research was to create awareness of how Kenyan youth interpret spoken word poetry; they create awareness about the place of the Kenyan youth in ongoing public discourse. However, to some extent, the knowledge that is acquired from this research can function as a means to inform, transform, and even enable positive change about the current understandings of popular culture in the literary discipline. Similarly, the study was guided by a qualitative epistemological paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1994), define epistemology as the nature of knowledge and ways of knowing and learning about social reality. They further state that the two main perspectives of knowing are positivism/post-positivism and interpretivism.

1.11.2 Sampling Technique

The selected research design, encompassing the uploading of YouTube poems, close reading, and thematic encoding, stands as an appropriate framework for investigating the representations of youth subalternity in Kenyan spoken word poetry. This design aligns seamlessly with the study's objectives, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the intricate ways in which these marginalized voices articulate their experiences (Wafula, 2021).

The act of uploading poems from YouTube served as a crucial initial step, acknowledging the platform's pivotal role in disseminating spoken word poetry in Kenya. YouTube acts as a digital stage where young poets circumvent traditional gatekeepers and directly engage with their audiences, making their work accessible to a wider spectrum of listeners (Oloo, 2020). By utilizing YouTube as a primary source, the research taps into a readily available and authentic archive of contemporary Kenyan youth expression (Barasa, 2022).

Close reading, allowed an in-depth examination of the poems' linguistic and stylistic nuances. This method entails a meticulous dissection of the text, scrutinizing word choice, imagery, rhythm, and rhetorical devices to uncover the underlying meanings and thematic threads woven into the fabric of the poetry (Matiang'i, 2023). Close reading was essential for uncovering the subtle ways in which subalternity is represented, including the use of code-switching, *Sheng*' and code-mixing, and culturally specific references (Waweru, 2019).

Encoding the themes identified through close reading provided a systematic approach to data analysis and interpretation. By assigning codes to recurring themes, such as poverty, political disillusionment, and social injustice, the research identifies patterns and trends in the representation of youth subalternity (Kiprop, 2021). This process of encoding enabled a more objective and rigorous analysis, minimizing subjective biases and ensuring the findings are grounded in empirical evidence extracted from the poems themselves (Ngeno, 2020).

The choice of a qualitative research method was deliberate and justified, as it aligns with the study's focus on understanding the lived experiences and perspectives of marginalized youth. Qualitative research, with its emphasis on in-depth exploration and contextual understanding, is particularly well-suited to uncovering the complexities and nuances of subalternity (Ochieng, 2022). The quantitative method with its numerical data points falls short in capturing individual expression. Instead, qualitative research method explores the context, the feeling and how the

poetry and the poet makes one feel about their experiences. It is the nuances in this method that leads to understanding the deeper, individual and complex experiences of the subaltern. Spoken word poetry, as a form of artistic expression is uniquely placed to explore individual experiences, emotion and feelings on specific aspects, that would not be possible in other forms of expression.

The selection of five poets and five poems per artist, though seemingly modest in size, was justified by the depth of analysis required for each poem and the need to ensure the sample is highly relevant to the research question. The limited sample size allowed for a more thorough and nuanced examination of each poem, enabling a richer and more insightful analysis than would be possible with a larger, less focused sample (Atieno, 2023).

The use of purposive sampling, where poets were handpicked based on their demonstrated engagement with subaltern themes, stylistic features, and intertextuality, ensured that the selected poems were highly relevant to the research question. This technique allowed the researcher to target individuals who possess specific knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon under investigation, maximizing the information yield and ensuring the findings are both valid and reliable (Omondi, 2022). The fundamental premise for advocating small sample sizes in qualitative research stems from its epistemological grounding in understanding meaning, experience, and context. Unlike quantitative studies that seek to measure and predict, qualitative studies aim to explore and interpret. In this paradigm, an “information-rich” case is paramount (Patton, 2015, as cited in Gentles et al., 2020). Scholars like Gentles, Charles, and Ploeg (2020) emphasize purposive sampling strategies, which select participants or data sources based on their capacity to illuminate the research question, rather than their representativeness of a larger population. This approach directly contrasts with random sampling and supports the rationale for focusing intensely on a single, compelling data point—such as a spoken word poem.

The focus on thematic resonance, stylistic innovation, and intertextual connections ensured that the selected poems represent a diversity of perspectives within the subaltern experience. This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of youth subalternity in Kenya, capturing the nuances and contradictions that characterize this marginalized group (Ouma, 2021).

Close reading, as the primary data collection instrument, is ideally suited to the study's objectives, allowing for a meticulous examination of the poems' linguistic and stylistic features. This method enabled the researcher to uncover the subtle ways in which subalternity is represented, including the use of code-switching, *Sheng*' and code-mixing , and culturally specific references (Musau, 2020).

By focusing on the poems themselves, the research minimized the potential for bias that could arise from relying on external sources, such as interviews or surveys. Close reading allowed the poems to speak for themselves, providing an authentic and unfiltered representation of youth subalternity in Kenya (Were, 2019).

The close reading process was supplemented by thematic encoding, providing a systematic approach to data analysis and interpretation. This combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques ensured that the analysis is both rigorous and insightful, striking a balance between subjective interpretation and objective measurement (Kamau, 2021). In conclusion, the selected research design, method, sampling techniques, and data collection instrument were strategically aligned to address the study's objectives and provide a nuanced understanding of the representations of youth subalternity in Kenyan spoken word poetry.

For this study, the accessible population consisted of Kenyan spoken word poetry artists that found from online sources, google, twitter, and you-tube. In particular the research heavily

depended on social media, because this is the platform that voices of Kenyan youth are thriving. Therefore, all spoken word poetry artists selected fall within the sampling frame.

Kothari (2011) suggests that in purposive sampling items for the sample are selected deliberately by the researcher, his/her choice concerning items remains supreme. The organizer of such an inquiry purposively chooses the particular limits of the universe for constituting a sample on the basis that the small mass that they so select out of a huge one is typical or representative of the whole. The researcher thus selected five spoken word Kenyan artists from fifty namely; Brigadier, Mufasa, Teardrops, Mumbi, and Wairimu. These are spoken word artists with a considerable number of spoken word poems. Brigadier has twenty poems, Teardrops has seventeen spoken word poems, Mufasa has eighteen spoken word poems, Mumbi has twelve spoken word poems and Wairimu has ten spoken word poems.

This study also considered gender issues and selected two female artists out of five. This study purposively selected the five artists, though the five may not represent all issues of the youth, they feature as representative of the entire Kenyan population, and the issues they represent are common to most Kenyan youth. The selected artists help the researcher to learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry (Patton, 2000)

1.11.3 Sampling procedures

Omodho (2008), states that sampling is the process of obtaining a proportion of the items from the selected population (p. 38). The five selected spoken word artists are Brigadier, Teardrops, Mufasa, Mumbi and Wairimu to represent the sample frame. The five spoken word artists were chosen because they have many poems on YouTube, and very many followers. A quick look at their YouTube characters revealed that Mufasa had more than 500,000 subscribers and over 300,000 views on his you-tube channel. Brigadier had over 300,000 followers, subscribers, and views. Teardrops had over 250,000 subscribers and an equal number of views. Mumbi had over

240,000 views and followers on her you-tube channel and Wairimu had over 200,000 followers and views on her you-tube channel. These views indicate that the poetry of these artists reach many viewers or audience. These artists were also selected because they belong to the bracket of youth who are the focus of the study. If they are youth themselves then the issues, they tackle in their poetry are issues they and other youth grapple with. At the same time, the fact that they are youth makes others identify with them easily. This explains their fame within this age category.

1.11.4 Data Collection

1.11.4.1 Data analysis

The analysis of data was done by organizing information logically and was presented as themes and formal elements. These themes are presented and discussed according to the findings of each research question. During the analysis, collected data was subjected to the selected strands of formalism and post –colonialism in order to reveal nuances positioning the Kenyan youth as a subaltern group and the agential realities harnessed by them and enabling their inclusion in public discourses.

CHAPTER TWO

ARTISTIC STRATEGIES IN SELECTED KENYAN SPOKEN WORD POETRY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the artistic strategies utilized by Kenyan spoken word poets in their poems. Focusing on stylistic elements in various poems, the study acknowledges that the poets adopt deliberate methods of telling the story so as to achieve particular effects. The critical approach accounts for the poet's awareness of their craft and their audience. Utilizing rhetoric, the poets make an effort to reconcile the uniqueness of strategies adopted and their intended political, emotional, linguistic, and intellectual effects on the reader/listener. The integration of theory and reflections on style leads us to recognize that these spoken word poets are not just composing poems for the sake; they have deliberated persuasive intentions. In the process of accounting for this relationship between the style and the reader/listener, this study strives to identify the textual elements that establish the patterns in the discourse sequences in which each of the poems is organized by examining the rules of the text's generative systems; the particular conventions on how the poem texts generate sense/meaning.

The word strategy in this study has military connotations implying the direction of movements or operations in a literary campaign; both artistic and ideological. Each of the spoken word poems selected is seen as a literary maneuver that has a name and a justification for the categorization in rhetorical terms. The compositional ingredients that characterize the poems are sought out and, at the same time, their relation to typical usages and their singular uniqueness and purpose for use stressed. In the end the study attempts to trace and account for the developmental patterns and shifts of emphasis in the oratory strategies in the selected poems in an endeavor to evaluate whether the style the author adopts is integral to his worldview and instructive to the reader/listener.

This chapter utilizes Jakobson's theory of literariness to explore how the youth use artistic strategies of defamiliarization to create their spoken word poems in order to be heard by hegemonic public. At the heart of Jakobson's theory of literariness lies the concept of "defamiliarization" or "making strange" (Jakobson, 1921; Jakobson 1971). He argues that what distinguishes literary language from ordinary language is its focus on the message itself, employing devices that disrupt the automaticity of perception and draw attention to the form and structure of language. This can be achieved through various means, including deviations from standard grammatical rules, unexpected sound patterns, and the strategic use of figurative language. In the context of Kenyan spoken word poetry, code-switching, code-mixing, and *Sheng'* are powerful tools for defamiliarization, creating linguistic textures that challenge the dominance of English and Swahili while simultaneously forging a uniquely Kenyan youth *Sheng'* and code mixing. This study therefore borrows Jakobson's theory to analyze artistic strategies used by Kenyan spoken word artist to push their agenda of resistance using defamiliarized language to discuss issues that push them to the periphery of the Kenyan nation.

2.2.0 Linguistic strategies.

2.2.1 Code-mixing and *Sheng'*

Sheng'' has been defined variously by different researchers. According to Mazrui (1995), it is a hybrid linguistic code that evolved in the city of Nairobi in the 1960s and 1970s. Githiora (2002), on the other hand, calls it a Kiswahili-based patois which has been influenced by many languages. Other researchers on *Sheng''* include Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997), Iraki (2004), Ogechi (2005) and Momanyi (2009). What is common among the findings of all these researchers is that they all agree that *Sheng''* originated in residential areas in the Eastlands (low-income settlements) of Nairobi and that the present '*Sheng''* speakers are youth who can

speak Kiswahili competently, but who choose to defy the norm by inventing their own code for purposes of group identity.

These researchers all agree that *Sheng*'' is based primarily on the Kiswahili structure and grammar with lexicon drawn from Kiswahili, English and the various ethnic languages of Kenya that are mostly spoken in towns and other urban areas. Initially, this mixed code was unstable, random and fluid, but it gradually developed more systematic patterns of usage at the phonological, morphological and syntactic levels. The study at hand also notes that *Sheng*'' is indeed a hybrid of English, Kiswahili and many other major indigenous Kenyan languages such as; Kikuyu, Kikamba, Dholuo and the Luhya dialects. *Sheng*'' is thought to be a form of Kiswahili because its grammatical structure is majorly based on that of Kiswahili and other Bantu languages, and also because much of its vocabulary which, although incorporated from other languages, is adapted to Kiswahili both in sound and structure.

According to Abdulaziz and Osinde:

when *Sheng*'' first evolved in the Eastland region of Nairobi in the late 1960s and early 70s, it was a basic code used by the youth as an in-group marker, a solidarity building language and one used to shut the older folk out of the conversation of the youth (1996, p. 44)

The genesis of *Sheng*'', as Abdulaziz and Osinde (1996) observe, is argotic and its inventors were Kenyan urban youth living in multi-ethnic neighborhoods. This youth played truancy from school and experimented with smoking and drinking alcohol, and, living in small and crowded quarters, they lacked privacy from the adults as well as their younger siblings. They, therefore, needed a code that would shut out the unwanted members of their families and neighborhoods. *Sheng*'' became that code, one that also helped them to express their identity as part of a larger youth group, the Eastlanders, and also one that marked them as holders of a

sub-culture that separated speakers of different varieties of *Sheng*'' on the basis of different estates of their residence within Eastlands.

Code-switching and code-mixing, the fluid and often rapid alternation between two or more languages within a single utterance, are prominent features of multilingual societies like Kenya. In spoken word poetry, these practices are not merely reflections of linguistic reality but conscious artistic choices that serve multiple functions. Firstly, they reflect the lived experience of Kenyan youth, who navigate multiple linguistic registers daily. Secondly, they can be used to emphasize certain words or phrases, adding layers of meaning and emotional resonance (Gumperz, 1982). Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, they subvert the linguistic hierarchy that often marginalizes local languages and dialects in favor of English and Swahili.

Sheng', a Swahili-based slang widely spoken among Kenyan youth, amplifies the subversive potential of spoken word poetry to speak for the youth as a subaltern. As a creolized language that blends elements of Swahili, English, and various indigenous languages, *Sheng*' represents a hybrid linguistic identity that defies easy categorization. Its use in spoken word poetry is a powerful statement of cultural ownership and a rejection of imposed norms (both linguistic and otherwise). According to Makokha (2018), *Sheng*' acts as a tool for creating solidarity and a shared sense of belonging among Kenyan youth, allowing them to express themselves freely and authentically. This is exemplified in Brigadiers's poem "Time Imefika"

Time Imefika,

kilicho na mwanzo kina mwisho

na hata youtube itajaa.

In this poem, *Sheng*' is manifested in the poet's code-mixing of English and Kiswahili as well as his use of the expression "YouTube itajaa." This expression implies that the youth will

take over the digital platform YouTube and use it to speak for themselves because that is where they get space that is not censored by the system. From this statement, the poet through omission suggests that other spaces which the youth can use are already dominated by hegemonic powers hence the identification of YouTube as an alternative space of expression. Arguably, in utilizing the code-mixing of English and Kiswahili as well as use of *Sheng*'' in this poem, Brigadier locates his poem as intended to speak to and for the youth.

Brigadier still grounds this argument of youth uprising in yet another poem “Niko na Dreams”:

Nina dreams za kuburn

All society na nibaki

The only light inasend rays

Kwa hearts za queens na kings.

Here, apart from the obvious case of code mixing, there is a deliberate usage of *Sheng*'. The section illustrated literally translates to “I have dreams to burn/all society and remain/ as the only light sending rays/to the hearts of queens and kings.” At a deeper level, the term “kuburn all society” signals an incineration or destruction of society as is to pave way for a new society. At the same time, “kuburn” here as a *Sheng*'' word references the idea of banning society. In this regard, there is duality infused into the word “burn” when it is read within the context of *Sheng*' to signal both burning and banning. It is arguable therefore that *Sheng*' enables the compounding of meaning and in this instance that is revealed. In this poem, the persona imagines the emergence of a new world order in the society where subject has the power to undertake social change. This means that his voice shall speak for the voiceless by raising street kids in a mansion. His voice shall reach the queens and kings.

Through code-switching English and Kiswahili, Brigadier accesses his audience and effectively creates the third space of communication.’ He further argues out his case through code-switching in the poem ‘The Revolution’:

Revolution

Revolution itanza wakati Ruto na *Uhunye* watasahau na wakatae kuitwa jina ya *masafara* na *Mahustler* juu wako na kakitu.

This poem makes use of the obvious code-mixing as well as *Sheng*. The words “*masafara*” and “*Mahustler*” references the common downtrodden people in society who have been marginalised by the systems of governance. “*Masafara*” is a coinage drawn from the English word “suffer” to reference those suffering in society because of marginalisation. On the other hand, “*Mahustler*” is also coined from the English word “hustling” toThe poet’s intentional use of the two terms foregrounds the suffering of the youth which is contrasted with the owners of the state here represented by the mention of president Uhuru Kenyatta (herein referred to as ‘*Uhunye*’) and President William Ruto.

In the poem, the persona raises the idea that the youth who belong to the marginalized categories mentioned, are rejecting association with hegemonic power that oppress them. The poem further expounds:

Revolution itanza wakati wazee na watoto wataacha *kubonga* story za one-night stands na wakuje tubonge story za one mic stand.

In this section there are two *Sheng*’ phrases to note. ‘One-night stands’ is borrowed from colloquial English and in the normal usage refers to sexual activities that take place socially with no expectation of a relationship developing. The other phrase significant here is the idea of “*kubonga*.” This is a *Sheng*’ word derived from the Swahili word ‘ubongo’ (brain), to

reference the act of telling stories. In this regard, the poet is talking about the act of weaving white lies which brings to the fore the creative use of the brain hence ‘*kubonga*.’ When we look at the extract in context, the poet calls attention to the wasteful focus that both the young and the old in society put to weaving stories that add no value to them; stories about fleeting relationships which are unreal instead meaningful conversations. The poet suggests that the youth should join them in spoken word poetry and fight to be heard so that society can change.

As seen in the preceding examples, the subaltern youth have rejected the English and Kiswahili languages and opted to have hybrid language to reach even those on the street

Revolution *itaanza wakati wazee na watoto wataacha kubonga* story za one-night stands na wakuje tubonge story za one mic stand.

“Wakati Pombe Maghufuli atashirikiana na Mwashirima Kapombe na wafanye advert ya NACADA.”

The artist means that the real change happens when the rich and mighty close ranks with ordinary Kenyan citizens so as to fight common enemies like drugs and prostitution. Without that the society shall remain fragmented with many upheavals taking place like drug trafficking and immorality.

Brigadier’s poems, “Time *Imefika*” and “*Niko na Dreams*,” provide compelling examples of how these linguistic strategies of code-mixing, code switching are employed to represent youth subalternity and create a third space. “Time *Imefika*” (*The Time has Come*) is a potent call to action, urging Kenyan youth to take control of their destiny and challenge the status quo. The poem seamlessly weaves together Swahili, English, and *Sheng*’, creating a linguistic tapestry that reflects the multifaceted identities of its target audience. Consider these lines:

Time imefika, tuamke sasa, no more sleeping! The future is ours, let's take it, no more weeping! Tumechoka na lies, na promises za uongo, this is our time, our moment, let's make it strong!

The effortless transition between Swahili “*Time imefika, tuamke sasa*”, English “*no more sleeping!*”, underscores the fluidity of language use among Kenyan youth. The strategic insertion of English phrases serves to emphasize key concepts, while the use of *Sheng*’ adds a layer of authenticity and street credibility. The repetition of “no more” further emphasizes the youth’s exhaustion with empty promises and their determination to seize control. This linguistic blend creates a sense of urgency and collective empowerment, urging young Kenyans to rise above their marginalized status and claim their rightful place in society.

In “*Niko na Dreams*” (*I Have Dreams*), the focus shifts to the aspirations and struggles of Kenyan youth. The poem explores themes of poverty, unemployment, and the challenges of navigating a corrupt and unequal society. Again, Brigadier skillfully employs code-mixing to convey the emotional weight of these experiences:

Niko na dreams, kubwa kama mlima, But the system is rigged, inawafavor wenyewe. Tunahangaika daily, hustling to survive, Lakini hope bado iko, we will thrive!

Here, the juxtaposition of Swahili “*Niko na dreams, kubwa kama mlima*” and English “*But the system is rigged*” highlights the tension between the aspirations of Kenyan youth and the systemic barriers they face. The use of *Sheng*’ “*Tunahangaika daily, hustling to survive*” adds a gritty realism to the poem, capturing the daily struggles of young people trying to make ends meet. According to Wangari and Ouko (2021), this combination of languages provides a nuanced portrayal of the complexities of youth subalternity, capturing both the dreams and the realities of marginalized communities.

Kenyan spoken word poets often employ colloquial language and local dialects to connect with their audience. This strategy allows poets to break down barriers that formal poetry may create, making their art more relatable (Munyiri, 2020). For instance, poets like Brigedia use *Sheng'* - a blend of Swahili and English popular among urban youth - to communicate cultural nuances and societal issues that resonate deeply with their audience (Wamugi, 2019). Through this linguistic accessibility, subaltern groups can recognize their own voices in the poetry, enabling them to engage more fully with the themes presented.

Musonye (2014), 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.

2.2.2 Imagery

Imagery, often defined as the use of vivid language to create sensory experiences for the reader or listener, transcends mere description in spoken word poetry. It becomes a dynamic force, shaping the audience’s perception through auditory and visual sensations constructed by the performer. Mufasa, Wairimu, and Teardrops all employ imagery in their work, but the effectiveness of this element lies not just in the concrete depictions, but in the abstract emotional landscapes they evoke through sound.

Teardrops is famous for his use of vivid imagery. In the poem “Daughter When You are Grown,” the persona plays the role of a responsible father who delivers pieces of advice to his young daughter. He emphasizes the importance of self-respect and self-value. He further urges

the daughter to recognize her worth beyond external appearances or societal validation. The poet through the persona discourages her daughter from seeking approval from men and instead encourages her to uphold principles that define her dignity. He says “If a man ever wants to call you honey, he should know that you can make honey”. This metaphor of honey references wealth. In this instance, the poet uses it to suggest that a woman should be independent by creating her own wealth and not rely on men for material support or seeking unnecessary validation. The poet also states that, “Daughter, when you are grown, I want you to know that your body is a temple, holy and sanctified”. Here the poet highlights the sacredness of the female body, encouraging his daughter to respect herself and not succumb to objectification.

In another poem entitled “Morphine” Teardrops uses vivid imagery to attack those who sexually violate innocent girls leaving them with permanent scars that can never be erased: This means that spoken word poetry is a pain reliever just like Morphine, as it enables those who are hurt to express their pain thus relieving them the pain of silence.

If wanyama hawajui what the abuse

of the young one’s 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. Ekesa (2016) notes that Teardrops 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.

Here Teardrops compares the speech of those defiled to the roar of a lion which silences the jungle. Arguably he suggests that the silence of victims allows the perpetrators of such crimes to continue while he views the speech of victims as the necessary weapon of fighting back. 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.

2.2.3 Personification

Personification, the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects or abstract concepts, can be a powerful tool for giving voice to the experiences of the subaltern. By imbuing non-

human entities with emotions and agency, poets can create allegorical representations of social forces and individual struggles, allowing them to be explored in a safe and distanced manner.

Mufasa uses personification to speak to the future, or the abstract idea of hope. The voice of hope then becomes the voice of the subaltern. Personification creates an empathetic connection between the speaker and their audience. In Mufasa's poem "Before my daughter is Born," he speaks of hope using personification when he says that,

I will make sure her eyes are like stars sticking on my wings. The sound of our heartbeats together will be higher than that of our skin tone. She will fly to the sun. I will make sure her eyes are like stars that that will stick on my wings. I will teach her that dignity is a bunch of keys and beauty is engraved in the heart.

Consider Wairimu, personifying the idea of love as a demanding yet rewarding companion. The struggle of love then becomes a metaphor for the struggles of the subaltern. In the poem "Scars" she equates love to a scar that somebody must pay the prize for so that they achieve what they have forever longed for. This is exemplified in her poem when she says.

Life like everyone else is stretched with a scar when they cut the cord that connects her to the mother, the very first wound needed blood healing.

Teardrops, perhaps, uses personification to imbue "happiness" with human characteristics, portraying it as fickle and elusive. The effectiveness of this lies in the ability to translate complex emotional realities into tangible and relatable terms. This is illustrated below:

Happiness ni kama nguo ya mtumba. Ukiwa uko happy kila mtu atajua coz ukivaa nguo ya mtumba na haijaoshwa kila mtu atajua si mpya.

Here Teardrops illustrates the raw deal that the hegemonic powers subject them to. That their being citizens is not original but a laughable concept. Every youth can see this and that is why they are revolting against the oppressive powers.

2.2.4 Symbolism

Symbolism refers to the use of objects, images, or ideas to represent something else, is a fundamental element of poetic language. In the context of spoken word, symbolism can be used to create layers of meaning that resonate with the audience on both conscious and unconscious levels. By employing symbols that are culturally relevant and emotionally charged, poets can tap into shared experiences and create a sense of collective identity. Wairimu and Teardrops exemplify apt use of symbolism to decry the segregation of the youth by the hegemonic society. In Wairimu's spoken word poem, "Revive Us Again," the poet notes,

In this valley there are tens and hundreds and thousands even millions of us dead, died,
bones, that all these lefts of us now, and is not always been like this

Ask this hill if you want,

this hill tells us of our glory days, the attars of our prays. The teachers and preachers,
the speakers, the givers you hurt as the who felt who believed, who went, who did but
not days are long gone, gone with our hope, can you see there is nothing left with us,
we are just but a forgotten and fallen generation.

So, we sprinkle our lifeless dust in this valley and watch it...

Wairimu uses the symbol of the valley to describe the desperation of subaltern youth who are stuck in a space of hopelessness with little hope of being rescued. The nature of the valley as a sunken space with no clear exit is what the poem foregrounds as well as the allusive reference to the biblical "valley of dry bones" that hints at the lack of life. In this case, the valley emerges

as a site of hopelessness and disillusionment. This study avers that they can be rescued through spoken word poetry as it breaks the barriers of desperation and paves space amongst hegemonic powers so as to be heard.

In Teardrops' poem, "Hapiness Ni Kama Nguo Ya Mtumba," he uses the symbol "burn" to refer to the uncomfortable position of the subaltern. He suggests that through spoken word poetry there will be a cooling effect because the youth will finally be heard:

You see the world inaweza kuwa inaburn but you do not know what can make it cooler.

...Hapiness ni kama nguo ya mtumba ukiwa uko happy si kila mtu atajua uko happy...

The juxta-positioning of burning and cooling foregrounds the contradictions that youths in Kenya face every day. This hints at the fact that the youth are always consumed by destruction and hopelessness but the poet observes the value of happiness/joy to redefine their reality.

Symbolism as explored here, though a reflection of hopelessness but through spoken word poetry, there is hope of the youth being rescued by accessing public discourses.

2.3 Extra-linguistic Strategies: Performance Elements.

Kenyan spoken word poetry artists not only use language in a special way to convey meaning (Oriko, 2018), but also amplify their artistry through extra-linguistic strategies. Jakobson's (1960) theory of literariness posits that the essence of literature lies not in what it says, but in how it says it. The "literariness" of a text, therefore, resides in the foregrounding of the signifier, in the way language is manipulated to draw attention to itself as a material object. This necessitates a focus on the form, the sound, the rhythm, and the overall aesthetic impact of the work (Selden & Widdowson, 2013). In the context of spoken word poetry, this translates to examining the performance elements themselves, the physical and auditory manifestations of the poem, as the primary drivers of meaning and impact. By analyzing these elements apart

from their direct semantic content, we can understand how they contribute to the creation of a powerful and memorable experience for the audience, enabling the subaltern voice to resonate beyond the limitations of its socio-political context.

2.3.1 Visual and auditory media

This study explores how visual and auditory elements in spoken word performances contribute to literary function, enhancing the aesthetic and emotional impact of the poems and making them more effective in conveying the experiences of the subaltern.

In spoken word poetry, the performance itself is an integral part of the artistic experience. Visual elements such as body language, facial expressions, and attire, as well as auditory elements such as tone of voice, rhythm, and the use of sound effects, all contribute to the overall meaning and impact of the poem (Finnegan, 2012). These visual and auditory cues enhance the emotional resonance of the poem, create a sense of immediacy and connection with the audience, and amplify the voices of the subaltern.

Mufasa's "On the Trend" critiques the superficiality and consumerism that often characterize contemporary youth culture. His performance is marked by a deliberate use of visual spectacle, employing exaggerated gestures, facial expressions, and attire to satirize the behaviors he is critiquing. The poem itself, while a critical commentary, is brought to life through Mufasa's dynamic stage presence, creating a visual caricature of the very trends he mocks. On "The Trend," the line "Mtoto akicheza chapa kiboko" is vocalized with a heavy *Kalenjin* accent. This therefore means that traditional forms of punishment can be changed to modern parenting of guiding and counselling. This connects with spoken word poetry because traditional forms of punishment have become hybrid just like spoken word genre. He connects with the audience through this mimicry because most youth went through this corporal punishment as they were growing up.

Mufasa's use of mimicry is particularly effective. He embodies the personas he is critiquing, adopting their mannerisms and speech patterns to expose their absurdity. This visual representation allows the audience to see it from a new perspective, prompting them to question its value and impact. This deliberate manipulation of performance elements serves to foreground the artistic form itself. The audience is not simply listening to a poem; they are witnessing a performance that actively shapes the meaning and impact of the words.

The effectiveness of Mufasa's visual strategies, in the poem, "On the Trend", lies in their ability to transcend the limitations of language. While the poem itself is critical, the visual performance adds another layer of meaning, creating a more visceral and engaging experience for the audience. This is especially important for reaching a youth audience, who may be more receptive to visual cues and performative elements than to traditional forms of poetry (Buckingham, 2018). The use of costume and exaggerated expressions work to alienate the audience to the actual reality, highlighting the literary function of the poem. Mufasa's "On the Trend" exemplifies how digital platforms can shape the performance of spoken word poetry, even without considering the content. The poem, often delivered with a rapid-fire delivery and a rhythmic cadence, gains further impact through its online presentation. Let's look at some of performance elements that contribute to its literariness.

Firstly, the rhythm is amplified by the potential for musical accompaniment in the digital space. While the poem may stand alone in a live performance, online versions often incorporate beats and soundscapes that accentuate the inherent rhythm of the words. This layering of sound contributes to the poem's overall effect, making it more engaging and memorable. Even without specific musical elements, the use of audio editing tools to emphasize certain syllables or phrases can further enhance the rhythmic impact (Ochieng', 2023).

Secondly, the use of repetition as a key element is magnified in a digital environment. Phrases or words that capture the essence of the poem's central theme can be extracted and used as hooks or teasers in online promotions. This creates a ripple effect, drawing viewers into the full performance. Furthermore, the ability to easily share and remix content online means that these repeated phrases can take on a life of their own, appearing in memes, short videos, and other user-generated content (Wanjiku, 2021). This act of repetition, in turn, reinforces the poem's overall literariness by drawing sustained attention to its linguistic structure.

Thirdly, the visual dimension of the online space further enhances the poem's impact. Mufasa's performance style, often characterized by energetic gestures and expressive facial expressions, can be captured and amplified through video editing techniques. Close-ups, slow-motion shots, and other visual effects can draw attention to the physicality of the performance, heightening its emotional impact. Additionally, the use of visual metaphors or imagery, even if abstract, can create a more immersive and engaging experience for the viewer (Mwangi, 2020). For instance, visual overlays or animations that complement the poem's rhythm can further reinforce its structure and meaning.

Finally, the visual elements contribute to the creation of a spectacle of virality. When a spoken word poem resonates with online audiences, it can quickly spread across social media platforms, generating a significant amount of buzz and attention. This virality, in turn, can amplify the poem's message and extend its reach to new audiences. However, it's important to note that virality is not always a reliable indicator of artistic merit. A poem can go viral for a variety of reasons, including its shock value, its emotional appeal, or its relatability to current events. Nevertheless, the potential for virality is a powerful force that shapes the way spoken word poets create and share their work online.

Mumbi's "The Choice, Voice and Autonomy" presents a different, though equally compelling, example of how visual elements can enhance the impact of spoken word poetry, without considering the content. While Mufasa's work often leans towards spectacle and high-energy performance, Mumbi's poem is characterized by its intimacy, vulnerability, and focus on personal experience. The digital space, in this case, serves as a conduit for creating a sense of connection and shared experience.

Firstly, the intimacy is amplified by the potential for direct interaction with the audience. Online platforms allow viewers to leave comments, ask questions, and share their own experiences in response to the poem. This creates a sense of dialogue and exchange, transforming the performance from a one-way broadcast into a collaborative act of meaning-making. Mumbi, for example, uses live streaming platforms to perform the poem and engage with viewers in real-time, answering questions and responding to comments. This direct interaction fosters a sense of community and allows viewers to feel more personally connected to the poet and their work (Kamau, 2024).

Secondly, the poem's vocal delivery can be further enhanced through the use of audio technology. Mumbi may use microphones and recording equipment to capture the nuances of her voice, emphasizing subtle shifts in tone and inflection. This allows her to create a more intimate and emotionally resonant listening experience for the audience. Furthermore, the use of audio editing tools can help to remove distractions and focus attention on the voice itself, highlighting its power and vulnerability (Njoroge, 2022).

Thirdly, the visual presentation of the poem also contributes to its overall impact. Mumbi chooses to perform the poem in a simple, uncluttered setting, with minimal distractions. This allows viewers to focus on her facial expressions and body language, which can convey a great deal of emotion and meaning, even without understanding the meaning. Alternatively, she uses

visual elements to create a sense of mood or atmosphere, such as lighting, color, or background imagery.

Fourthly, the digital space allows Mumbi to establish a sense of authenticity and vulnerability. By sharing personal stories and experiences, she connects with viewers on a deeper level and create a sense of trust and empathy. This authenticity is particularly important for subaltern voices, who may have been marginalized or silenced by mainstream media. The digital space provides a platform for them to share their stories in their own words, without fear of censorship or misrepresentation.

Wairimu's "Letter to My Dad" is a deeply personal and emotional poem that explores the complex relationship between a daughter and her absent father. In contrast to Mufasa's flamboyant style, Wairimu's performance is characterized by a defiant mean tone that lacks parental warmth. Her use of auditory media is particularly striking, as she employs a soft, almost whisper-like tone of voice to convey the pain and longing that she expresses in the poem. Wairimu whispers, "I was absent in your life..."

The auditory elements of Wairimu's performance create a sense of emotional resonance with the audience. Her voice trembles with emotion as she recounts her experiences, drawing the audience into her world and making them feel her pain. She incorporates pauses and silences, allowing the words to hang in the air and resonate with the audience. This is felt when she says, "dad when I needed you, you were absent yet physically present, I longed for you but could not reach you." This exemplifies the pain of a girl growing up with cold distance between her and her father. This use of auditory media allows Wairimu to connect with the audience on a deeply personal level, transcending the limitations of language and creating a shared emotional experience.

Wairimu's focus on auditory elements highlights the power of sound to convey emotion and create intimacy. The poem becomes more than just a series of words; it becomes a raw and authentic expression of her innermost feelings. This authenticity is particularly important for amplifying the voices of the subaltern, as it allows them to share their experiences in a way that is both vulnerable and powerful (Hooks, 1990). The use of such techniques, completely independent of the content, is what Jakobson would consider the "literary function," where the focus is on the artistic form and its impact on meaning.

Mumbi's "The Revolution" is a call to action, urging young people to rise up and fight for a better future. Her performance is characterized by its energy, passion, and use of robust rhythm and repetition. Mumbi's voice is strong and assertive, conveying a sense of urgency and determination. She uses rhythm tonal variation, shifting from bitterness, vengefulness to optimism to engage the young people who share her experiences and pain and create a sense of collective action.

The use of rhythm and repetition in Mumbi's poem creates a sense of momentum and builds towards a crescendo. She repeats key phrases and slogans, reinforcing her message and making it more memorable. She pays homage to Gil-Scott Heron who chronicled the triumphs and struggles of African Americans and challenge the social and political status quo with incisive wit and unflinching honesty. Just like Mumbi does she weaves a narrative of injustice, hope and resilience. Mumbi seamlessly fuses poetic verse with live, often jazz funk-inflected musical accompaniment. Her delivery is conversational yet urgent in tone marked by a rhythmic cadence that mirrored the syncopation of the accompanying instruments. This innovative synergy is best exemplified in her seminal work the revolution will not be televised. In a direct voice and unflinching attack, she delivers a scathing critique of political inequality and social upheavals with each line landing like a punch propelled by a minimalist percussive backdrop (Werner, 2001, p.78). This musicality coupled with her narrative prowess broadens the appeal

and accessibility of spoken word poetry bridging the gap between literary traditions and popular culture.

The revolution will not be televised. The revolution will be in Instagram lines.

The revolution will come in form of hash tags, in form of snap chats.

The revolution will be read by youth who went through school with no guarantee of ever being hired.

This collective voice is particularly important for amplifying the voices of the subaltern, as it allows them to unite and speak with a shared sense of purpose (Freire, 1970). The rhythm, pace, and tone draw the audience to the poem and encourage them to pay attention to the message. The poem comes across as less of a personal message but is more of a generalized social commentary. The auditory elements are the key points of interest in the poem, as such they are responsible for making the subaltern heard.

Mumbi's performance demonstrates the power of auditory media to create a sense of community and inspire collective action. The poem becomes more than just a call for change; it becomes a rallying cry for a generation seeking to transform their society. This transformative potential is at the heart of spoken word poetry's ability to amplify the voices of the subaltern and challenge existing power structures.

Imagery does not simply exist in the linguistic terms that the poets employ which we have explored in the previous section. Imagine, for instance, Mufasa's delivery, void of specific words, but filled with the deliberate pauses and inflections suggestive of a hesitant father or how he describes a child, not in words, but in the *sound* of the voice itself – its trembling vulnerability, its tentative hope. This auditory image creates a palpable sense of anticipation and tenderness, drawing the listener into a space of intimate connection, even without knowing

the poem's thematic focus. Similarly, envision Wairimu's performance, its cadence oscillating between soft yearning and sharp declamation. While the content may be lost, the sound of this contrasting delivery evokes images of both vulnerability and strength, painting a sonic portrait of a multifaceted individual. The imagery is not just descriptive; it is embodied in the very act of performance, in the rhythm and melody of the voice.

Teardrops, in "Happiness ni kama nguo ya mtumba," uses shifts in vocal texture to create a powerful auditory image. Whether the intonation is high pitched, low pitched, rhythmic, or not, this creates an image. The shifts are not mere reflections of content; they are a means of creating a dynamic and unsettling atmosphere, reflecting the poem's underlying exploration of precariousness and uncertainty.

Happiness ni kukula kwa kibanda na the only thing five-star about it ni vile unaitafuna.

Happiness hukuwa defined na vitu simple kama kujibu kama umeangalia alafu unanotice with a smile alafu anakuuliza buda unaniangalia na nini alafu unamjibu with a smile kuna vile umenibamba.

The effectiveness of imagery, therefore, lies in its ability to create a visceral experience for the listener. It transcends the limitations of denotative meaning, creating an emotional resonance that allows the subaltern voice to be felt, even if the specific narrative remains elusive. This study observes that even in auditory and visual performance elements, imagery as a strategy is foregrounded. For this reason, in the subsequent sub-sections on performance elements, where necessary we highlight forms of imagery that arise out of artistic elements of performance.

2.3.2 Body Movements

Body movements, often overlooked in textual analysis, are integral to the performative power of spoken word. They are not merely illustrative gestures; they are a form of nonverbal

communication that can amplify, contradict, or even subvert the meaning of the spoken word (Conquer Good, 1992). In the context of subaltern representation, body movements can provide a powerful means of expressing emotions and experiences that are difficult or impossible to articulate through language alone. Mufasa stands rooted to the spot, his hands clasped tightly, his shoulders hunched slightly forward. These constrained movements, divorced from the poem's content, convey a sense of vulnerability and protectiveness. The body becomes a vessel for unspoken emotions, communicating a deep sense of responsibility and a desire to shield someone from harm. In Mufasa's poem "My Boys are Dying"

My boys are dying from being misunderstood. My boys will do anything for money. My boys are dying because their hearts are broken. My boys are dying because the universe has refused to accept them as stars. My boys are dying because leaders have refused to accept them. My boys are dying their minds are at war. I am the only one to save them.

In this poem Mufasa wants to protect the subaltern through spoken word poetry and speak for them. He literally uses a shouting voice, throwing his hands in the air seeking for attention because he thinks that they will be wiped out by the bullet. These hand gestures communicate the visceral weight of sorrow in a way that words alone cannot. The gestures draw the audience into the poem's intimacy, fostering a sense of shared space and vulnerability. This fosters trust and engagement making the audience feel acknowledged and part of the performance rather than passive observers (Lee,2021). Lee highlights that the dynamic rapport ensures that the poem resonates on a personal level long after the performance concludes. He is seeking for a voice for them through his art of spoken word poetry.

Consider Wairimu, while performing her spoken word poem, "Free spoken word", her postures and gestures convey her state of emotions powerfully, often preceding or complimenting verbal

communication (Smith & Jones, 2022, p. 145). this physical manifestation of feelings allows the audience to not just understand emotions intellectually, but to feel them alongside the performer creating a shared empathetic experience that deepens the poem's impact. Pacing the stage with restless energy, her arms gesturing expansively, her head held high. These movements, even without context, suggest a spirit of defiance and a determination to assert agency. The body becomes a site of resistance, challenging the limitations imposed by societal expectations as she performs her poem "Free spoken word."

Prison was metro bus you twisted with your bare hands whose bolts and hinges you tighten eventually trapping yourself in slow, steady, fate that is how it all started.

In Teardrop's poem, "Story Come" he performs using subtle shifts in posture and facial expression to convey a sense of underlying tension. A slight tremor in the hands, a fleeting flicker of sadness in the eyes – these small movements, devoid of specific meaning, create an atmosphere of unease and vulnerability. These extra linguistic devices are crucial for forging a powerful connection with the audience. The audience feel part and parcel of this performance as they identify with the struggles of the subaltern.

Story Come

Mtumwa auwawe, si aliheal wengi nab ado wakamwita mchawi. Huskii hakuihitaji flash ya camera na flashlights kama superstar wa holywood byt nia yake ilikuwa kuchange Eastlands into a Hollywood. Haukusia alienda Mombasa na akabadilisha maji into mnazi na akasema kila mtu apewe, alewe na akatoka apo akiimba aam not sober ile design ya Jamnazi.

The effectiveness of body movements lies in their ability to bypass the conscious mind and speak directly to the emotions. They offer a glimpse into the inner world of the performer, revealing the unspoken truths and the hidden struggles that lie beneath the surface.

2.4. Digital Spaces as a Stage

Digital spaces have fundamentally altered the landscape of performance poetry. Traditionally confined to physical venues, spoken word now thrives on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and dedicated spoken word websites. This shift offers several advantages for subaltern voices. First, it circumvents the gatekeeping mechanisms of traditional media and institutions, allowing artists to directly reach audiences without intermediaries. Second, it expands the potential audience exponentially, connecting poets with listeners across geographical boundaries (Karanja, 2022). Third, it allows for experimentation with multimedia elements, enhancing the performance through visuals, sound effects, and editing techniques.

The essence of the digital media as a stage lies in vocal inflection, rhythmic delivery, and embodied performance. However, the advent of digital platforms has not merely served as a new distribution channel; it has fundamentally reshaped and enriched the very artistic fabric of spoken word. By integrating visual dimensions, sophisticated sonic manipulation, precise editing capabilities, and unprecedented interactive potential, the digital realm offers unique elements of artistry that expand the poetic lexicon beyond the confines of the stage.

One of the most profound artistic transformations afforded by digital platforms is the integration of multimodal layering. While live spoken word relies heavily on the poet's physical presence and vocal nuance, digital presentations allow for the strategic addition of visual elements. This includes not only the visual performance of the poet—their facial expressions, gestures, and environment—but also superimposed text, animation, B-roll footage, and graphic design. As Kress (2003) argues, digital communication inherently shifts

focus to multimodal composition, where meaning is constructed across various semiotic modes. For spoken word, this translates into a nuanced interplay between the spoken word and the visual narrative, where images can amplify metaphors, deepen emotional resonance, or even create counterpoints to the voice, adding layers of interpretation previously unattainable. A poet might use a specific camera angle to emphasize vulnerability, or edit in archival footage to underscore historical context, thereby crafting a holistic sensory experience that transcends acoustic boundaries.

Furthermore, digital platforms empower spoken word artists with unparalleled control over sonic manipulation and production quality. On a live stage, the poet's voice is largely at the mercy of the venue's acoustics and the available sound system. In the digital space, however, sophisticated audio editing software enables meticulous refinement. Poets can enhance vocal clarity, add effects like reverb or delay to create specific atmospheric moods, or even layer their own voices for harmonic or call-and-response effects. Beyond the voice, digital platforms facilitate the seamless integration of background music and sound effects, transforming a verbal performance into a rich, immersive soundscape. This allows poets to meticulously craft the emotional and tonal backdrop for their words, evoking specific settings or feelings that complement and intensify the spoken narrative, creating a highly polished and intentional auditory artwork.

The ability to edit and manipulate time is another critical artistic advantage unique to digital delivery. Live performance is inherently linear and temporal; once spoken, words cannot be unsaid, and pacing is dictated by real-time flow. Digital mediums, conversely, offer absolute control over sequence, rhythm, and emphasis through cutting, splicing, and sequencing. Poets can meticulously refine their delivery, re-record difficult sections, or strategically insert pauses and silences that would be challenging to maintain naturally in a live setting. This

post-production precision allows for a sophisticated form of poetic orchestration, where every word, every silence, and every transition can be precisely timed for maximum impact. As Auslander (1999) discusses the shift from “liveness” to mediated performance, digital spoken word embraces its mediated nature, turning the editing suite into an extension of the poet’s artistic tool kit, enabling a level of compositional finesse akin to filmmaking.

Digital platforms foster a unique form of audience interaction and community building that directly contributes to the art form’s evolution. Unlike the transient applause of a live show, digital performances invite comments, shares, likes, and direct messages, creating a dynamic feedback loop. This not only provides immediate validation and constructive criticism but also facilitates the formation of global communities around specific poets or themes. As Jenkins (2006) observed in the context of participatory culture, digital spaces empower audiences to become active participants rather than passive consumers. For spoken word, this means poets can engage in dialogue with their listeners, respond to comments, and even inspire collaborative projects or “challenges,” blurring the lines between creator and audience. This ongoing interaction can influence a poet’s subsequent work, fostering a more responsive and evolving artistic practice that is uniquely shaped by its digital ecosystem.

Digital platforms have done more than merely provide a wider stage for spoken word poetry; they have instigated a profound evolution in its artistic expression. By enabling multimodal layering, precise sonic manipulation, meticulous editing, and dynamic audience interaction, these platforms offer poets an expanded palette of creative tools. This evolution does not diminish the power of live performance, but rather complements it, forging a distinct, digitally-native form of spoken word artistry that leverages the unique affordances of the virtual realm to amplify, deepen, and diversify the poetic voice.

However, the digital space also presents unique challenges. The ephemeral nature of online content, the constant competition for attention, and the potential for misinterpretation or harassment can all undermine the impact of a performance. It is therefore crucial to examine how poets navigate these challenges and leverage the affordances of digital spaces to effectively foreground their message.

While digital spaces offer significant opportunities for spoken word poets, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges and limitations. The digital realm is not inherently democratic or equitable (Noble, 2018). Algorithms can amplify certain voices while silencing others, and access to technology and internet connectivity remains unevenly distributed. Furthermore, the potential for online harassment and abuse can discourage poets from sharing their work online, particularly those from marginalized communities.

In addition, the quest for virality can sometimes lead to a focus on sensationalism or clickbait, undermining the artistic integrity of the work. Poets may feel pressured to create content that is easily digestible and shareable, rather than focusing on more complex or nuanced themes. It is, therefore, imperative that poets and audiences alike critically engage with the digital space, recognizing both its potential and its pitfalls.

Digital spaces have profoundly transformed the landscape of spoken word poetry in Kenya, offering new avenues for subaltern voices to be heard. By analyzing Mufasa's "On the Trend" and Mumbi's "The Choice, Voice and Autonomy" *This study* has demonstrated how performance elements such as rhythm, repetition, intimacy, and interactivity are amplified through digital platforms. Without regard for the content, the digital space provides a powerful tool for shaping the audience's experience of the poetry and drawing attention to the artifice of language.

However, it is crucial to recognize that the digital space is not a panacea. Challenges such as algorithmic bias, online harassment, and the pressure to conform to viral trends can undermine the effectiveness of spoken word poetry as a form of social and political expression. Therefore, a critical and nuanced approach is needed to fully harness the potential of digital spaces for amplifying subaltern voices in Kenya and beyond. Continued research is needed to explore the evolving relationship between spoken word poetry, digital technology, and the representation of marginalized communities.

2.5 Conclusion

The study explored linguistics strategies, para-linguistics strategies and performance elements used by spoken word poetry artist in Kenya. Through the artistic strategies used the study avers that spoken word poetry artists push limits of experimentation coining new words. The artists create new artistic forms and play around artistic performances that no one would have imagined. This therefore means that the youth cannot be contained, they play outside hegemony blurring boundaries and creating new rules. Rules are a rich resource for doing many things. They are unafraid to play outside of rules. The disobey rules of acceptance suggesting that as a people they are ready to pave space. They create the third space of engagement.

The use of code-switching, code-mixing, and *Sheng'* in Brigadier's poetry, and in Kenyan spoken word more broadly, contributes to the creation of what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls a "third space." This is a space of hybridity and cultural negotiation, where dominant and subordinate cultures intersect and create new forms of expression. In the context of language, the third space represents a challenge to linguistic hegemony, where marginalized languages and dialects are given voice and legitimacy.

By strategically blending Swahili, English, and *Sheng'*, Kenyan spoken word poets like Brigadier are not simply reflecting the linguistic reality of their communities; they are actively

shaping it. They are creating a new linguistic landscape where youth voices are amplified, and where the boundaries between languages are blurred. This challenges the notion that English and Swahili are the only legitimate languages of power and authority, and creates space for alternative forms of expression to flourish. As argued by Kioko and Mutuku (2020), this linguistic innovation is a crucial aspect of youth empowerment, allowing young Kenyans to define their own identities and challenge the social and political structures that marginalize them.

The artistic strategies employed in spoken word poetry, particularly the use of visual and auditory media, are highly effective in amplifying the voices of the subaltern. These strategies, underpinned by Jakobson's theory of literariness, enhance the aesthetic and emotional impact of the poems, making them more engaging and thought-provoking. By employing visual spectacle, auditory intimacy, rhythm, repetition, and collective voice, spoken word poets can connect with their audience on a more visceral and emotional level, transcending the limitations of language and creating a shared sense of community.

Spoken word poetry provides a vital platform for marginalized youth in Kenya to express their experiences, challenge existing power structures, and imagine alternative futures. By embracing the performative nature of the art form and employing a range of artistic strategies, these poets are making their voices heard and contributing to a more just and equitable society. Further research could explore the reception of these performances by different audiences and the long-term impact of spoken word poetry on social and political change in Kenya. The analysis of these strategies, independent of content, aligns with Jakobson's emphasis on the "literary function," where the artistic form itself shapes meaning and impact. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the power of spoken word poetry as a tool for social change and a means of amplifying the voices of the subaltern.

CHAPTER THREE

SPOKEN-WORD POETRY AND THE FRAMING OF FLUID IDENTITIES AMONGST KENYAN YOUTH

3.1 Introduction

This chapter underpinned by Spivak's (2008) theory of subalternity interrogates the way spoken word poetry in Kenya frames fluidity of subaltern identities amongst Kenyan youth. It examines how selected Kenyan spoken word poetry gives voice to the voiceless youth. It also explores how the youth use spoken word poetry to confront the stereotypes of young people by trying to reach the broader young listening public through politically and socially relevant poems. The youth tend to raise issues such as unemployment, identity crisis, gender discrimination, poverty and corruption (Muyia, 2014).

In this chapter the study looks at spoken word poetry as a performance-based literary genre which has emerged as a potent form of expression among Kenyan youth, reflecting the complexities of their identities. This art form captures the dynamic interplay of cultural, social, and political influences that shape young people's experiences in Kenya (Dina, 2015). As a multifaceted medium that engages with various themes, spoken word poetry allows Kenyan youth to articulate their realities, aspirations, and struggles, thus revealing the fluid nature of their identities. The study further discusses how spoken word poetry serves as a lens through which the evolving identities of Kenyan youth can be understood, focusing on themes such as cultural hybridity, social issues, and political engagement. Identity can be shaped by different issues like politics, gender and culture. Identity is also intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989).

3.2 Defining identity.

Dundes (1984) informs us that the word identity derives from the Latin *idem* meaning “the same.” Scholarly discussions show that identity depends as much upon differences as upon similarities. Heraclitus (ca. 500 B.C), and much later St. Thomas Aquinas, refer to the metaphor of the flowing river (at any one spot it is the same river but never the same water) (Broadie S,2023). While Locke and Hume refer to animate objects to exemplify the notion that identity remains constant even if the physical constituents change (Feser, E,2019). The same principle can be applied to group identity.

The term identity is defined by various critics differently. Kelly defined it as “self-reflective and self-conscious projection of shared and remembered symbols, myths, traditions, religion, history, language, food, clothing and such other factors; it is also an affirmation of difference because when I know who I am, I also know who I am not or how I am different from other” (Feist, J,2021, p. 32). In the article, “Memory, History and Homeland: The Indian Diasporic Experience,” Jain points out that “Identity is the external layer related to color, race, class, social position, economic status, nationality and a whole lot of other outward indicators” (2021, p. 77). This idea of linking the external and internal elements of identity is clarified when Pathak, in his book *Quest for Identity in Indian English Writing* observes that identity is “the process of creative self-realization” (2021, p. 21). This notion of centering the self is what this study finds fascinating, especially in relation to the question of marginalization related to identity and self for the subaltern subjects that are marginalized.

In trying to understand the question of identity, the study borrows the views of various established scholars who have done much research on the same. Homi Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* states that “For identification, identity is never an a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality (1994, p.73). In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Hall describes personal identity as constructed within, not

outside representation. And that identity can be said to arise from the ‘narrativization’ of the self (1996, p. 4) meaning that identity may refer to who we are and what we may wish to be like. The question of one’s image is very important in identity construction. It also involves the modification of the same image and ‘Identification is never the affirmation of pre-given identity, but it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image’ (Bhabha, 1994).

The view of identity is consistent with the postmodern turn in social theory. As the cultural social worlds in which we root our identities splinter and drift apart, our identities move with them. Hall (1997), one of the founders of the field of cultural studies writes that, ‘The subject, previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities...identity becomes a “moveable feast”: formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us” (Hall 1997).

That is why Bauman states that identity is a modern invention and reiterates that, “To say that modernity led to the ‘disembodying’ of identity, or that it rendered the identity ‘unencumbered’; is to assert a pleonasm, since at no time did identity ‘become’ a problem; it was ‘problem’ from its birth- was *born as a problem* (that is, as something one needs to do something about – as a task), could exist only as a problem; it was a problem, and thus ready to be born, precisely because of that experience of under – determination and free – floating which came to be articulated *ex post facto* as ‘disembodied’. Identity would not have congealed into a visible and graspable entity in any other but the ‘disembodied’ or ‘unencumbered’ form (Bauman 1996: 19)

This study builds on Collins’ (1990) concept of the matrix of domination. He elucidates that identities are fought within an interlocking system of oppression and privileges. He argues that

race, class, and gender are not discrete categories of experience but mutually constructive systems, leading to specific social locations that defines individuals' identities and opportunities. Recent scholarship continues to apply and extend this framework. In their work on digital activism and social justice, Browne and Gounari (2022) utilize Collins's insights to analyze how marginalized communities leverage online spaces to forge collective identities and dominant narratives, demonstrating how political and cultural circumstances intersect with the race and gender to shape emergent identities. This highlights the active role individuals play in constructing their identities in response to, and often in defiance of, systematic constraints. In line with the above arguments, this study therefore discusses the different contexts and different types of identities in the following section.

3.3 Social identity

Social identity refers to the part of an individual's self-concept that derives from their knowledge of membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, as cited in Renfro & Jones, 2021). Unlike personal identity, which emphasizes unique individual characteristics, social identity highlights shared group attributes and the psychological connection people feel to their in-groups. This connection is not merely cognitive; it is deeply affective, influencing emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. As Smith and Davies (2023) elaborate, social identity provides individuals with a sense of belonging, meaning, and often, enhanced self-esteem, derived from the positive evaluation of their group. This study posits that there are various forms of social identities that spoken word poetry artists create as they contest their subalternity.

3.3.1 Social Issues and Self-Representation

The representation of social issues in spoken word poetry illustrates the fluid social identities of Kenyan youth. Many poets utilize their platforms to address pressing concerns such as

inequality, corruption, and violence, reflecting the socio-political realities that shape their lives (Mungai, 2020). By articulating their grievances and aspirations, these young artists not only assert their agency but also create a space for collective reflection and action. The fluidity of their identities is evident in their ability to shift between various societal roles and perspectives, embodying the complexities of their lived experiences.

Moreover, spoken word poetry provides an avenue for Kenyan youth to engage in critical self-reflection and dialogue about their identities in broader social contexts. For instance, the works of Mufasa and Teardrops showcase the interconnections between personal narratives and systemic issues, emphasizing that individual experiences are often intertwined with collective social struggles. This narrative strategy reflects the multifaceted identities of Kenyan youth, who grapple with their personal histories while also engaging with larger socio-political questions (Patel, 2017; Macharia, 2018). As they navigate these intersections, poets continuously reshape their identities, demonstrating the fluid nature of self-representation in a rapidly changing world.

Mufasa's poem "A Poem That Will Melt Your Heart" shows how young people challenge and redefine social norms as seen in this poem:

The pastor says anonymous when he means unanimous.

My pastor says it is difficult to raise a child today

When Birdman drives a 320cc automobile

Cinderella is a girl who comes home past midnight

Mtoto achapwe kiboko.

Through the contradiction hinted at in pronunciation, the poet raises contradictions of nurturing children. In this instance, the poet raises the issue of corporal punishment in a society where the old are immoral. Through this poem, the youth are challenged how parents punish them.

The poem suggests that children should not be punished when parents are in a rage. This shows the uncertain identities of the youth who seem to be challenging traditional norms of parenting which are in and of themselves veiled with contradictions.

In Teardrops' poem, "Story Come" he uses everyday language, that is *Sheng'*, to reveal his identity. His social identity is neither modern (symbolized by English) nor traditional (symbolized by mother tongue). It is in an in-between, a hybrid identity:

Mi hupenda sana

Ndo maana napenda poetry

Ningekua naifanya sababu ya machic

Ningefanya poultry

You see unawezakill the king

But not the kingdom

But not the prophecy.

Through the code-mixing, the poet positions himself as a subject at ease in the mix of cultures defined by the aesthetics of poesy. The poet contrasts his love for poetry with a play on poultry farming and romantic relationships with women. The poet argues that his love for poetry is not defined by romantic love nor love for farming but the concept of love. The poem affirms the supremacy of the idea of love over the love of specific things and positions himself as a poet defined by the concept of love. Essentially, the poet is suggesting that his social identity is defined and determined by love, love for poetry and love.

In Brigadier's piece "Streets," he explores the tension between modernity and tradition in the social reality of urban life. He articulates a desire for the youth to embrace their African roots while navigating the complexities of urban life. He captures the contradictions of urban life:

Streets

Karibu kwa streets za Nairobi, ile street mnajua wote iko katikati ya CBD, Koinange street. Si ni hii street ilifanya mademu waka-lose touch na old fashioned wakakataa kudunga dera, lesa wakaanza kudunga vitu tighter utadhani ni mademu wa Taveta, na si Wataita.

Karibu kwa streets, si ni hii street ya Koinange ndio uki-mention the first thing itacome kwa your mind si Jeff and that's why hutampata kwa hiyo street on bench.

Hii street yenye hunikumbusha about our mothers na strength of a woman, mama ngina street.

In this poem, Teardrops explores the reality of social life in the urban space. In mentioning Koinange street, Teardrops calls the reader's attention to the street's infamy as a prostitution den in the 1990s. An important element, however, in this representation is the quick deflection to another street, Mama Ngina Street, which foregrounds the women's movement in Kenya. Through this poem, Teardrops makes a commentary on the sociality of urban life and how naming can sometimes be a social exercise involving use and reimagination.

Teardrops also raise the issue of urban dressing which is further emphasized in Brigadier's poem "Niko na Dreams." Here Brigadier avers that beauty can be defined by the standards of the youth on their own terms as they negotiate their fluid identities in terms of dressing:

Nina dreams ya kulegalize na kuraise standards za beauty

Sasa mrembo usiniringie ati uko na standards

Sijawahiona mrembo ata mmoja ako na sticker ya KEBS

Na hata hao machali wanakufuatafuata

Wote ni ma counterfeits

This poem makes a mockery of standards of beauty as well as standardization of products in Kenya. He re-imagines beauty as defined by KEBS (Kenya Bureau of Standards), the organization charged with ensuring that the market is not tainted by products of substandard level or contaminated products.

3.3.2 Social Identity and Activism

Spoken word poetry provides a voice for the youth to express their views and concerns about pressing social issues. Poets like Mumbi and Teardrops have leveraged spoken word to critique societal norms and advocate for change, thus positioning themselves as agents of social discourse (Achieng, 2018). In Teardrops' poem, "Nchi Bila Amani ni Nchi Bila Dhamani" (*A country without peace is a worthless country*), he decries poverty which is fueled by corruption and political violence, and would like to identify himself with a peaceful country where resources equitably distributed. This is illustrated in the following lines:

Najua chenye wananchi wa kawaida yafaa kujua

Ni eti the last four letters to the word mheshimiwa

na the word dhulumiwa ni miwa

Na ni mheshimiwa anajuwa utamu wa miwa

Mdhulumiwa ni mkulima wa sukari

Hajawahi onja utamu wa miwa.

Through the word play on the suffix "miwa" which literally translates to *sugarcane*, in the two words "mheshimiwa" (*honorable*) and mdhulumiwa (*oppressed*), the poet foregrounds the interconnections between the leaders who by virtue of leadership positions are seen as of high rank and nobility and common citizens who in a third world country are exploited and discarded by leaders. The poem locates the exploitation of citizens in the suffix which accords the leaders

all the favors of this inter-relation between the honorable and the oppressed. Through this comparison, we can read the youth as the oppressed that have been discarded in society. In this case, the poet is pushing for activism of the youth in changing these unfair dynamics. In a society where youth are often marginalized, spoken word poetry becomes a powerful tool for advocacy and self-assertion. In Mumbi's poem "Choice, Voice and Autonomy" she offers resistance in the following lines:

We are running out of time

So, if you deny us the freedom we deserve

We will just find a way on this table

You refuse to invite us

It is time we start to shake it.

Her argument is that it is now time for the youth to resist marginalization by force through spoken word poetry. That if they are not allowed positions on the discourses in Kenya, they will take the positions by force. This is what is meant when she says "It is time we start to shake it." Young poets articulate their frustrations and aspirations, revealing a collective identity that is not only shaped by personal experiences but also by shared social contexts. As highlighted by Inoue (2020), "the act of performing spoken word poetry nurtures a sense of belonging among youth, enabling them to collectively negotiate their identities in relation to societal expectations" (p. 67). This shared experience fosters solidarity and encourages active engagement in social movements, reflecting a dynamic interplay between individual and collective identities.

3.3.3 Gender Issues and Empowerment

Another significant aspect of the identities of Kenyan youth, particularly young women, is the discourse around gender issues. Spoken word artists provide a voice to gender-based injustices, challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for women's rights. Artists such as Wairimu and Mufasa often address issues like gender violence, sexual harassment, and the quest for empowerment in their performances.

For instance, Mufasa's poem "Before My Daughter is Born" reflects on the struggles women face in asserting their agency within a patriarchal society, while simultaneously celebrating their resilience and strength. His performances not only highlight the struggles women endure but also empower young women to embrace their identities and challenge societal limitations:

Before My Daughter is Born

She will never know rape and one-night stands.

She will be morally sound.

She will be Mahatma Gandhi.

She will learn hard work and God.

She should be persistence and has the right dream.

The poet imagines the emergence of an ideal society devoid of all forms of violence against women as the right society to bring forth a daughter. The poet, opens up discussion around gender equality, inspiring movements and community initiatives aimed at addressing gender-based violence and discrimination. By using spoken word as a platform for advocating for a pro-women society. Mufasa plays an instrumental role in redefining gender identities and fostering a culture of empowerment among young Kenyans. This art form, characterized by its emphasis on performance, rhythm, and the spoken word, resonates deeply with the experiences,

challenges, and aspirations of young Kenyans. This is well illustrated in Mufasa's poem, "Before My Daughter is Born" where he redefines gender identities and fosters a culture of empowerment amongst the subaltern youth. In his performance he moves away from traditional roles of females and encourages girls being taken to school and says that education is the key to dignity. He avers that beauty is not skin color but it is engraved in the soul. He says that being female should not equal to limitation but emphasizes equal chances for both sexes. He talks about the future generation of the youth never knowing rape but living in secure environments. He talks of gender equality and inequality.

Brigadiers' spoken word poem, "Streets" explores gender issues as a social construct, he decries half naked girls on the street as they practice prostitution and suggest that there is still hope for the female person as Taita girls who dresses in Deras. He explores gender violence through rape and prostitution on Mama Ngina Street and still proposes a ray of hope because of the name of that street that suggest strength of a woman.

In Wairimu's spoken word poem, "An Open Letter to My Dad" we experience gender violence when Wairimu's dad subjects her mother to physical assault. Her dad is a violent absentee father. Although the daughter is wounded but we decipher hope when she stands up against this abuse from her father and addresses him and asks him to reform. Admittedly, this study avers that the subaltern youth foregrounds gender equality in all aspects of socio-political lives and frowns upon gender violence thus creating a society where both genders thrive.

In Teardrops' poem, "I have a Dream" he challenges the status quo of poverty and male supremacy by asserting that the female gender should be empowered and the resources should be equitably distributed in the society. Here the female gender is reasserting their identity as that of strength and not the traditional weaker sex. This is shown in the below lines from his poem "I have a dream":

I have a dream that one day tutaraise men wenye wataraise men

Men wenye watakuwa not only wanaspand on women

But watakuwa na kusave na kuinvest on women

So kama unawezainvest on her salon

Utashindwa vipi kulipia her course

The above poems illustrate that we are moving away from the traditional roles of women being provided for but being equal partners in society. So, the female gender is being recreated from a fluid gender to a stable gender through spoken word poetry. What is interesting in Teardrops' poem is the assertion of men helping to empower women. Thus, the poem can be seen as advising men to raise a generation of men that value women and protect and empower them.

In contrast to Teardrops' poem where he is talking about men raising responsible men is Wairimu's poem "Letter to my dad" which exemplifies neglect. She describes the subaltern position of girls ignored by their fathers. Wairimu describes a fatherless upbringing where at twenty-five years of age, she contests the absentee father syndrome by penning a poem to her father so that society can change and love both boys and girls equally and be present fathers in their lives. The following lines in the poem "Letter to my dad" exemplify this:

Dad, I have never had a conversation with you.

Twenty-five years of silence

I am here with pen and paper

To write you a letter

Wairimu represents a common reality of single-mother homes in society where an absentee father leads to a traumatized adulthood for children. Through spoken word poetry, Wairimu expresses the pain of not knowing how to relate to men because of lacking a father figure. This

poem can thus be seen as a trigger for Teardrops' earlier discussed poem which offers a solution that can lead to the emergence of a more balanced society. In this regard, empowerment begins from nurturing.

In Mufasa's poem "Before My Daughter is Born" he discusses the issues of sexuality and avers that he be a present father in the life of his daughter and teach her values. That her gender should not be limitation for her to achieve.

Before My Daughter is Born

I won't choose her mother by skin color.

I will pay fees for her to be bright

Beauty is in the brains

I'll teach her to seek humility not money

In the man she wishes to marry

And I will let her know that gender should not be a limitation

I hope she will fight not her neighbors

But with her neighbors

To fight for justice.

Mufasa embodies the fighting spirit of the subaltern. That the traditional roles of gender limitations, of skin color discrimination should be fought by the youth so that their identities are defined by values and not stereotypes. Through spoken word poetry, the subaltern wants to speak for themselves in accordance with Spivak's theory of Subalternity.

3.4 Political identity

Political identity refers to a collective's shared sense of belonging and purpose within the political sphere, often framed in relation to access to power, resources, and governance. It transcends mere individual political opinions, representing a group's collective self-understanding and its position relative to other groups in the pursuit of political goals (Smith & Chen, 2022). This identity frequently crystallizes around common interests, values, grievances, or shared experiences of marginalization or privilege, which then inform political allegiances and actions. For instance, collective identities might coalesce around national, ethnic, religious, class, or ideological lines, shaping voting patterns, protest movements, and policy demands (Johnson & Lee, 2023). It is inherently relational, often defined in opposition to another or a competing political group, thus providing a framework for collective mobilization and political competition (Miller, 2021).

The emergence of political identity is a dynamic and multifaceted process, rather than a fixed or primordial attribute. It is largely a social construct, continually negotiated and reinforced through various mechanisms. One primary driver is the strategic mobilization by political elites who frequently articulate narratives that resonate with existing social cleavages, historical injustices, or socio-economic disparities (Garcia & Rodriguez, 2022). These narratives can evoke a sense of shared destiny, grievance, or threat, forging a collective 'us' against a perceived 'them.' Furthermore, political institutions and electoral systems can inadvertently shape the formation of political identities. For example, winner-take-all systems or ethnically demarcated constituencies can incentivize identity-based mobilization, reinforcing distinctions and solidifying group boundaries (Chen & Wang, 2021). Historical events, such as conflicts, colonial legacies, or periods of significant social change, also play a crucial role in shaping and hardening political identities by creating shared memories and collective experiences that bind groups together (Davies & Kim, 2023). Finally, media and digital platforms increasingly serve

as powerful arenas for the construction and dissemination of political identities, amplifying certain narratives and fostering group cohesion or division (Liu et al., 2020).

In the Kenyan context, the study of political identity is particularly salient, given its deeply entrenched history of ethnic politics, clientelism, and post-colonial state formation. Kenyan scholars have extensively contributed to understanding how political identities, especially those rooted in ethnicity, religion, or region, are mobilized, sustained, and impact electoral outcomes, resource allocation, and national cohesion. While a singular, universal definition of political identity might not be the primary focus of their individual works, their collective scholarship profoundly elucidates its local manifestations and dynamics. For instance, the interplay between inequality, ethnicity, and state power in Kenya, has been studied demonstrating how socio-economic disparities are frequently framed along ethnic lines, thereby solidifying political identities leveraged by elites during elections (Kanyinga, 2022). Although not offering a global definition, Kanyinga's work meticulously illustrates the emergence of political identities through the politicization of socio-economic grievances and the instrumentalization of ethnic ties in national politics. Elsewhere, Oloo (2023) argues that political parties and electoral processes in Kenya, highlight how these institutions often become vehicles for ethnic aggregation rather than ideological platforms. His research unpacks how political identity, often pre-existing or strategically constructed along ethnic lines, profoundly shapes political competition and voter behavior, underscoring its emergence through the electoral cycle and elite manipulation.

This study argues that the subaltern youth have been greatly affected by political landscape in Kenya and political manipulations, resulting in fluid identities of the Kenyan youth. This fluidity places the Kenyan outside dominant political discourses. This has caused the youth to

come up with creative art forms that pave space for youth to be heard and to contribute to national political debates.

3.4.1 Political Identity and Resistance

The political landscape in Kenya is marked by a history of instability, corruption, and disenfranchisement, all of which have significantly influenced the identities of its youth. Spoken word poetry has emerged as an arena for political expression, enabling young people to voice their dissent and critique power structures. Poets often address themes of governance, human rights, and civic engagement, thus asserting their identities as informed citizens and advocates for justice.

The spoken word platform allows for the articulation of a political identity that is assertive and confrontational. Poets engage with issues such as electoral violence and ethnic tensions through their performances, often using metaphor and storytelling to convey their messages (Mungai, 2019). As a result, spoken word poetry not only reflects the political consciousness of Kenyan youth but also cultivates a sense of agency, empowering them to challenge oppressive systems. This is shown in Mufasa's poem, "Freedom":

FREEDOM

Death stings, jobs die because of second name.

We vote leaders because of their second name.

Politicians before sponsoring Facebook pages needs to know

A thousand likes don't make a leader we like

Mufasa critiques the ethnic nature of Kenyan politics when he foregrounds the significance of the second name in determining voting patterns. The second name which in the Kenyan context signals the family name and by extension the ethnic identity. Mufasa further observes the social

engineering of politics through digital influencers. At the same time, he acknowledges the violence and disenfranchisement that follows the same trend of ethnicity. Through these few lines of his poem *Mufasa* extensively demonstrates the fact that negative ethnicity is responsible for Kenya's political regression as well as Kenya's economic problems. Through linking the politics with the economy, *Mufasa* reimagines a leadership/politics not defined by these forms of identities but one framed by one's capacity to lead. In essence, he challenges political violence and tribalism and opts for activism challenging the oppressive system, advocating for peace and equality in a state that treats all its citizens as equal.

While *Mufasa* observes the politicians' exploitation of digital platforms where the majority of the youth express themselves, Mumbi in a different poem foregrounds the benefits of social media for youth resistance movements. In the poem "Revolution," Mumbi insists that the youth revolution is a digital revolution where the youth fight a system that has marginalized them through digital political activism. She posits:

The revolution will be youth posting long updates on Facebook

About their opinion and the state of the nation

And you not paying attention

The revolution will be brought to you in broad daylight, on the radio,

With the messages hidden with codes in music.

Mumbi suggests that through the coded language of the youth (including *Sheng*' and digital space framed in memes, emojis and other creative forms of digital space), the revolution will be brought to the public arena. This research notes one such case is the way the youth carried out the Anti-finance bill protests of 2024. Wanjiku (2024) details how "the streets echoed with adapted anthems and spontaneous poetic recitations, transforming protests into a public performance of collective grievance and hope." These auditory elements were vital for

maintaining morale, ensuring cohesion, and making the protests accessible and engaging for participants.

Furthermore, performance art and symbolic gestures were evident. Instances of mock funerals for democracy, theatrical displays of state oppression, and coordinated symbolic actions gained significant media attention. These acts, often captured by journalists and shared widely, served to dramatize the protest's message, drawing empathy and highlighting the moral arguments against the bill. Mwangi (2024) further highlighted that “from mock funerals for ‘dead aspirations’ to performance pieces embodying public suffering, the protests harnessed theatrical elements to amplify their urgent message.”

The 2024 Kenyan financial bill protests vividly demonstrated the enduring power and evolving nature of art as a form of protest. Visual art, digital memes, music, and performance were indispensable in shaping the movement's identity, communication, and impact. These initial reports suggest that the artistic expressions of the “Reject Finance Bill” movement will likely become a significant case study for understanding contemporary youth-led protests and the creative ways dissent finds its voice in the digital age.

3.4.2 Political Engagement and Identity Evolution

Political engagement is another crucial aspect of how spoken word poetry reflects the fluid identities of Kenyan youth. Many poets utilize their art to comment on the political landscape, making powerful statements about governance, corruption, and democracy (Owiny, 2019). This engagement is particularly relevant in Kenya, where the youth population plays a significant role in shaping political discourse and action. By using poetry as a tool for activism, these young artists assert their agency and challenge the status quo, revealing a commitment to social change that transcends traditional boundaries of identity.

The act of performing spoken word poetry itself can be seen as a form of political resistance, allowing poets to claim space and voice in a society that often marginalizes their perspectives (Munyiri, 2021). This performative aspect underscores the fluidity of identity, as poets navigate various roles—artists, activists, and community leaders—while addressing the political issues that impact their lives. In this sense, spoken word poetry becomes a site of identity negotiation, where young artists continuously redefine themselves in response to external pressures and opportunities for agency.

In Teardrops' poem "Nchi Bila Amani ni Nchi Bila Dhamani" he illustrates in the following lines about political instability and how the youth are negotiating their identities that they would want to have a country that is stable.

Niliambiwa na babu toka zamani

Nchi bila amani ni nchi bila dhamani

Na haifai kuwa nchi bila amani

Just because why tunaportion kidogo kwa bendera

Shida zinatrend kuliko Larry na Rubadiri

Hao mafisadi ni mavazi wamebadili

Maadili ni yale yale

Utumishi kwa wote but huduma kwa wachache.

Teardrops is responding to political instability and urges for proper governance for the young people to have stable lives. But so long as the young people have fluid identities the government will not accord them an opportunity to live in a stable environment because they are not listened to as exemplified by the line 'huduma kwa wachache.' The poet decries the government's disregard for the youth by benefiting only a select few.

In Mufasa's poem "The Revolution," he speaks against ethnicity, tribalism and executions. He contests identities based on tribe and speaks for identities based on values. He represents the subaltern in contesting the stereotyped identities based on tribe and ethnicity.

Revolution

I didn't choose my mother's womb

I didn't choose the name of my neighbor

My neighbor didn't choose me

Therefore, it does not make sense

When my neighbor is forcefully moved

It is painful for a neighbor to lose a hand

Because of belonging to the wrong tribe

It is so painful when she watches her father being beheaded

Mufasa subverts the traditional beliefs that identity must be formed on tribal lines. Therefore, this is a cry for societal change where identities should be formed based on nationalism, values, and beliefs, most importantly on patriotism. Mufasa further implies that with the constant comingling of citizens, tribe as a measure of political identity is becoming outdated. He also observes the fact that intermarriages have complicated the neat tribal alliances. In mapping these contradictions, Mufasa's poem foregrounds the evolution of identities attached to tribal lines and re-imagines a positive ethnic lens for rethinking Kenya's politics.

3.5 Cultural identity

Cultural identity refers to a sense of belonging to a specific social or cultural group. It is, however, far from a static construct. As theorized by various scholars, it is a dynamic, fluid,

and often contested process rather than a fixed attribute. According to Chen and Kim (2021), cultural identity encompasses an individual's self-perception as a member of a group, shaped by shared cultural elements such as language, values, beliefs, customs, and norms. Furthermore, Liu (2023) posits that cultural identity involves both an internal sense of belonging and external recognition, often negotiated within various social contexts. It is not simply inherited but actively constructed and reconstructed throughout one's life, especially in response to changing social realities and interactions with other cultural groups.

The emergence of cultural identity is a complex interplay of internal and external factors, deeply rooted in social learning and interaction. From a socio-constructivist perspective, cultural identity is forged through processes of socialization, where individuals internalize the values and practices of their primary cultural groups (Garcia & Lopez, 2022). This initial immersion provides foundational elements of identity. However, identity formation is not a passive absorption; it involves continuous negotiation, particularly for youth. In the context of subalternity, where dominant cultural narratives often marginalize or misrepresent minority groups, cultural identity frequently emerges as a site of resistance and creative expression. Young people, in navigating their subordinated positions, may embrace, reject, or hybridize elements of both their traditional and the dominant cultures, fashioning unique identities that challenge existing hegemonies. The digital age further complicates and enriches this process, as online spaces serve as powerful platforms for cultural exchange, identity exploration, and the formation of transnational cultural communities (Wang & Li, 2023). Here, youth experiment with different facets of their identities, drawing from a global repertoire of cultural forms, thereby creating novel hybrid identities.

Kenyan scholarship has significantly contributed to understanding cultural identity, particularly in the context of post-colonialism, ethnicity, and rapid urbanization. While a

singular, universally accepted definition by Kenyan scholars may not be explicitly articulated, their collective work provides rich empirical and theoretical insights into how cultural identities are formed and expressed in the Kenyan milieu. Scholars like Mugambi (2022) have explored how ethnic identities, despite efforts towards national integration, continue to play a crucial role in shaping individual and collective self-perceptions, often intersecting with political and economic realities. Furthermore, works by Njunge (2021) delve into the vibrant urban youth cultures, particularly the emergence of *Sheng'* (a hybrid language blending Swahili, English, and local languages), as a marker of identity for young people navigating a complex urban landscape. *Sheng'*, in this context, is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a cultural expression that signifies a distinct youth identity, forged in the crucible of diverse influences and distinct from both traditional and colonial linguistic norms. Similarly, Onyango (2020) examines how religious identity, often syncretic in nature, emerges as a significant component of cultural identity for many Kenyan youths, fusing traditional beliefs with introduced religions in unique ways. These scholars, through their focus on specific cultural practices, languages, and social groupings, implicitly define cultural identity by illustrating its dynamic, adaptive, and often resistant manifestations within the Kenyan socio-historical context.

3.5.1 Cultural Hybridity and Identity Formation

Kenyan youth navigate a landscape marked by globalization, urbanization, and an evolving cultural identity. Spoken word poetry encapsulates this cultural hybridity, allowing poets to blend traditional oral storytelling with contemporary themes and forms (Achieng, 2017). For instance, poets frequently incorporate local languages, proverbs, and idioms into their performances while also embracing global influences such as hip-hop and spoken *Sheng'* and code mixing. This blending of styles not only showcases the performers' diverse backgrounds

but also resonates with audiences who share similar experiences of navigating conflicting cultural narratives.

Moreover, the fluid nature of identity is highlighted in the way young poets challenge and redefine cultural norms. They address issues such as gender roles, sexuality, and ethnicity within their performances, often subverting traditional expectations. For example, Gatheca (2018) posits that through spoken word, Kenyan youth assert their individuality while also confronting societal constraints, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse around identity in a rapidly changing society. The performative nature of spoken word allows these poets to explore and express their evolving identities, fostering a sense of belonging amid uncertainty.

3.6 Intersection of Individual and Collective Identity

This section evaluates the place of individual's and group identities in the society and find out whether an individual's identity is influenced by group identity. It also looks at how spoken word poetry can be used in shaping youth identities that have been viewed as fluid/unstable and always in the state of a flux. The study notes that apart from the personal identity there is collective identity which involves a sense of 'we-ness' which is preferred by the youths in the in-groups. The members in the group are individuals with similar perception, interest and aspirations. It is therefore, worth noting that individuals construct their identities along two lines: personal, through the characteristics and behaviors they associate with themselves: and social, by their membership of various social groups (Howard, 2000).

3.6.1 Collective Identity

Collective identity in spoken word poetry resonates prominently with the socio-political context of Kenya. Collective identity is fundamentally rooted in a shared interpretation of reality, a common memory, and a collective vision for the future. It is not static but rather a

fluid process of meaning-making, shaped by social interaction and cultural production (Brewer, 2021). Groups coalesce around narratives that affirm their existence, often in opposition to external forces or dominant ideals. These narratives, whether historical, mythical, or contemporary, provide the glue that binds individuals into a collective whole, offering a sense of purpose and belonging. The very act of sharing these narratives, particularly in public forums, transforms individual experiences into collective memory and solidarity. Since the early 2000s, poets have utilized their craft to address issues such as tribalism, political corruption, and social injustice, thereby fostering a sense of shared identity among the youth. The post-election violence of 2007-2008 significantly influenced poetic expression, leading to a heightened awareness of ethnicity and nationality. Poets such as Mufasa, encapsulate this collective identity by addressing the ramifications of tribal divisions in his work. In his poem “Freedom,” Mufasa critiques the way ethnicity informs social relations and political loyalty in Kenya, calling for unity among the youth that transcends tribal affiliations (Otieno, 2020).

Similarly, spoken word poets like Teardrops have articulated a collective Kenyan identity through their performances. Their artistic expressions often emphasize shared heritage, calling for reconciliation and healing post-conflict while celebrating Kenya’s diverse cultures. The collective identity fostered through spoken word platforms encourages collaboration among youth, empowering them to confront national issues collectively (Ong’ondo, 2018). In Teardrops poem, “Nchi Bila Amani ni nchi Bila Dhamani”

Niliambiwa na babu toka zamani, nchi bila amani ni nchi bila dhamani na haifai kuwa
nchi bila amani, just because why tunaportion kidogo kwa bendera.

Shida zinatrend kuliko rari na rubadiri hao mafisadi ni mavazi wamebadili mahadili ni
yale yale.

Ili kumaliza ugaidi waliahidi kuongeza usalama Zaidi magaidi ni wale wale
wanarudia yale yale, si mbali bali pale pale serikali saidia kilio ni kile kile.

In this poem, Teardrops depicts lack of peace in the country although there is a small patch on the Kenyan flag. This is an irony of sorts. There is uprising after uprising as it is evidenced in the youth riots that are rampant. In the spoken word poem, Teardrops observes that there is a lot of corruption in Kenya that make the youth to miss employment opportunities and are thus marginalized by the state.

In Wairimu's poem, "Revive Us Again" Wairimu talks about youth who are equaled to dead dried valley of bones. The hegemonic forces have marginalized the youth to an extent where they are almost dead. This is because of their everyday experiences where they live a hopeless life. However, the youth can collectively envision hope through spoken word poetry and eventually move out of the dry bones.

In this valley there are tens, and hundreds and 1000s even millions of us dead, dried, bones that all these lefts of us now, and is not always been like this,
Ask this hill if you want, this hill tells tell of our glory days. the attars of our prays.

3.6.2 Individual Identity

Individual identity, a multifaceted and continuously evolving construct, is shaped by an intricate interplay of personal experiences, societal influences, and self-perception. In contrast to the communal narratives, individual identities are explored through personal experiences, struggles, and aspirations. Many poets use their platforms to delve into topics such as mental health, love, gender, and socio-economic challenges. Wairimu, a prominent spoken word artist, has made waves with her poem "An Open Letter to My Dad," a powerful exploration of her identity as a woman navigating societal expectations and personal ambitions in Kenya. Through her performance, she communicates the tension between individual desires and collective norms, encapsulating the dual identity many young women face (Jumba, 2021).

The individual narratives articulated in spoken word poetry allow the poets to forge connections with the audience on a personal level. This intimate engagement not only affirms individual experiences but also underscores broader societal issues, invoking empathy and understanding among listeners. Poets such as Brigadier, who integrates personal anecdotes about economic struggles and aspirations, highlight how these individual challenges resonate with many young people in Kenya, effectively creating a multifaceted dialogue around identity (Mohammed, 2022).

3.6.3 The Interplay of Collective and Individual Identities

Identity is multiple: there are many forms of personal identities and many forms of group identities. However, the early considerations of identity tended to be more concerned with personal identity than with group identity. Personal identity is viewed as a double awareness of self-sameness and continuity in time and space and the recognition of that identity by others. Again, it is impossible to speak of sameness without reference to differences. Meads (1958) states that “it is not possible to define a man if you don’t mention a woman. And again, how do you define a woman if you don’t mention a man? There can be no self without another, no identity of group A without a group B. This means that identity is an oppositional process producing or strengthening “persistent identity systems.” This oppositional principle constitutes one of the common threads in both personal and group identity, particularly concerning issues affecting minority versus majority cultures. Minorities experience opposition more than majorities, and it is they who have more of a stake in defining their own identity. This process is what is applied in this study to outline the concepts of fluid youth identities and performativity in the selected poem.

The interplay between collective and individual identities in spoken word poetry is crucial to understanding the holistic representation of youth experiences in Kenya. This duality reflects

the complexities of modern Kenyan society, marked by a blend of traditional values and contemporary influences. Spoken word artists often navigate between these identities, illustrating how personal stories are embedded within the larger societal framework.

For instance, Mufasa, a celebrated poet and activist, integrates his narrative of gender-based violence within a collective call to address this critical issue across the nation. In his performances, he emphasizes that his story is not merely an individual struggle but a reflection of a pervasive societal problem, thereby encouraging collective accountability and action (Kilonzo, 2019).

In brigadier's poem, "Mheshimiwa"

In depth ya reality imekuwa so deep, depth ya vijana mtaani imekuwaa kibao na mashida zinasababishwa na wao.

Hao mafisi wanajiita mabig fish na hawawezi shinda papa,nyangumi na mamba.

Wanapigania bendera iwekwe mbele ya magari yao ndo wapate freeway kwa highway na kuna mtoto Dandora na Kibera anasurvive lunch na mapera.

In the above spoken word poem, brigadier expresses the pain of a starving child in the slums yet the hegemonic powers are flying fags so that they can be given space in the jam. This reflects the suffering individuals at the expense of the rich who ignore them. Individuals vote for the rich yet as voters suffers unemployment, the rich increase their salaries very often.

There is a flop of the famous "Kazi kwa vijana project"

In yet another spoken word poem by Mumbi, "Choice, Voice and Autonomy"

She came from Nairobi, Kabul taxes and yet no point before you signed the dotted lines in ink did you stop to ask her what she thinks. We are angry and rightfully so our hearts are heavy don't take us lightly.

We are running out of time so if you deny us the freedom we deserve, we will just find a way in this table you refuse to invite us is time we start to shake it.

Mumbi gives a scathing attack to the Kenyan nation and avers that the youth are angry because of suffering exclusion from the state. The individuals face persecution in terms of poverty, unemployment, brutality and all manner of sufferings yet the individuals will not give up. The individuals face the burden of heavy taxation but they still fight for their rights. That is why she says that “you deny us space on this table; we shall shake it.” The subaltern youth are indeed shaking the table through insurgence of spoken word poetry as an art of resistance.

In Teardrops poem, “Story Come”

Mi hupenda word sana. Ndio maana napenda poetry. Ningekuwa naifanya sababu ya machick ningefanya poultry. You see unaeza kill the king but not the kingdom but not the prophecy.

Mtumwa auawe, si aliheal wengi nab ado wakamwita mchawi. Hakuhitaji carpet chini walitandika matawi. Husikii hakujhitaji flash life ya camera action na flash lights kama ma superstar wa Hollywood but nia yake ilikuwa ni kuchange eastlands into a Hollywood.

Teardrops talk about a nation and particularly so the youth who are ready to die as individuals sacrificing for the subaltern youth to be liberated from hegemonic chains. Teardrop says that even if you kill a prophet (individual) the prophecy still remains. This means that even if they kill an individual the course shall remain. An individual’s death is a seed that is planted and out of this seed, liberation shall spring up particularly through revolution insurgence of spoken word poetry as a powerful of freedom from hegemonic capture. Through such works,

poets invite the audience to consider the intersectionality of their identities and the various factors that shape them. As discussed above, this study opines that collective and individual identities work simultaneously and alternatively to create a hybrid society amongst the Kenyan youth. This blurs the lines of subalternity, enabling the voices of youth to be amplified through selected spoken word poems from Kenya.

3.7 The Digital Platform and Identity Construction

Digital spaces, including social media platforms, streaming services, and virtual communities, provide Kenyan youth with a stage to express their identities. These platforms enable young poets to reach a global audience, allowing their work to transcend geographical boundaries. Similarly, the platforms enable the youth identities to be framed by both local and global trends and issues. For instance, platforms like Instagram and YouTube have popularized spoken word poetry, giving rise to a new generation of artists like Teardrops and Wairimu, who use their platforms to discuss issues ranging from identity, gender, socio-economic challenges, to political unrest (Nyanjom, 2021).

Spoken word poetry serves as a form of digital identity construction, where young people articulate their narratives and experiences. This digital presence allows them to reclaim agency over their identities, often countering stereotypes and societal expectations. For example, in the poem “An Open Letter to My Dad,” Wairimu energizes her audience by discussing the complexities of language and identity among Kenyan youth, reflecting the duality of traditional and modern influences (Sudi Prophet, 2018).

The influence of globalization is another critical factor in understanding how digital spaces affect youth identities. As Kenyan youth engage with global artistic movements, they incorporate diverse influences into their work. This hybridization of style and content reflects a more cosmopolitan identity while maintaining local relevance. For example, poets like

Wairimu fuse traditional Kikuyu themes with contemporary issues, creating a unique blend that resonates with both local and international audiences (Ngoya, 2022).

This cross-pollination of ideas allows for a dynamic self-exploration among youth, as they navigate their identities against various cultural backdrops. As globalization infuses new narratives into familiar spaces, Kenyan youth can articulate a multifaceted identity that reflects their lived realities, aspirations, and challenges.

3.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, spoken word poetry serves as a powerful medium through which the fluid nature of identities among Kenyan youth can be explored. By examining themes of cultural hybridity, social issues, and political engagement, it becomes evident that this art form allows young poets to navigate their multifaceted identities in a rapidly changing landscape. As they confront societal constraints and articulate their experiences, these artists reshape their narratives and assert their agency, redefining what it means to be a Kenyan youth in contemporary society. The ongoing evolution of identities within spoken word poetry underscores the importance of this genre as a vital space for self-expression, reflection, and social change.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE DIALOGIC NATURE OF SPOKEN WORD POETRY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the dialogic nature of Kenyan spoken word poetry, particularly regarding its representation of youth subalternity, through the lens of Bakhtin's (1984) concept of dialogism. This objective is central to the broader thesis, which aims to explore how spoken word poetry functions as a platform for marginalized Kenyan youth to voice their experiences, challenge dominant narratives, and negotiate their identities. Understanding how these poems engage in dialogue – both internally and externally – is crucial to grasping their subversive potential and their contribution to a more nuanced understanding of youth subalternity in Kenya. The chapter argues that Bakhtin's dialogism provides a robust framework for analyzing the complex interplay of voices, ideologies, and power dynamics within and surrounding Kenyan spoken word poetry.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism is predicated on the fundamental idea that all language is inherently social and exists in a constant state of interaction and negotiation (Bakhtin, 1981). Language, according to Bakhtin, is not a neutral tool for conveying pre-existing thoughts but is instead a dynamic, multi-voiced arena where different social languages, ideologies, and perspectives collide. Every utterance, every word, carries the weight of past usage and anticipates future responses. This embeddedness of language in a social context is what Bakhtin terms "heteroglossia," the coexistence of multiple, often conflicting, languages within a single society or even a single text.

Dialogism, therefore, highlights the interconnectedness of utterances and their dependence on social and historical context. No utterance is original or isolated; it invariably responds to prior utterances and anticipates future ones (Holquist, 2018). This responsiveness takes many forms, including agreement, disagreement, parody, and subtle shifts in meaning. The dialogic nature

of language means that meaning is not fixed or inherent but is instead constructed through the ongoing interaction between speakers, texts, and their social environments.

Furthermore, dialogism challenges the traditional notion of a unified, authoritative voice. Instead, it emphasizes the plurality of voices and perspectives, recognizing that even within an individual, multiple social voices may be present and competing. This is particularly relevant when examining texts that seek to represent marginalized groups, as it allows for a nuanced understanding of the internal struggles and contradictions that often characterize the experience of subalternity.

The application of Bakhtin's dialogism to Kenyan spoken word poetry offers a powerful lens for understanding how these poems function as sites of social and political engagement. Kenyan spoken word poetry, particularly that which addresses youth subalternity, is inherently dialogic in several key respects. Kenyan spoken word poets often draw upon a wide range of sources, including traditional oral literature, popular music, religious texts, and political speeches (Kemunto, 2021). By incorporating these diverse elements, poets create a dialogic space where different cultural traditions and social narratives intersect and interact. This intertextual dialogue allows poets to engage with and challenge existing power structures, question dominant ideologies, and create new meanings that resonate with their audiences.

4.2 Internal Dialogue and Identity Negotiation

The experience of subalternity is often characterized by internal conflict and a struggle to reconcile competing identities. Many Kenyan spoken word poems reflect this internal dialogue, grappling with issues of cultural identity, social belonging, and personal agency (Mwangi, 2020). The internal dialogues are both for the self and the Kenyan nation. By exploring these internal contradictions, poets offer a nuanced and complex portrayal of the challenges faced by

young Kenyans and the Kenyan nation as a whole, while navigating the complexities of the post-colonial society.

In Briggedia's poem "Niko na Dreams" we see both self and national internal dialogues exemplified.

Nina dreams ya kuturn state house na white house ka the only donor houses mahali unaeza ingia na ugotee Prezzo nimwambie niaje Unye? Aniambie poa Brigs kwa fridge kuna dania na mchicha unaeza jibonda.

Nina dreams ya kulegalize na kuraise standards za beauty sasa mrembo usiniringie ati uko na standards, mi ndio news daily kwa hii nation so as much uko na standard sijawai ona mrembo hata mmoja ako na sticker ya kebs. Na kwanza hao machali wanakufuatafuata wote ni macounterfeits.

We encounter hegemonic powers interacting with the subaltern youth. Here we have discourse on hegemony and liberty. The president interacts with the youth and through this interaction, food security is discussed at individual and national level where the rich have excess food in the fridge but the youth have nothing to eat. Self and national internal dialogues are seen where we have beauty discussed as a counterfeit yet what is being reflected is corruption in the nation where the goods are not subjected to KEBS stickers meaning that what is being sold in the market does not pass through the right channels before it is consumed.

In Teardrops' poem "Nchi Bila Amani ni Nchi bila Dhamani" we have self and national internal dialogues revealed in the lines below.

Najua chenye wananchi wa kawaida yafaa kujua ni ety the last four letters to the word mheshimiwa na word mdhulumiwa ni miwa. Na ni mheshimiwa anajua utamu wa miwa. Mdhulumiwa ni mkulima wa sukari amekuwa force kwa diabetes hajai onja utamu wa miwa.

The Kenyans and the hegemonic powers share the same nation yet the ordinary citizens pay taxes to fund the luxuries of the rich. The same citizens do not enjoy the benefits of the taxes. It is only the rich few who do. This is discourse on the self and national internal dialogues.

Spoken word poetry in Kenya frequently takes the form of social commentary, directly criticizing political corruption, social injustice, and cultural hypocrisy. This act of critique inherently engages in a dialogue with existing power structures and authoritative discourses (Barasa, 2019). By challenging these dominant narratives, poets create a space for alternative perspectives and contribute to a broader public conversation about social change. This is performed in Mufasa's poem "Freedom"

My neighbour didn't choose to be my neighbour too

He didn't consider my height, my tribe or my father's hair colour before he moved
in

So it did not make sense when he was forced to move out because of his tribe

A lot of things have not made sense in a long while

My neighbour lost his hand and the leaders lost their touch

I had never seen diversity meant to look so ugly

Job died because of his second name

Ten, we vote in leaders because of their second names

Who teaches the police about right and they are never wrong?

In this poem, a neighbor loses a hand because he belongs to a different tribe. The discourse here is on tribalism where Mufasa is criticizing social injustice and political hypocrisy. One cannot heal from their despair; it is the nation that needs cohesion to accommodate all her

tribes. This is a social commentary on police brutality in the nation of Kenya. Through spoken word poetry, the poet exposes a society bedeviled by political violence due to tribalism.

4.3 Audience Participation and Collective Meaning-Making

Spoken word performances are rarely passive events. Audiences often actively participate, offering encouragement, agreement, or even challenges to the poet's message. This dynamic interaction between poet and audience further emphasizes the dialogic nature of the art form, highlighting the collective construction of meaning and the shared responsibility for social change. The YouTube platform that informs this platform is in itself a genre that is participative in nature. It is free for all and relatively cheap. It is a public arena and the many subscriptions and likes show participation by the audience.

The year 2014 marked a significant period for the burgeoning spoken word poetry scene in Kenya, characterized by its grassroots growth and powerful connection with local communities. In Embu, a town known for its vibrant cultural fabric, a "street bash" dedicated to spoken word poetry emerged as a quintessential example of this phenomenon. This event, likely organized with a blend of youthful enthusiasm and community support, transformed public spaces into dynamic stages, fostering both artistic expression and communal engagement. The execution of this street bash was a testament to the accessible and democratic nature of spoken word, while the audience's participation was not merely passive reception but an active, integral component of the performance itself.

This chapter explicates how the dialogic nature of Spoken word poetry fosters a unique space for diverse conversations among the youth across various platforms, a vibrant and dynamic art form blending performance, poetry, and social commentary, has emerged as a powerful voice for contemporary youth. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, spoken word poetry cultivates a unique dialogic space, particularly effective in engaging young people across various platforms in

meaningful conversations about a range of social, cultural, and personal issues. This thesis explores the dialogic nature of spoken word poetry and how it facilitates these crucial conversations among young people navigating a complex and rapidly changing world.

The concept of “dialogic” in this context emphasizes the inherent interactivity and responsiveness within the communication process (Bakhtin, 1981). It suggests that spoken word poems aren’t merely monologues delivered from a stage, but rather invitations to engage, reflect, and respond. This is shown in Teardrops’ poem “Nchi Bila Amani ni Nchi Bila Dhamani”

Kilio ni kile kile

Serikali Saidia

Polisi ni wale wale

Polisi hawana policy

Ni kama sisi hufanya zero grazing kwa parliament

Zizi ni zile zile

When these lines are said, the audience responds by clapping and snapping to encourage him and to identify with what he is saying.

Spoken Word’s accessibility is a key factor in its success in reaching young people. The form often bypasses traditional gatekeepers of literary art, allowing voices from marginalized communities and diverse backgrounds to be heard directly (Alim & Ibrahim, 2016). This democratization of expression allows young people to discuss issues directly relevant to their lives, often overlooked in more formal academic or political settings. Topics explored can range from experiences of racial injustice and gender inequality (Muhammad, 2020) to struggles with mental health, identity formation, and the pressures of social media (Boyd,

2014). By giving voice to these often-silenced experiences, spoken word poetry validates the lived realities of young people and creates space for empathetic connection.

Online platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, have further democratized the distribution of spoken word, connecting young poets with global audiences and facilitating virtual dialogues across geographical boundaries (Khan, 2019). Comment sections, live streams, and collaborative projects become extensions of the performance space, allowing for immediate feedback, critical engagement, and the development of shared perspectives.

This chapter argues that the dialogic nature of spoken word poetry is not merely a feature of the art form, but a vital component of its power to connect, empower, and inspire young people. By analyzing the themes and digital platforms utilized in spoken word poetry, this study seeks to understand how this art form cultivates meaningful and diverse conversations, contributing to a deeper understanding of youth perspectives on critical social, cultural, and personal themes. The exploration of these dynamics provides valuable insights into the potential of spoken word poetry as a tool for fostering social change, promoting empathy, and empowering young voices to contribute to a more inclusive and understanding world.

Spoken word poetry drawing heavily from hip hop, oral narratives, novels, and proverbs, provides a powerful platform for youth, particularly those from subaltern backgrounds, to express their experiences, challenge dominant narratives, and access broader public discourse.

We shall discuss how spoken word poetry performers borrow from hip hop, oral traditions, the novel and blues to compose their pieces.

4.4 The voice of the underdog: How Spoken Word Channels Hip Hop to Amplify Youth Subalternity

Spoken word poetry, a vibrant art form emphasizing performance and emotional delivery, often serves as a powerful platform for voices historically pushed to the margins. It achieves this, in

part, by borrowing heavily from the aesthetics of hip hop. This chapter argues that spoken word poetry strategically adopts these hip-hop techniques to amplify the subalternity of youth, providing a crucial avenue for expressing experiences of marginalization, frustration, and resilience. By analyzing the work of contemporary spoken word artist Mufasa, this connection between form and social commentary becomes strikingly clear.

Hip hop has always been intrinsically linked to social commentary and the experiences of disenfranchised communities (Kitwana, 2005). Its rhythmic foundation, often built on sampled beats and percussive vocals, creates a space for complex narratives and emotional expression. Diss track, an element of hip hop, injects personality and intention into the performance. This element, when adopted by spoken word artists, provide a framework for articulating lived realities that often go unheard. Diss track in spoken word poetry critiques the government allowing the youth to talk about the injustices that they go through at the hands of the government. This is evident in Briggedia's poem "Mheshimiwa" when he throws barbs at the government calling them hyenas because they eat their own children.

Hao mafisi wanajiita mabig fish na hawawezi shinda papa, nyangumi na mamba.

Wanapigania bendera iwekwe mbele ya magari yao ndo wapate freeway kwa highway na kuna mtoto Dandora na Kibera anasurvive lunch na mapera.

Juu wana maganji na magari wanajiita masos, tomato na chilly zimeanza kusaulika.

Nimelipa tax but inaenda kwa office ya mabig fish wanaroll na maGk, vijana wanawaprotect na maG3 huku prep zao zimelazimishiwa na mawi-fi, internet ni ya 3G

The hip hop culture infused in spoken word poetry is a mind game that roasts the government so that it can wake up from its slumber and address issues that the youth go through. The government ignores the sufferings of the youth and that is why spoken word poetry is an apt weapon for fighting for the subaltern youth.

Mufasa, a prominent figure in contemporary spoken word, masterfully utilizes these techniques to address issues of identity, social injustice, and the challenges faced by young people, particularly young black men. His works are often characterized by a raw, visceral energy, mirroring the intensity and urgency of the issues he addresses. He expertly weaves intricate pieces, creating a compelling diss track that draws the audience into his narrative.

Consider, for example, Mufasa's powerful piece "My Boys Are Dying". His strategic use of the diss track technique propels the poem forward, mirroring the relentless pressure and challenges faced by young people navigating systemic barriers. The youth use this device to bring down the barriers that block them from being heard.

My Boys Are Dying

My boys are dying in tribal fights.

My boys are dying because their leaders are clashing.

My boys are dying because their leaders are lying.

My boys are dying because every government arm is thieving and our president is saying see, I have no arm for reaching but they all riching.

My boys are dying because integrity is dying.

Through diss tracks, the spoken word artists express the hopelessness, where the young people have no opportunities, tribalism is rampant and corruption is the order of the day.

The adoption of hip hop's sonic toolkit by spoken word artists like Briggedia is not merely stylistic. It is a conscious choice to align themselves with a tradition of resistance and social commentary. In the poem "Ulafi" he demonstrates how society is skewed towards the rich at the expense of the poor and youth.

Ulafi

Wacheni huo usaliti, mali kumiliki zisizo za halali nani nguvu za wananchi
mjukuu wa Nyerere Jasiri ka Mugabe uongozini ni dhamani bana kataza ubabe,
nasema truth walai si uongo hii collabo ya Kenya umekutana na bongo. Punguza
ulafi wa madaraka Kenya na bongo mmenipata eeh, hizi ni sauti za mamlaka na
bila shaka mtazielewa mtazipata

Hip-hop has long served as a voice for the voiceless, and the spoken word, by embracing its core elements, inherits this legacy. This connection allows young artists to tap into a powerful cultural current and amplify their message in a way that resonates with a wider audience, particularly those who identify with the struggles depicted in their work (Rose, 2008).

Ultimately, spoken word poetry, through its strategic adoption of hip hop's culture, provides a vital platform for the subalternity of youth. Artists like Mufasa and Briggedia demonstrate how these techniques can be used to articulate experiences of marginalization, challenge dominant narratives, and inspire social change. By giving voice to the often-unheard stories of young people, spoken word poetry contributes to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the world we live in. It is a powerful reminder that art can be a powerful tool for social justice and a catalyst for empowering marginalized communities (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

The continued exploration of this connection between spoken word, hip hop, and youth subalternity holds significant potential for further research.

4.5 Spoken Word Poetry: Rekindling Community and Shared Experience Through Modern Oral Tradition

Spoken word poetry, a vibrant and dynamic art form, has emerged as a powerful force for community building and shared understanding in the 21st century. Its roots, however, are deeply intertwined with the ancient tradition of oral storytelling, a practice that, for millennia, served as the primary means of transmitting cultural values, history, and collective identity. Like oral storytelling gatherings of the past, spoken word performances create a space for connection, empathy, and the forging of a shared experience through the power of voice and emotional expression. This chapter explores how spoken word, exemplified by Kenyan artist Brigadier's work, echoes the community-building function of traditional oral narratives. This exemplified in Brigadier's poem "Niko na Dreams"

Niko na Dreams

Nina dreams ya kuona barracks zimejengwa kapedo, marsabit na Moyale.
Soldiers wakieka bunduki chini wakichat na slogan wakiimba national anthem
wakisema more peace, no more violence na alshabab wakiacha kulipua watu,
wakingoja Christmas na Edi walipue balloons.

Nina dreams ya kuona luu za kanju watu wakiingia sare na ndani zimewekwa
installed home theatre na screens za bure. Nina dreams za kuona hawkers
Nairobi wakiwa na freedom, wakiuza dawa ya mende na njugu.

One of the key ways the spoken word fosters community is through its accessibility and emphasis on lived experience. Unlike some forms of written poetry, spoken word often prioritizes directness and emotional honesty, making it relatable to a wide audience. This directness mirrors the unadorned nature of many oral traditions, where stories are shaped by the immediate context and the needs of the community. As Mullen (2012) notes, spoken word

artists often draw upon their personal experiences and struggles, creating a sense of vulnerability that invites audiences to connect on a deeper level.

This vulnerability breaks down barriers and encourages empathy, fostering a sense of shared humanity. Brigadier, a prominent figure in the Kenyan spoken word scene, exemplifies this approach. His performances frequently tackle social and political issues relevant to Kenyan youth, such as unemployment, corruption, and the challenges of navigating a rapidly changing society (Oduor, 2018). For example, in his politically charged pieces, Brigadier often uses vivid imagery and humor to critique societal injustices, prompting introspection and dialogue among his listeners. This mirroring of shared struggles fosters identification and strengthens community bonds. Through his performances, Brigadier opens a space for open discussions and collective reflection.

Furthermore, the performative aspect of the spoken word facilitates a communal experience that transcends individual interpretation. In Teardrops' poem "Story Come" we see the audience joining him at the beginning of the story just like in the space of the traditional story telling.

Teardrops – Story story

Audience – Story come

Teardrops – Mi hupenda word sana, ndio maana napenda poetry.

The live setting, with its energy and immediacy, creates a dynamic interplay between the performer and the audience. The audience's reactions – their laughter, gasps, and nods of agreement – shape the direction and tone of the performance, creating a collective narrative that is co-created in the moment. This is similar to oral storytelling gatherings, where the storyteller would often adapt the narrative based on the audience's responses, ensuring that the story remained relevant and engaging (Okpewho, 1992). The call-and-response format, a common feature in both traditional African storytelling and contemporary spoken word, further

enhances this sense of collective participation (Kaschula, 2011). Brigadier frequently employs call-and-response techniques in his performances, inviting the audience to participate in chants, affirmations, or even completing lines of poetry. This active involvement transforms the audience from passive listeners into active participants in the creation of meaning. This shared participation promotes a sense of ownership and belonging within the community.

This is brought out in his poem “Time Imefika”

Time itafika

Time itafika yenye doctors, nurses na phamarcist watakuwa
declared guilty coz they are drug dealers.

The more tunacheza na drugs za hosi tunapunguza Maisha.
Nieleze kuna tofauti gani kati ya muarubaine na weed.
Muarubaine ni tree na weed ni herb. Muarubaine inatreat 40
illness(arubaine) but weed inakupeleka into 40 different states of
mind. Muarubaine ni mti naeza toa mbao ya kujenga viti, meza
na kabati but sales za weed zinaeza jenga KICC na times towers
combined.

Moreover, spoken word, much like oral tradition, serves as a vehicle for cultural preservation and transmission. In many communities, oral narratives were the primary means of passing down history, values, and customs from one generation to the next. Spoken word, in its contemporary form, can fulfil a similar function, particularly for marginalized communities whose voices may be absent from mainstream narratives. By sharing their stories through spoken word, artists can reclaim their cultural heritage, challenge dominant narratives, and empower future generations.

In Kenya, spoken word artists like Brigadier are actively contributing to the preservation and evolution of Kenyan culture. His work, infused with Swahili and *Sheng'* (Kenyan slang), reflects the linguistic diversity of the country and provides a platform for young Kenyans to express themselves in their unique voices (Bosire, 2020). This not only ensures the continuation of these languages but also celebrates the unique cultural identity of Kenyan youth, fostering a sense of pride and belonging.

Karibu kwa streets za Nairobi, ile street mnajua wote iko kon ai ya CBD,
Koinange street. Si ni hii street ilifanya mademu waka-lose touch na old
fashioned wakakataa kudunga dera, lesa wakaanza kudunga vitu tighter
utadhani ni mademu wa Taveta, na si Wataita.

Karibu kwa streets, si ni hii street ya koinange ndio uki-mention the first thing
itacome kwa your mind si Jeff and that's why hutampata kwa hiyo street on
bench.

Hii street yenye hunikumbusha about our mothers na strength of a woman,
Mama Ngina Street.

In the above poem, Briggedia fosters a sense of dressing that has uniquely identified the Kenyan women and that is dressing in 'deras' and 'lesos' and loathes the skimpy dressing of women in Koinange street. He emphasizes the tradition of the strength of our mothers as is seen in the name Mama Ngina Street.

However, it is important to acknowledge some differences between traditional oral storytelling and modern spoken word. Oral traditions were often deeply embedded in specific cultural contexts, with stories serving specific ritualistic or social functions. Spoken words, while often culturally grounded, can also be more fluid and adaptable, drawing inspiration from a wider range of sources and addressing a more diverse audience. Additionally, the rise of digital

platforms has significantly expanded the reach of spoken word, allowing artists to connect with audiences beyond their immediate geographical communities. This broader reach can potentially dilute the sense of localized community that was characteristic of traditional oral storytelling gatherings.

In conclusion, spoken word performances, as exemplified by the works of Briggedia, Teardrops and Mufasa, share a profound connection with traditional oral storytelling gatherings. Like their ancient counterparts, spoken word performances create a space for community building, shared experience, and cultural transmission. Through its accessibility, performative nature, and emphasis on lived experience, spoken word fosters empathy, encourages participation, and empowers individuals to connect on a deeper level. While differences exist between the two forms, the underlying function of creating a sense of belonging and shared understanding remains a powerful and enduring legacy. The spoken word, therefore, represents a modern manifestation of the ancient human desire to connect, share stories, and build community through the power of the spoken word.

4.6 The Mask and the Mirror: Persona, Identity, and Marginalization in the Spoken Word Poetry

Spoken word poetry, a vibrant and dynamic art form, often serves as a powerful platform for exploring personal and collective identities. Like novelists who craft characters to illuminate different facets of the human experience, spoken word poets frequently employ persona – the adoption of a distinct voice or character – to delve into complex themes of identity, belonging, and marginalization. This chapter argues that Teardrops, a contemporary Kenyan spoken word artist, skillfully utilizes persona in his poetry to explore diverse aspects of his own identity and to amplify the voices of marginalized communities.

By examining specific examples of his work, we can understand how this technique allows him to engage with sensitive and often silenced narratives in a deeply impactful way. For

example, in his poem, “Happiness ni Kama Nguo ya Mtumba” we see him developing novel characters;

Happiness Ni Kama Nguo Ya Mtumba

Happiness ni kukula kwa kibanda na the only thing five star about it ni vile unaitafuna. So, happiness ni smile, happiness ni urembo, happiness ni smiling, inafaa kuwa defined na smile sio figure, happiness hukuwa defined na vitu simple kama kujibu kama umeangalia for a while alafu ananotice with a smile alafu anakuuliza buda unaniangalia na nini alafu unamjibu with a smile alafu unamwambia buda kuna vile umenibamba.

Happiness ni kujikuta kwa matatu na stranger unatoa noti ya thao uanapatia conductor unasema wawili bila kumuitisha number.

The concept of persona, derived from the Latin word for “mask,” is central to understanding this technique. In literature, and particularly in poetry, persona refers to the voice adopted by the author that is distinct from their biographical self (Hollander, 2010). This allows for the exploration of perspectives and experiences that might not be immediately accessible or comfortable within the poet’s own lived reality. As Alsup (2015) argues, the use of persona can provide a safe space for both the poet and the audience to confront challenging social issues. For marginalized poets, persona becomes a strategic tool to negotiate power dynamics and challenge dominant narratives (Martinez, 2018).

Teardrops’ work exemplifies this strategic use of persona. While many of his poems draw on his personal experiences as a young Kenyan man, he also embodies different characters to address broader social issues. For example, in many of his poems, he takes on the persona of the everyday Kenyan, highlighting the struggles they go through in their day-to-day lives, he uses this persona to talk about the difficulties in accessing education or getting meaningful

employment. His ability to inhabit these diverse voices allows him to connect with a wider audience and foster empathy across social divides.

One key function of persona in Teardrops' poetry is its ability to represent marginalized groups. Spoken word, with its emphasis on performance and orality, offers a particularly potent means of giving voice to those who are often silenced (Smith, 2012).

By adopting the persona of a street child, a victim of domestic violence, or a member of a discriminated ethnic group, Teardrops can bring these experiences to life viscerally and immediately. This is not simply about representation; it is about inhabiting and embodying these experiences, forcing the audience to confront the realities of marginalization. Through these personas, he challenges the dominant narratives that often perpetuate these injustices and offers a platform for marginalized voices to be heard.

In his poem "Nchi Bila Amani ni Nchi Dhamani" he represents the underdogs who are mistreated by the state;

Nchi Bila Amani Ni Nchi Bila Dhamani

Vitanda za Kenyatta ni kama jina ya pili ya Nyarebari ni chache.
Utumishi kwa wote but huduma kwa wachache, as long as
unahongwa unaeza tumia genge au kapuka si lazima utumie
bongo. Unajua police stations ni mapolisi lakini hao polisi
hawananga policy polisi ni wale wale serikali saidia kilio ni kile
kile. Ni kama sisi hufanya zero-grazing kwa parliament, chama
tofauti wanasisia ni wale wale, zizi toafauti ngurwe ni zile zile
yaani tofauti na zizi na zile zile.

Mufasa discusses issues of social justice and identity. The youths are marginalized through poverty, unemployment, and family instability. He says that politicians are flying to Dubai yet

the youth can't afford bus fare. This makes the spoken word more accessible as it resonates with their realities.

Furthermore, Teardrop's use of persona allows him to explore the complexities and contradictions within his own identity. As a young, educated, and artistically inclined Kenyan man, he occupies a unique position within his society. By adopting different personas, he can explore the tensions between his privilege and the struggles of those less fortunate. He can also delve into the multiple and often conflicting aspects of his own identity as a man, an artist, and a member of a particular cultural group. This process of self-exploration through persona is not simply about self-expression; it is about understanding the self within the broader context of social and cultural forces. As Hooks (2014) argued, such self-reflection is a critical step in the process of social change.

Teardrops' spoken word poetry demonstrates the power of persona as a tool for exploring identity, representing marginalized groups, and fostering social change. By adopting different voices and embodying diverse experiences, he can connect with his audience on a deeply emotional level and challenge the dominant narratives that often perpetuate inequality. His work highlights the potential of spoken word poetry as a platform for amplifying marginalized voices and for promoting a more just and equitable world.

By carefully crafting his personas, Teardrops isn't simply performing; he's offering a mirror to society, reflecting both the beauty and the brutality of the human experience and inviting us to engage in a critical dialogue about who we are and who we aspire to be. The use of persona allows him to bypass the limitations of his perspective, offering a polyphonic chorus of voices that resonate with authenticity and emotional depth. This makes her work a powerful example of how art can be used to promote empathy, understanding, and social justice.

4.7 The Echo of Ancestors: Proverbs, Aphorisms, and Traditional Wisdom in Spoken Word Poetry

This section examines the incorporation of proverbs, aphorisms, and other forms of traditional wisdom within spoken word poetry, with a specific focus on the work of contemporary Kenyan poet Briggedia. Drawing on Mieder's (2004) framework for understanding the role of traditional forms in modern art, this analysis explores how Briggedia utilizes these elements to connect with audiences, reinforce cultural values, and offer insightful commentary on contemporary social issues. Through close readings of selected poems, the essay demonstrates the enduring relevance of traditional wisdom in a rapidly changing world, as mediated through the dynamic medium of spoken word. In his poem "Mheshimiwa" he uses the aphorism "Big fish haezishinda papa, nyangumi na mamba."

This means that the hegemonic powers think that they offer the best leadership by sidelining the youth. But given an opportunity, the youth can do better than them in salvaging this nation. Mufasa extends the use of sayings by saying that "...You have a smile that stretches like a hand." This means the wife's happiness shall last forever. This alludes to the Kenyan leadership, that if it listened to the youth the society shall be at peace.

In Briggedia's poem Ulafi, he uses an aphorism "Kula jasho la wavuja jasho." This means that hegemonic forces oppress the subaltern youth by keeping them outside hegemonic discourses. But through this aphorism, Briggedia warns that their time is over. It is over because the subaltern youth are going to revolt, and we have seen them revolting, so that they are listened to.

Apart from aphorisms, the spoken word artists also borrow from the proverbs genre to amplify their voices. This is seen when Teardrops says "Nchi bila amani ni nchi bila dhamani." This refers to the Kenyan nation that is very unstable with incessant riots from the youth as they

revolt against the government to be allowed to take part in public debates. The nation will only be peaceful after they are allowed on the table. Briggedia, in his poem “Streets”, uses a proverb “Asiyefunzwa na mamake hufunzwa na ulimwengu.” This is a warning to young women to be careful and go back to traditional ways of dressing and living, without which they might face violence like rape. This alludes to the Kenyan nation that unless they listen to the subaltern youth, the nation will face protests day in day out without any peace. The young people shall continually revolt until they are listened to.

Spoken word poetry, a performance-based art form, thrives on its ability to connect with audiences in a direct, visceral way. While often associated with contemporary social commentary and personal narratives, its power is frequently amplified by the strategic use of traditional wisdom, echoing the voices of ancestors and grounding its messages in established cultural frameworks. Mieder (2004) argues persuasively that the integration of such traditional elements represents a conscious effort to bridge the gap between the past and the present, imbuing contemporary artistic expression with a sense of historical continuity and cultural depth. *This study* explores this phenomenon through the lens of Wairimu, a prominent Kenyan spoken word artist, whose poetry skillfully weaves proverbs, aphorisms, and other forms of traditional wisdom into her performances, thereby enriching their meaning and amplifying their impact.

Wairimu’s spoken word poem “Scars”

Scars

Life like everyone else is stretched with a scar when they cut the cord connecting her to the mother creating the very first wound that needed bleed healing.

As signified maybe life was not going to be perfect but she collected a few morals while she grew up.

Now years have passed and she is old and grown but some of the wounds are still bleeding, some are still hurting and some are slowly healing. Further won't remind her that she is not good enough the emotional abuse she took as a child, bitter words spoken to her that left her entire be, those sleepless nights. Maybe she bathed in tears.

The enduring appeal of proverbs and aphorisms lies in their capacity to encapsulate complex truths in concise, memorable language. They represent a distilled form of collective experience, passed down through generations, offering guidance, cautionary tales, and insights into the human condition (Yankah, 2012). In the context of spoken word poetry, these traditional sayings serve as anchors, grounding the poet's personal experiences and observations within a broader cultural context. They allow the poet to tap into a shared reservoir of knowledge and understanding, creating a sense of connection with the audience and lending their words an added layer of authority and resonance.

Wairimu's poetry exemplifies this integration of traditional wisdom. Wairimu, a vibrant voice in the Kenyan spoken word scene, consistently infuses her work with elements drawn from Kenyan cultural heritage. Her poems frequently address themes of identity, social justice, and the challenges faced by contemporary Kenyan society. By strategically incorporating proverbs and aphorisms, she not only enhances the poetic quality of her work but also reinforces the cultural relevance of her messages.

Life is stretched with a scar We have scars whether spiritual, emotional or physical. The cord connects the child to the mother signifying a permanent relationship. Jesus endured scars to save the universe.

One prominent way that Wairimu incorporates traditional wisdom is through the direct quotation or paraphrasing of Kenyan aphorism. For instance, in her poem “Scars” she alludes to the aphorism “life is stretched with scars”. This inclusion is not merely decorative; it functions to contextualize her critique of challenges that leave a mark in life. The proverb, likely familiar to her audience, acts as a shorthand for a broader set of cultural values and expectations, thereby amplifying the impact of her criticism. By juxtaposing the wisdom of the proverb with the realities of contemporary society, Wairimu effectively highlights the discrepancies between ideal and lived experience.

Furthermore, Wairimu often employs aphoristic statements that, while not directly attributable to specific proverbs, resonate with traditional Kenyan modes of thought and expression. These aphorisms, often delivered with a rhythmic cadence typical of spoken word, serve to instill complex ideas into easily digestible and memorable phrases. They function as mini-lessons, offering insights into navigating the challenges of life and promoting values such as resilience, community, and perseverance. In a performance setting, these aphorisms often elicit nods of recognition and murmurs of agreement from the audience, indicating a shared understanding of the underlying cultural values.

The significance of Wairimu’s incorporation of traditional wisdom extends beyond mere stylistic embellishment. It represents a conscious effort to reclaim and reaffirm cultural identity in the context of globalization and cultural homogenization (Appiah, 2006). By drawing on the rich reservoir of Kenyan proverbs, aphorisms, and storytelling traditions, she asserts the value and relevance of her cultural heritage. This act of cultural affirmation is particularly important for younger generations, who may be increasingly exposed to Western values and lifestyles. Wairimu’s poetry serves as a reminder of the enduring wisdom embedded in Kenyan culture and a call to embrace and celebrate one’s heritage.

Moreover, Wairimu's use of traditional wisdom contributes to the creation of a sense of community among her audience. The shared recognition of proverbs and aphorisms fosters a sense of belonging and reinforces the collective identity of the Kenyan people. In a society often marked by ethnic and social divisions, this sense of shared cultural heritage can serve as a powerful unifying force. Her performances, therefore, become not only artistic events but also powerful expressions of cultural solidarity.

Wairimu, Briggedia, Teardrops and Mufasa's spoken word poetry provide a compelling example of how traditional wisdom can be effectively integrated into contemporary art forms. By skillfully weaving proverbs, aphorisms, and storytelling traditions into their performances. They not only enrich the poetic quality of their works but also reinforce cultural values, foster a sense of community, and provide insightful commentary on contemporary social issues. Their work demonstrates the enduring relevance of traditional wisdom in a rapidly changing world and highlight the power of spoken word poetry to serve as a vehicle for cultural preservation and social commentary. The echo of ancestors resonates powerfully in their verses, reminding us of the enduring wisdom that continues to guide and inspire.

4.8 The Blues Echo in Kenyan Spoken Word

The blues, born from the hardship and resilience of African Americans in the early 20th century, offers a rich tapestry of themes - oppression, poverty, loss, and a yearning for freedom - that resonate deeply with the realities faced by many Kenyans today. By adopting these blues-infused techniques, spoken word artists like Mufasa, Mumbi and Briggedia create powerful performances that connect with audiences on an emotional level, fostering empathy and sparking critical dialogue about social inequalities. Spoken word poetry has emerged as a powerful medium for social commentary in Kenya, providing a platform for artists to articulate the experiences and struggles of marginalized communities. This chapter argues that Kenyan

spoken word artists draw heavily from the subgenre of blues music, integrating its thematic and stylistic elements into their poetry to amplify the voices of the subaltern. This is evident in Mufasa's poem, "My Boys are Dying"

My boys are dying because their pocket is light.

My boys are dying because their heart is heavy.

Maybe, if they had Whitney's voice,

They would sing their heart out and watch it beating right in front of them.

His work often grapples with themes of poverty, corruption, and social inequality, mirroring the concerns that are central to the blues tradition. He weaves a narrative of disillusionment and lost hope among Kenyan youth. The poem's repetitive refrain, "My Boys Are Dying" echoes the cyclical nature of hardship depicted in blues songs, reinforcing the sense of despair and lack of opportunity faced by many young people (Mufasa, 2018).

Furthermore, Mufasa's delivery style often incorporates elements of blues performance. His use of vocal inflections, pauses, and rhythmic variations mirrors the expressive phrasing of blues singers. He channels the raw emotion inherent in blues vocals, conveying a sense of urgency and authenticity that resonates with his audience. This performance style transforms the poem into a powerful act of bearing witness, amplifying the voices of those who are often ignored or silenced.

The blues, at its core, is a lament. Born from the fields and backroads of the American South, it gave voice to the voiceless, expressing the pain of discrimination, economic hardship, and social injustice (Evans, 2010). Its characteristic features, such as call-and-response patterns, repetitive lyrical structures, and a focus on personal narratives of suffering, communicate a sense of collective struggle and a deep longing for change. This is where the connection

between blues and Kenyan spoken word becomes apparent. Specifically, Kenyan spoken word artists use these blues traits to make their message of subalternity more potent.

Mumbi, a prominent figure in the Kenyan spoken word scene, exemplifies this fusion of blues sensibilities and poetic expression. The integration of blues elements in her work serves a crucial function: it creates a sense of solidarity between the historical experiences of African Americans and the contemporary struggles of Kenyans as her poem alludes to Gill-Scott Heron's poem "The Revolution will not be Televised." By invoking the blues, Mumbi taps into a shared history of oppression and resilience, forging a connection between seemingly desperate communities. This connection allows her audience to recognize the universality of human suffering and motivates them to engage with the issues she raises in her poetry (Oduor, 2015).

Revolution.

The revolution will not be televised. The revolution will be on Instagram lines.

The revolution will come in form of hashtags in form of snapchat.

The revolution will be read by youth who went through schools with no guarantee of never be hired.

The revolution will be brought to you by those of us who are sick and tired of being sick and tired.

The thematic parallels between the blues and Mumbi's work extend beyond mere lament. Both traditions also offer a sense of hope and resilience in the face of adversity. The blues, while acknowledging the pain of the present, often look towards a brighter future, expressing a determination to overcome obstacles and create a better life. Similarly, Mumbi's poetry, while confronting the harsh realities of Kenyan society, also offers glimpses of hope and calls for collective action (Kimani, 2012).

Moreover, the blues influence in Kenyan spoken word, as exemplified by Briggedia, challenges the dominant narratives that often silence the voices of the subaltern. By giving expression to the lived experiences of marginalized communities, Briggedia disrupts the established power structures and creates space for alternative perspectives. His poetry becomes a tool for social change, empowering individuals to challenge injustice and advocate for a more equitable society (Ntarangwi, 2017). This can be seen in his poem “Niko na Dreams.”

Nina dreams ya kuona barracks zimejengwa kapedo, Marsabit na Moyale.
Soldiers wakiika bunduki chini wakichat na slogan wakiimba national anthem
wakisema more peace, no more violence na alshabab wakiacha kulipua watu,
wakingoja Christmas na Edi walipue balloons.

This spoken word poetry engages with dialogism. The words used carry a plurality of voices, and more so voices of brutality, terrorism and cattle rustling. The names that are given in the spoken word poetry are not just place names but they carry heavy meaning to Kenyans. The mention of barracks being built in Kapedo brings to mind cattle rustling, banditry and deaths of the police forces.

What happened in Kapedo is a recurring cycle of cattle rustling, banditry, and retaliatory attacks that often escalate into full-blown clashes. The region is largely arid and semi-arid, leading to fierce competition over scarce resources like pasture and water, primarily between the Pokot and Turkana communities (Amnesty International, 2022). This competition is exacerbated by easy access to illegal firearms, transforming traditional cattle raids into highly militarized engagements. The state’s presence has historically been weak, leading to a breakdown of law and order and a reliance on community-based justice mechanisms that sometimes perpetuate cycles of revenge. Development initiatives have also largely failed to take root, leaving local populations

impoverished and vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups (Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, 2021).

Marsabit and Moyale are also not just place names but they carry weight in meaning because of discourses in the public domain. These are places that are defined by intercommunity violence and religious extremism.

The perennial intercommunity violence in Marsabit and Moyale is deeply rooted in the region's socio-economic and environmental realities. Predominantly inhabited by pastoralist communities such as the Gabra, Borana, Rendille, and Burji, their livelihoods are inextricably linked to land and livestock. Climate change, leading to increasingly frequent and severe droughts, has intensified the struggle for dwindling resources, pushing communities into direct confrontation (Omondi & Wanjala, 2023). What were once localized cattle raids have transformed into deadly, weaponized conflicts, often involving high-powered firearms. These clashes are no longer just about livestock but are driven by a desire for territorial control, revenge for past killings, and a perceived need for communal security. As Gabre (2022) highlights, "the quest for water and pasture is increasingly intertwined with ethnic identity and a zero-sum mentality, making conflict resolution profoundly difficult."

In conclusion, these spoken word poetry artists demonstrate a clear influence from the blues tradition by amplifying the voices of the subaltern in Kenya, fostering empathy, promoting social awareness, and inspiring hope. This fusion of blues and Kenyan cultural expression creates a powerful and relevant art form that challenges dominant narratives and empowers individuals to advocate for change. The blues echo is a testament to the enduring power of music and poetry to connect people across cultures and generations, reminding us of our shared humanity and our collective responsibility to create a more just world. It creates a sense of unity among the subaltern and gives them hope for a better tomorrow.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS ON CHAPTER TWO

5.1.0 Finding Voice in the Echo Chamber: Representing Youth Subalternity in Kenyan Spoken Word Poetry

The study on Kenyan spoken word poetry began with a fascination for the raw, unfiltered power of voices often relegated to the margins. The study embarked on this study driven by a desire to understand how young Kenyan artists were utilizing this dynamic art form to articulate their experiences of marginalization and exclusion. This study delves into the core findings of this study, foregrounding my perspective as the researcher and illuminating the ways in which spoken word poetry serves as a powerful tool for subaltern youth to construct and project their own narratives.

The study's investigation was guided by three key theoretical frameworks. First, exploration of the literariness of the selected poems, drawing upon Jakobson's (1960) concept of the poetic function. This allowed me to analyze the linguistic and rhetorical devices employed by the artists, examining how their careful use of language contributed to the overall impact and meaning of their work. The study considered the use of metaphor, alliteration, rhythm, and other artistic choices that elevated these performances beyond mere speech, transforming them into potent works of art.

Secondly, the study engaged with Spivak's (1988) seminal work on the subaltern, particularly her question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" This framework provided a lens through which to analyze the power dynamics inherent in Kenyan society and how spoken word poetry enabled the youth, often silenced and marginalized, to challenge these prevailing structures. My objective was not to speak for the subaltern, but rather to analyze how they were speaking for

themselves, constructing their own identities and narratives within the context of their lived experiences.

Finally, the study utilized Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism to understand the interactive and relational nature of spoken word poetry. This framework helped the study to analyze how these artists were engaging in a dialogue with their audiences, with society at large, and with each other. The poems were not seen as isolated expressions, but rather as contributions to a larger ongoing conversation, a dynamic exchange of ideas and perspectives.

These theoretical lenses guided the analysis of a carefully curated selection of spoken word poems performed by young Kenyan artists. The selection process prioritized artists who explicitly addressed issues of youth subalternity, including themes of poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education and healthcare, political disenfranchisement, and the impact of societal prejudices. These poems served as primary data, offering rich insights into the lived realities of these marginalized youth.

One of the central findings of this research is the affirmation that spoken word poetry is, indeed, a powerful medium for subaltern youth to forge their own voices. Contrary to the notion that the subaltern cannot speak, these artists are not only speaking, but they are doing so with remarkable skill, creativity, and courage. They are using their poetry to disrupt dominant narratives, challenge oppressive systems, and articulate their hopes and aspirations. In their verses, they reclaim agency and assert their right to be heard.

The study observed the extent to which poems directly address the widespread issue of youth unemployment in Kenya. The artists use poignant imagery and personal anecdotes to depict the frustration, disillusionment, and despair that often accompany the search for meaningful work. They challenge the political establishment to address the systemic issues that perpetuate

this problem, demanding accountability and offering alternative visions for a more equitable future.

Furthermore, this study found that spoken word poetry provides a space for young Kenyans to explore complex issues of identity and belonging. Many poems grapple with the tension between tradition and modernity, between local and global influences, and between individual aspirations and societal expectations. The artists use their poetry to navigate these intricate terrains, constructing their own identities in a world that often seeks to define them on its own terms.

One particular area that stood out was the way these artists use the stage as a platform to promote social change. Their poems often address issues such as gender inequality, corruption, and environmental degradation. They use their performances to raise awareness, spark dialogue, and inspire action. They are not merely poets; they are activists, advocates, and agents of change.

The power of spoken word poetry lies not only in the content of the poems themselves but also in the performative aspect of the art form. The artists use their bodies, voices, and gestures to convey their messages with passion and conviction. They engage with their audiences in a dynamic and interactive way, creating a sense of community and solidarity. In these performances, the boundaries between artist and audience blur, and everyone becomes a participant in the act of storytelling.

Analyzing the literariness of these poems revealed a sophisticated use of poetic devices. The artists often employ vivid imagery, powerful metaphors, and rhythmic patterns to create a lasting impression on their audience. They masterfully use language to convey complex emotions and to paint compelling pictures of the realities they are describing. Their careful

attention to the aesthetic qualities of their work elevates it beyond mere political rhetoric, transforming it into a powerful art form.

The dialogic nature of spoken word poetry is also crucial to its impact. The artists are not simply speaking into a void; they are engaging in a dialogue with their audiences, with their communities, and with the broader society. They are responding to existing narratives, challenging dominant ideologies, and offering alternative perspectives. Their poems are often met with applause, cheers, and other forms of affirmation, creating a sense of shared understanding and solidarity.

This research proved that spoken word poetry is not just an art form; it is a form of resistance. It is a way for marginalized youth to challenge the power structures that seek to silence them. It is a way for them to reclaim their voices and to assert their right to be heard. It is a way for them to construct their own identities and narratives in a world that often seeks to define them on its own terms.

My role as the researcher in this endeavor was not to impose my own interpretations on the work of these artists but rather to provide a framework for understanding the ways in which they are already speaking for themselves. The study sought to amplify their voices, to bring their stories to a wider audience, and to contribute to a broader understanding of the role of art in social change.

5.1.1 Accessibility of spoken word poetry through code-mixing and *Sheng'*

Spoken word poetry, an art form characterized by its performance aspect, has evolved significantly over the years. The intersection of language, culture, and personal experience creates a rich tapestry that speaks to diverse audiences. This chapter posits that code-mixing and *Sheng'* enhances the accessibility of spoken word poetry, thereby engaging broader demographics and fostering a deeper emotional connection with the audience. This chapter

discusses the implications of these findings and explore the significance of code-mixing and *Sheng'* in shaping the landscape of spoken word poetry.

The use of code-mixing and *Sheng'* functions as a bridge between the performer and the audience. As highlighted by Johnson and Smith (2018), code-mixing and *Sheng'* allows poets to articulate their identities, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences more authentically. The findings of this thesis align with previous studies that suggest that poetry delivered in *Sheng'* and code-mixing resonates more profoundly with audiences who share similar linguistic backgrounds (Davis, 2020). This connection cultivates a sense of belonging and relatability, enabling listeners to engage with the material on a personal level.

Moreover, this chapter underscores the role of *Sheng'* and code-mixing in democratizing spoken word poetry. When poets utilize language that is familiar to their surroundings, they dismantle barriers that may alienate potential audiences who feel disconnected from more formalized language structures (Wang, 2019). This aspect is particularly relevant in multicultural societies where linguistic diversity prevails. For instance, spoken word poetry performed in Kenya by Brigadier in "Time Imefika," not only celebrates cultural heritage but also invites wider participation from listeners who identify with that cultural narrative (Harris & McCoy, 2021). The findings suggest that incorporating code-mixing and *Sheng'* into spoken word poetry fosters inclusivity, ultimately enriching the art form itself.

In addition to enhancing accessibility, *Sheng'* and code-mixing serve as a powerful tool for social commentary. This research highlights how spoken word poets employ *Sheng'* and code-mixing to critique societal issues such as corruption, inequality, and identity politics. As noted by Thompson (2022), the authentic voice of the poet, amplified through the use of *Sheng'* and code mixing, becomes a vehicle for advocacy and change. The emotional weight carried by *Sheng'* and code-mixing expressions can evoke empathy and provoke critical thought among audiences, thereby facilitating a dialogue about pressing social issues. This critical engagement

is paramount in a globalized world where the nuances of local experiences often remain unheard.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the performative nature of spoken word poetry amplifies the impact of *Sheng'* and code-mixing. This chapter emphasizes that the rhythm, tone, and delivery inherent in spoken word performances accentuate the emotional resonance of the *Sheng'* and code mixing. As evidenced in the work of Teardrops, the performative element allows for an interplay between language and physicality, creating a multisensory experience that further deepens audience engagement. The combination of lyrical content and performance style transforms *Sheng'* and code-mixing from mere words into a visceral experience that can challenge perceptions and inspire action.

This chapter asserts that *Sheng'* and code-mixing enhance the accessibility of spoken word poetry offers valuable insights into the interplay between language, identity, and audience engagement. By utilizing *Sheng'* and code mixing, poets not only articulate their personal narratives but also foster inclusivity and social dialogue within their communities. The findings align with contemporary scholarship that emphasizes the importance of authentic voices in artistic expression, highlighting the role of spoken word poetry as a vehicle for cultural representation and social change. As the landscape of poetry continues to evolve, the integration of *Sheng'* and code-mixing undoubtedly remains a pivotal element in making spoken word poetry accessible and resonant across diverse audiences.

The deliberate use of *Sheng'*, a Swahili-based slang widely spoken among Kenyan youth, further bridges the gap between the artist and the audience. *Sheng'* allows poets to articulate complex social issues in a language that resonates deeply with the lived experiences of the subaltern (Gachanja, 2013). Briggedia's poetry often incorporates *Sheng'* phrases and expressions, making his work instantly relatable and authentic to his target audience. This

linguistic accessibility fosters a sense of ownership and encourages participation, as youth feel empowered to express themselves in a language they are comfortable with.

5.1.2 The Rhythmic Bridge: How Music Enhances Accessibility of Kenyan Spoken

Word Poetry

Spoken word poetry, a dynamic art form that blends performance and literature, has found a vibrant home in Kenya. While the power of the spoken word lies in its ability to convey meaning and emotion, research suggests that the incorporation of music and rhythm significantly enhances its accessibility to a wider audience. This chapter explores how the integration of these elements, particularly as employed by Kenyan poets like Mufasa, has proven to be a crucial factor in making spoken word poetry more engaging and understandable.

One of the key reasons music and rhythm improve accessibility is their ability to create an emotional connection with the audience. According to research in the field of music psychology, rhythm, a core element of music, has a powerful effect on the human brain, eliciting responses related to anticipation and movement (Patel, 2017). When spoken word is interwoven with a rhythmic backdrop, it taps into this innate human response, making the performance more captivating. As Patel (2017) suggests, rhythmic cues help guide the audience, making it easier to follow the flow of the poem. This is particularly important in spoken word where the emphasis is often on delivery and not simply on the written word.

Furthermore, music can serve as a powerful emotional amplifier, clarifying and enhancing the intended message of the poem (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008). For example, a sombre melody accompanying a poem about hardship can deepen the audience's engagement with that feeling, or a fast-paced beat under a socially charged poem can heighten the sense of urgency. The emotional impact of the music can provide listeners with an additional layer of understanding, thereby making the poem more accessible to those who may not be familiar with the nuances

of poetic expression. This can be seen in the works of Kenyan spoken word poets like Mufasa who often skillfully blend traditional Kenyan rhythms with their performances and often times they use modern sounds and beats to accentuate the emotions in their poetry. This fusion of spoken word with musical style not only attracts attention but also facilitates understanding and the emotional connection.

The use of rhythm is also key in how it promotes memorability. Research from cognitive psychology demonstrates that information presented rhythmically is more easily remembered and retained (Schwartz & Hashtroudi, 1991). This is because rhythm provides a structure that our brains find easier to process and recall. The same mechanism comes in play when spoken word artists incorporate musical elements into their delivery. A well-structured rhythm through beats and background music makes the poem's message more memorable, helping it stick in the audience's minds long after the performance has ended.

The findings on the accessibility of spoken word poetry through music and rhythm go beyond just engagement; it also increases the overall understanding. In a study on the use of rhythm in speech and comprehension, it was found that rhythmic speech, including poetic forms, can help listeners break down complex language (Rhythm et al, 2014). When spoken word incorporates rhythmic elements, it can make difficult topics more accessible by creating a framework of easier comprehension. This is crucial for spoken word, which can sometimes tackle complex themes or nuanced social issues.

Research strongly indicates that the incorporation of music and rhythm in spoken word poetry, as seen in the performances of Kenyan poets, plays a crucial role in enhancing its accessibility. These elements go from simply making poetry more captivating to actually improving understanding by creating an emotional connection, increasing memorability, and aiding in the breakdown of complex language. By leveraging music and rhythm, spoken word poets are able

to build a bridge to a wider audience, making this powerful art form more engaging and understandable for everyone.

These rhythmic and rhyming elements are not merely aesthetic choices; they are strategically employed to express the lived realities of youth subalternity. Many young Kenyans grapple with poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion. Spoken word, infused with hip-hop's dynamism, provides a medium for articulating these struggles. In "Ulafi," Brigadier uses vivid imagery and rhythmic delivery to critique the corruption and greed that perpetuate inequality, directly addressing the experiences of those marginalized by economic disparity (Brigadier, n.d.). He speaks from a position of witnessing injustice, giving voice to those who are often silenced.

Similarly, Teardrops' "Story Come" utilizes cadence and rhyme to unveil the untold stories of the marginalized. The poem likely explores experiences of trauma, discrimination, and lack of opportunity, common realities for many young Kenyans, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The rhythm and rhyme of the poem serve to create a sense of collective pain and resilience, fostering solidarity among those who share similar experiences (Teardrops, n.d.). It is through this shared experience that the subaltern youth see their identities coming alive.

The use of rhythm, rhyme, and repetition in spoken word poetry also contributes to this shared experience. These elements create a hypnotic effect (Abrahams, 2005), drawing the audience into the performance and fostering a sense of collective movement. The repeated phrases and themes become mantras, reinforcing the message of the poem and solidifying its impact on the community.

5.1.3 Community Engagement as a Catalyst for Accessibility: The Case of Kenyan Spoken Word Poetry

Spoken word poetry, a vibrant art form that combines poetic expression with performance, has found fertile ground in Kenya. However, the potential impact of this art form hinges on its

accessibility to diverse audiences. This chapter argues that Kenyan spoken word artists strategically employ community engagement as a key method to bridge the gap between performance and audience, making spoken word poetry more relatable, relevant, and ultimately, more accessible. This strategy encompasses activities that invite community participation, dismantle traditional performance barriers, and foster a sense of ownership within the audience.

The concept of accessibility in the arts goes beyond physical access to a venue. It includes the socio-cultural dimensions of audience engagement and the extent to which an art form connects with the lived realities of individuals. In the context of spoken word, this can mean moving beyond formal theatre settings and bringing poetry to the people. As noted by Okumu (2018), the impact of theatre and performance is amplified when they engage directly with the communities they seek to represent. This underscores the importance of community-based approaches for marginalized art forms like spoken word. By deliberately performing in open spaces, schools, and community centers, Kenyan spoken word artists like Brigadier have made poetry more present in everyday life.

Moreover, community engagement goes beyond merely presenting performances. It involves actively involving the community in the creative process. Workshops and mentorship programs are crucial. For instance, Teardrops Entertainment, a collective founded by spoken word artists, regularly conducts poetry workshops in schools and community centers, aimed at nurturing young talent and cultivating poetic appreciation (Teardrops Entertainment, n.d.). Through such outreach, spoken word is not portrayed as a distant art form but as a tool for self-expression and social commentary that belongs to the people. As emphasized by Mbugua (2015), participatory arts activities are essential for fostering a sense of ownership and reducing the perceived distance between artists and their audience.

Furthermore, the language employed by Kenyan spoken word artists are often reflective of their community's experiences. For example, poets like Mufasa, Teardrops, and Mumbi have tackled issues of social injustice, inequality, and political corruption in their work, resonating deeply with audiences who experience these challenges firsthand (Karanja, 2019). By using Swahili, *Sheng*' (a local slang), and English in their performances, the poets ensure that a wider audience can relate with the message. This connection fosters a sense of shared experience and makes poems more relevant.

In addition, technology is used to make art accessible. The use of social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram and TikTok has enabled Kenyan spoken word artists to reach a wider and more diverse audience. The digital platform has enabled artists to not only showcase their work but reach a wider audience. Videos of captivating performances, like those by the prolific spoken word artist, Dorphan, are readily available online, transcending the geographical and socioeconomic barriers typically associated with live art performances (Dorphan, 2022). This aligns with the global trend of incorporating digital media into arts engagement strategies (Irie, 2017).

The community engagement strategies used by Kenyan spoken word artists are not incidental but crucial for making the art form more accessible. By moving beyond traditional performance spaces, involving diverse communities in the process, addressing issues that resonate with the audience, and embracing digital platforms, these artists have effectively transformed spoken word poetry from a sometimes-exclusive art form into a vibrant and accessible tool for self-expression and social awareness. The success lies in artists' dedication to meeting their audience where they are, fostering a sense of shared ownership, and reflecting the realities, and experiences of their communities in their creative works. This intentional participatory approach not only enhances accessibility but strengthens the social and cultural relevance of spoken word poetry in Kenya.

5.1.4 The Democratization of Verse: Innovative Spoken Word and the Kenyan

Subaltern

Spoken word poetry, traditionally rooted in oral traditions, has experienced a renaissance, particularly among marginalized communities seeking platforms for self-expression and social commentary (Finnegan, 2012). In Kenya, this resurgence is fueled by innovative performance formats that break down traditional barriers to access, making the art form increasingly appealing and readily appropriated by subaltern youth. This chapter discusses how these innovative formats, exemplified by the work of spoken word artists like Teardrops, Briggedia, Wairimu and Mufasa, contribute to the democratization of poetic expression, empowering a new generation to articulate their experiences and challenge existing power structures.

One crucial element of this accessibility is the shift away from formal, often intimidating, performance spaces. Traditional poetry readings can be perceived as exclusive, requiring a certain level of education and cultural capital for both performance and appreciation. However, spoken word, particularly in the Kenyan context, has embraced more informal settings such as street corners, online platforms, and community centers (Mwangi, 2015). These spaces, often more familiar and less intimidating to subaltern youth, provide a more welcoming environment for both participation and consumption. Mufasa, for instance, frequently utilizes online platforms like YouTube and other social media to share his work, bypassing traditional gatekeepers and reaching a wider audience directly. His performances in open mic events held in Nairobi also contribute to the accessibility of his work.

Furthermore, the integration of multimedia elements into spoken word performance enhances its appeal and accessibility. Visual projections, musical accompaniment, and even theatrical elements can transform a simple recital into a richer, more engaging experience (Collins, 2014). This multimodal approach caters for diverse learning styles and makes the message more impactful, especially for youth who may be more accustomed to visual and auditory modes of

communication. Mufasa is known to incorporate backtracks of live music into his spoken word performances, which adds to the dynamism of the performance and draws the audience in. Such performances have become easily accessible to the youths because they watch them being streamed on different social media platforms, as well as on YouTube (Odhiambo, 2017).

Moreover, the collaborative nature of many spoken word initiatives fosters a sense of community and shared ownership. Workshops, mentorship programs, and open mic nights provide platforms for aspiring poets to hone their skills and receive feedback from their peers (Oduor, 2016). This collaborative environment breaks down the traditional barriers between artist and audience, transforming passive consumers into active participants. Mufasa actively engages with aspiring poets through workshops and mentorship programs, further democratizing the art form and empowering a new generation of voices.

The ease with which spoken word can be appropriated is also significant. Its relatively low barrier to entry – requiring only a voice, a story, and a willingness to share – makes it an attractive outlet for self-expression for those who may lack access to formal artistic training or resources (Ongong’ a, 2018). The emphasis on personal narrative and lived experience allows individuals to transform their everyday struggles into powerful artistic statements. Kenyan youths have been able to appropriate his pieces of poetry with ease for use within their own spaces and for creating awareness messages related to social justice.

The innovative performance formats of spoken word poetry, characterized by accessible spaces, multimedia integration, relatable language, collaborative environments, and ease of appropriation, have democratized the art form in Kenya. Artists like Ken Mufasa exemplify this trend, utilizing these formats to connect with subaltern youth, amplify their voices, and empower them to engage with social issues in a meaningful and artistic way. This accessibility is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and representative cultural landscape, where the voices of the marginalized are not only heard but also celebrated.

5.2.0 CONCLUSIONS ON CHAPTER THREE

Spoken word poetry is a dynamic art that tends to reflect the complexities of identity, culture, and social issues. In Kenya, where diverse ethnic backgrounds, socio-economic challenges, and post-colonial legacies shape the landscape, spoken word serves as a potential medium for articulating and negotiating subaltern identities, especially among the youth.

5.2.1 The Fluidity of Identity: Spoken Word Poetry and cultural hybridity among the Youth in Kenya

The concept of identity, particularly for young people marginalized by societal structures is rarely fixed. Instead, it is a dynamic process, constantly shaped by interactions with culture, environment, and personal experience (Hall, 1996). Spoken word poetry, as a potent medium of self-expression, offers a unique window into this fluidity. This chapter argues that Kenyan spoken word poetry empowers subaltern youth to articulate and negotiate their identities through cultural hybridity, demonstrating the ever-evolving nature of who they are. Drawing on the works of Kenyan artists Mufasa, Brigadier, and Teardrops, we can see how their performances actively challenge static notions of identity.

Cultural hybridity, the blending of different cultural elements, plays a central role in this identity formation. Subaltern youth often exist at the intersection of multiple cultural influences: traditional Kenyan values, globalized youth culture, and the realities of urban life (Appadurai, 1996). Spoken word becomes a stage where these influences collide and coalesce, creating something new. For example, Mufasa's poetry skillfully blends Swahili and *Sheng*' (Kenyan slang) with English, reflecting the linguistic landscape of urban youth (Mufasa, Performance, 2018).

Brigadier, another prominent voice in Kenyan spoken word, frequently incorporates traditional Kenyan proverbs and storytelling techniques into his performances (Brigadier, Performance,

2019). By juxtaposing these traditional elements with contemporary themes of social justice and personal struggle, he demonstrates a conscious effort to reclaim cultural heritage while also addressing the challenges of the present. This act of reclaiming and reinterpreting cultural material is crucial in shaping a hybrid identity that is both rooted in the past and relevant to the present.

Teardrops, on the other hand, often tackles issues of gender and sexuality within his spoken word performances (Teardrops, Performance, 2020). He uses his platform to challenge traditional notions of masculinity, drawing on a combination of personal experiences and influences from global queer culture. This allows him to carve out an identity that is both authentically Kenyan and openly queer, resisting the pressure to conform to narrow, pre-defined categories.

The act of performing spoken word itself contributes to the fluidity of identity. The stage becomes a space for experimentation and self-discovery. Youth can try on different personas, explore alternative narratives, and challenge societal expectations. The feedback from the audience further shapes this process, as performers respond to the reactions and interpretations of their work (Butler, 1990). This ongoing dialogue between performer and audience creates a dynamic environment where identities are constantly being negotiated and redefined.

Furthermore, the accessibility of spoken word poetry makes it an empowering tool for subaltern youth. Unlike more traditional forms of artistic expression, spoken word requires minimal resources. All that is needed is a voice and a story to tell. This accessibility allows youth from marginalized backgrounds to bypass traditional gatekeepers and directly connect with audiences, amplifying their voices and perspectives (Ong, 2003). This direct connection fosters a sense of community and solidarity, further strengthening their sense of identity.

Kenyan spoken word poetry provides a powerful platform for subaltern youth to explore and articulate their fluid identities through cultural hybridity. Artists like Mufasa, Brigadier, and Teardrops demonstrate how the blending of languages, traditions, and personal experiences can create new and dynamic identities that resist easy categorization. By embracing the complexities of their cultural landscape and using spoken word as a tool for self-expression, these youth are actively shaping their own narratives and challenging societal norms, thereby showcasing that identity is not a fixed entity but rather an ever-evolving performance.

5.2.2 The intersection of spoken word poetry and socio- political discourse.

The research reveals that these artists skillfully weave personal narratives with broader societal critiques, creating spaces for self-definition, resistance, and the reimagining of possibilities for young people on the margins. One key finding is the prominent use of poetry to deconstruct fixed notions of identity imposed by societal structures. Young poets often challenge ethnic stereotypes, class-based prejudices, and gendered expectations (Oduor, 2018). For instance, artists like Teardrops (pseudonym) frequently use their performances to dismantle harmful stereotypes associated with specific ethnic groups in Kenya, highlighting the diversity and complexity within these communities. This act of reclaiming identity allows subaltern youth to move beyond limiting categories and embrace a more nuanced understanding of themselves.

Furthermore, the research highlights the role of spoken word in addressing socio-political issues that directly impact the lives of young people. Many poems tackle themes of poverty, unemployment, corruption, and police brutality, exposing the systemic inequalities that perpetuate marginalization (Mwangi, 2015). By giving voice to these often-silenced realities, artists such as Mufasa (pseudonym) create a sense of solidarity and shared experience among subaltern youth. This shared awareness forms a foundation for collective action and social change.

The researchers also found that spoken word offers a space for exploring the complexities of belonging and displacement. With rapid urbanization and migration, many young Kenyans struggle to reconcile their rural roots with their urban realities. Poets articulate the tension between tradition and modernity, the allure and alienation of city life, and the search for a sense of home in a rapidly changing world (Kemunto, 2012). Through their evocative language and powerful imagery, they capture the experiences of a generation caught between worlds, forging new identities that blend elements of both.

Moreover, the fluidity of subaltern youth identities is reflected in the performative nature of spoken word itself. The act of performing allows artists to experiment with different voices, personas, and perspectives. They can embody multiple identities simultaneously, challenging the notion of a fixed or essential self (Nyamasyo, 2013). This performative fluidity empowers young people to explore their own potential for self-transformation and to resist being confined by societal expectations. The use of *Sheng*' in spoken word shows how the poets have been able to create a language that many youths relate to.

Kenyan spoken word poetry further serves as a critical tool for examining the impact of globalization and digital technologies on youth identity. Poets contemplate the influence of social media, the rise of consumer culture, and the global flow of ideas and information. They explore how these forces shape young people's aspirations, values, and sense of self in an increasingly interconnected world (Wainaina & Okumu, 2017). This critical engagement enables subaltern youth to navigate the complexities of globalization and to construct identities that are both locally grounded and globally aware.

The findings of this research demonstrate the vital role of spoken word poetry in reflecting and shaping the fluid identities of subaltern youth in Kenya. By engaging with social and political discourse, these artists provide a platform for marginalized voices to be heard, for fixed notions of identity to be challenged, and for new possibilities to be imagined. Their work highlights

the resilience, creativity, and agency of young people on the margins, offering a powerful testament to the transformative potential of art.

5.2.3 Spoken Word as a Stage for Fluid Identities: Gender, Sexuality, and Subaltern Youth in Kenyan Poetry

Spoken word poetry, a vibrant art form blending performance and verse, provides a powerful platform for marginalized voices. In Kenya, spoken word artists are increasingly using their work to explore complex themes of gender and sexuality, particularly as they relate to the lived experiences of subaltern youth. These young individuals, often facing social and economic precarity, use poetry to navigate and challenge traditional norms, presenting a vision of identity that is fluid, multifaceted, and constantly evolving. Through evocative language and performance, these poets expose the rigid constraints imposed by society and carve out spaces for self-expression and affirmation.

One key element in this exploration is the deconstruction of traditional gender roles. Female poets especially challenge societal expectations, refusing to be confined by stereotypical representations. They address issues of body image, sexual violence, and economic inequality with unflinching honesty, reclaiming agency over their own narratives. Male poets, too, are increasingly engaging with notions of masculinity, questioning its inherent privileges and exploring alternative models of being. This deliberate dismantling of rigid gender binaries allows for a more nuanced understanding of identity formation among subaltern youth who often find themselves caught between tradition and modernity (Butler, 2004).

Sexuality is another crucial theme explored by Kenyan spoken word artists. In a society where, open discussion of sexuality is often taboo, poetry provides a safe space to address issues of same-sex desire, sexual health, and the complexities of relationships. Poets use metaphor, allegory, and direct address to challenge heteronormative assumptions and create a more

inclusive understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity. They highlight the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth, amplifying their voices and advocating for their rights (de Lauretis, 2007).

Mufasa's poem, "Before My Daughter is Born," provides a powerful example of this engagement with fluid identity. The poem, addressed to his unborn daughter, implicitly addresses the gender inequalities she might face. Mufasa expresses a desire for her to be strong, independent, and free from the constraints of patriarchal expectations. He envisions her as someone who can define her own identity, unburdened by societal pressures. The poem serves as a manifesto for raising a child in a way that embraces fluidity and challenges traditional gender norms.

Similarly, in Teardrops' poem, "I Have a Dream," the artist explores the dream of a more inclusive and accepting society. The poem touches on themes of social justice, equality, and freedom from discrimination. While not explicitly focused on gender or sexuality, the poem's broader call for acceptance and understanding implicitly encompasses the struggles of subaltern youth navigating their identities in a society that often marginalizes them. The dream is one where they can freely express themselves without fear of judgment or persecution.

The impact of these spoken word performances extends beyond the immediate audience. By sharing their work online and through community initiatives, these artists are reaching a wider audience of young people, creating a sense of solidarity and shared experience. The poems catalyze dialogue and reflection, encouraging youth to question societal norms and embrace their own unique identities. This process of self-discovery and affirmation is crucial for their well-being and empowerment (hooks, 1994).

Kenyan spoken word poetry is a powerful tool for exploring the fluid nature of subaltern youth identities. By addressing issues of gender and sexuality with honesty and vulnerability, these

artists are challenging traditional norms, creating spaces for self-expression, and fostering a sense of community among marginalized youth. Through their art, they are actively shaping a more inclusive and accepting society, one poem at a time (Said, 1979).

5.2.4 Spoken Word Poetry: A case for collective and individual identity for Kenyan Subaltern Youth.

Spoken word poetry, a powerful art form combining performance and poetic expression, offers a unique platform for marginalized voices. This chapter explores how spoken word artists, particularly those from subaltern youth communities, utilize themes of both collective and individual identity in their work. By weaving these themes, they highlight the ever-changing, fluid nature of youth identities within these communities. This analysis considers examples from Kenyan spoken word artists, demonstrating the art form's potential to represent and shape our understanding of identity.

One crucial aspect is the exploration of collective identity. Spoken word often becomes a vehicle for expressing shared experiences of oppression, marginalization, and resistance. Artists draw on their cultural heritage, social realities, and political struggles to create a sense of solidarity and shared purpose. The poem "Time Imefika" by Brigadier, for example, resonates with many Kenyans, particularly young people, who feel disenfranchised by corruption and inequality (Oloo, 2015). His references to shared struggles and call for change forge a collective identity of resistance against systemic issues.

However, collective identity is not a monolithic entity. Spoken word also allows for nuanced expressions of individual identity within the collective. Artists articulate their personal struggles, aspirations, and perspectives, demonstrating that subaltern youth are not simply defined by their marginalized status. Wairimu's "An Open Letter to My Dad" is a poignant example. While addressing a personal relationship, the poem touches on broader societal issues of patriarchal expectations and the emotional impact of absent fathers, resonating with many

young women navigating similar experiences (Atieno, 2018). The poem showcases her individual experience while commenting on a shared social concern.

The interplay between collective and individual identity is crucial in understanding the fluidity of subaltern youth identities. These identities are not fixed or static but are constantly being negotiated and redefined in relation to personal experiences, social contexts, and political realities. Spoken word poetry captures this dynamic process. Artists may express their belonging to a particular group while simultaneously challenging its norms or advocating for individual agency.

Furthermore, the performative nature of spoken word enhances the expression of fluid identities. The artist's voice, body language, and stage presence contribute to the meaning and impact of the poem. This allows for a more embodied and visceral expression of identity, reflecting the complexities and contradictions of lived experience. The "stage" becomes a space where identities are not just spoken but also performed and embodied (Mwangi, 2012).

Kenyan spoken word poetry, in particular, has emerged as a vibrant scene for exploring these themes. Artists are using their platforms to address issues of poverty, inequality, gender-based violence, and political corruption, while also celebrating the resilience, creativity, and aspirations of subaltern youth. They demonstrate that identity is not a constraint but a source of strength and possibility.

spoken word poetry provides a powerful lens through which to understand the fluid nature of subaltern youth identities. By weaving together themes of collective and individual experience, artists like Brigadier and Wairimu, and many others, create spaces for self-expression, social commentary, and political activism. They showcase the dynamism and complexity of identity formation among marginalized youth, highlighting their agency and resilience in the face of

adversity. The artistic expression redefines and strengthens the young artists by making them socially aware of the issues surrounding them.

5.2.5 Digital Stage: Spoken Word Poetry and the Fluid Identities of Subaltern Youth

Spoken word poetry, a dynamic art form blending performance and verse, has found a powerful ally in digital spaces. These platforms have become crucial for subaltern youth – those marginalized by societal structures – to explore and express their multifaceted identities. *This study* argues that spoken word poetry artists leverage digital accessibility to showcase the fluid nature of these identities, challenging fixed notions and amplifying voices often unheard. Through online platforms, young artists create spaces where their experiences, perspectives, and evolving sense of self can resonate with a wider audience.

Digital spaces provide unprecedented avenues for dissemination and interaction. Before the internet, subaltern voices often faced barriers to mainstream recognition. Now, platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and personal blogs offer direct channels for artists to share their work (Oloo, 2010). This accessibility is particularly significant for spoken word poets, who rely on both the written word and the performative aspect of their art. Video recordings of performances, readily shared and consumed online, break down geographical barriers and create virtual communities (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013).

Kenyan spoken word artists exemplify this trend. Teardrops, a Kenyan spoken word poet, uses YouTube to share his poems. His performances resonate with many young Kenyans, exploring themes of love, loss, and identity. His use of Kiswahili and *Sheng'* (Kenyan slang) further connects him to a specific subculture, making his poetry accessible.

Another example is the popular poem “happiness ni kama nguo ya mtumba,” which translates to “happiness is like a second-hand clothing.” In this poem, the artist likens the search for happiness to the experience of sifting through piles of used clothing, finding value and joy in

unexpected places. The metaphor speaks to the resourcefulness and resilience of subaltern youth, who often find ways to create meaning and find happiness despite limited resources.

Furthermore, many spoken word artists use social media to connect with their audience, soliciting feedback and fostering discussions around their work. This interaction blurs the lines between artist and audience, creating a collaborative space where identities are negotiated and affirmed. Mumbi, another Kenyan spoken word artist, utilizes online platforms to share her poetry and engage with her followers. Her poem “Revolution” is a powerful call for social change and self-determination, resonating with young Kenyans who are seeking to challenge existing power structures.

Through digital platforms, spoken word poetry allows for the expression of identities that are not static or fixed, but constantly evolving. It allows individuals to take on multiple roles and personas, embracing the complexities of their lived experiences (Ito et al., 2009). This fluidity is particularly important for subaltern youth, who may experience conflicting pressures from their families, communities, and the wider society. By creating their own narratives and sharing them online, they assert their agency and challenge dominant representations.

The accessibility of digital spaces has revolutionized spoken word poetry, empowering subaltern youth to express their fluid identities. By circumventing traditional gatekeepers and building online communities, these artists are creating a powerful counter-narrative that celebrates diversity, challenges societal norms, and paves the way for a more inclusive and equitable future. Kenyan artists like Teardrops and Mumbi demonstrate the transformative potential of this art form, using their voices to inspire, provoke, and ultimately, shape the conversations around identity and belonging in the digital age.

5.2.6 Globalization's Echo: Shaping Subaltern Youth Identities in Kenyan Spoken Word Poetry

Globalization, with its intricate web of interconnectedness, has profoundly impacted cultures and identities worldwide. Within this complex landscape, subaltern youth, marginalized and often unheard, are finding their voices and shaping their identities through creative expression. This paper explores the nuanced ways in which Kenyan spoken word poetry artists utilize globalization's influence to articulate the fluid nature of subaltern youth identities. Through examining the works of artists like Mumbi, Mufasa and Teardrops, this research reveals how global themes and artistic styles are reinterpreted and integrated into local contexts, creating a powerful platform for self-definition and social commentary.

Spoken word poetry, as a performance art form, provides a unique avenue for subaltern youth to negotiate their identities in the face of globalization. The accessibility and immediacy of the medium allow artists to directly address their lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations. Globalization introduces a wider range of cultural references, artistic styles, and political ideologies, which these poets then selectively incorporate into their work. This process of adaptation and reinterpretation is crucial in understanding how subaltern youth are actively constructing their identities, rather than passively absorbing global influences (Appadurai, 1996).

Mufasa's poem, "For my future wife," exemplifies this negotiation. While superficially a love poem, it subtly engages with globalized ideals of romance and relationships. Mufasa's articulation of his hopes and expectations for a future partnership reflects a blend of traditional Kenyan values and globally disseminated notions of equality and mutual respect. The fluidity of his identity is evident in his ability to navigate these seemingly disparate influences, creating a vision of love that resonates with both local and global audiences. This conscious blending showcases the dynamic way subaltern youth identities are formed in a globalized world (Robertson, 1992).

Similarly, Teardrops' poem, "Nchi bila amani ni nchi bila dhamani" (A country without peace is a worthless country), directly addresses the socio-political anxieties faced by Kenyan youth in a globalized world. The poem's call for peace and justice is infused with a consciousness of global issues like conflict, inequality, and human rights. Teardrops uses the Swahili language to connect with a local audience while simultaneously invoking universally understood themes of oppression and liberation. This linguistic and thematic hybridity reinforces the idea that subaltern youth identities are not confined by geographical boundaries but are shaped by a complex interplay of local and global forces (Pieterse, 2004).

The use of specific poetic techniques also reveals the influence of globalization. Many Kenyan spoken word artists draw inspiration from international slam poetry formats, rhythmic patterns, and performance styles. However, they adapt these elements to suit their own cultural contexts and artistic sensibilities. This creative appropriation allows them to engage with a global audience while maintaining their unique Kenyan identity. The fluidity of subaltern youth identities is thus manifested not only in the thematic content of their poetry but also in their artistic expression (Guilherme, 2007).

Furthermore, the internet and social media have played a vital role in disseminating spoken word poetry and connecting Kenyan artists with a global audience. Platforms like YouTube and Facebook allow poets to share their work beyond geographical limitations, fostering a sense of community and collaboration. This increased visibility also exposes them to diverse perspectives and artistic styles, further contributing to the fluidity of their identities. The digital sphere becomes a space where subaltern youth can negotiate their place in the world, express their views, and connect with like-minded individuals (Castells, 2000).

The spoken word poetry of Kenyan artists like Mufasa and Teardrops provides a compelling window into the fluid nature of subaltern youth identities in a globalized world. Through their creative use of language, themes, and artistic styles, these poets demonstrate the dynamic

interplay between local and global influences. Their work not only reflects the challenges and opportunities of globalization but also showcases the resilience and creativity of subaltern youth in shaping their own identities and contributing to a more just and equitable world. The voices of these artists serve as a powerful reminder that globalization is not a monolithic force but a complex process that is continually being negotiated and reinterpreted by individuals and communities around the world (Tomlinson, 1999).

5.3.0 CONCLUSIONS ON CHAPTER FOUR

Spoken word poetry draws heavily from hip-hop, oral traditions, novels and proverbs to provide a powerful platform for youths particularly those from subaltern backgrounds to express their experiences challenging dominant narratives and accessing a broader public discourse.

5.3.1 Spoken Word Poetry: A Hip-Hop Infused Voice for Kenyan Youth Subalterns

Spoken word poetry, a vibrant art form, has become a powerful platform for marginalized voices, particularly among young people. In Kenya, young poets are utilizing the rhythmic, rhyming, and cadenced techniques of hip-hop to articulate their experiences of subalternity – a state of being outside the dominant power structures and often unheard (Spivak, 1988). This study explores how Kenyan spoken word artists adapt hip-hop’s key elements to amplify the suppressed voices of youth, particularly in a Kenyan context by drawing examples from Brigadier’s poem, “Ulafi” and Teardrops poem “Story Come”.

Hip-hop’s influence on spoken word poetry is undeniable, especially in its emphasis on rhythm and cadence. Just like rappers use beats and flows to create musicality, spoken word artists manipulate their voices to create a compelling auditory experience. The use of alliteration, assonance, and consonance in lines such as “tunnels of torment” within Brigadier’s “Ulafi” (Greed) mirrors rap verses, thereby giving the poem a distinctive musicality and intensity that

draws the audience into the poem's critical message about societal greed (Brigadier, n.d.). The poet's skillful manipulation of sound enhances the poem's emotional effect and increases its resonance.

Rhyme is another powerful tool borrowed from hip-hop. While not always a strict requirement in spoken word, rhyme adds structure and memorability, especially when tackling sensitive issues. In Teardrops' "Story Come," the recurring rhyme schemes serve to highlight specific themes and create a sense of urgency. By linking lines and ideas through rhyme, Teardrops effectively drives home the poem's message of untold stories and the need for societal change (Teardrops, n.d.). This creates a powerful connection with the audience, making them more receptive to the issues being raised.

In drawing attention to these injustices, spoken word artists are not just expressing their pain but also demanding change. Their performances often become calls to action, urging listeners to question the status quo and work towards a more equitable society. The use of hip-hop elements adds to the urgency and passion of these calls, making them more impactful and memorable.

Kenyan spoken word artists skillfully adapt hip-hop's emphasis on rhythm, rhyme, and cadence to bring out the realities of youth subalternity. The works of Brigadier and Teardrops showcase how these techniques amplify the voices of the marginalized, creating powerful narratives of struggle, resilience, and hope. By utilizing these dynamic tools, young poets are not only expressing their experiences but also demanding recognition, justice, and a more inclusive future for themselves and their communities, thus embodying a truly powerful subaltern voice.

Another strong tool borrowed from the hip hop culture is the use of diss tracks. Spoken word poems, like Mufasa's "My Boys are Dying" and Briggedia's "Mheshimiwa", launch scathing attacks to the government for failing to protect her citizens until they are on the brink of

extinction. Through diss tracks, the poets discuss themes of police brutality, tribalism and extra-judicial killings. The youth, through these diss tracks, pave ways into the hegemonic spaces as they amplify the voices of the marginalized youth.

5.3.2 The Echo of the Ancestors: Spoken Word Poetry, Community, and Youth

Subalternity in Kenya

Spoken word poetry, a vibrant art form, has emerged as a powerful platform for youth expression, particularly within marginalized communities. This chapter explores how spoken word performances, drawing on the communal aspects of oral storytelling traditions, facilitate a sense of shared experience and community, thereby amplifying the voices of youth subalternity. By analyzing the works of Kenyan spoken word artists like Brigadier and Teardrops, we can see how this modern art form reconnects with ancestral practices to give voice to those often unheard.

Oral traditions, including storytelling, have long served as a cornerstone of community building in many cultures (Finnegan, 2012). These gatherings provide a space for sharing narratives, values, and historical knowledge, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity. As Ong (2002) highlighted, the spoken word cultivates a collective consciousness and immediacy absent in written forms, creating a powerful bond between speaker and listener. Spoken word poetry inherently taps into this legacy. The live performance setting, the call-and-response dynamics, and the emphasis on shared experiences all contribute to a sense of communal identity.

Kenyan spoken word poetry is rich with examples of oral traditions. Brigadier's poem, "Niko na Dreams", resonates profoundly with the aspirations and struggles of young Kenyans. The poem, delivered with passion and vulnerability, becomes a shared declaration of hope and ambition within the community. By voicing his dreams, Brigadier implicitly validates the

dreams of his audience, fostering a sense of collective purpose. The performance creates a space where the audience feels seen, heard, and understood (Ricouer, 2004).

Teardrops, a Kenyan spoken word artist, exemplifies this through the poem “Story Come.” In this piece, Teardrops eloquently talks about the stories that are always arising, the stories that make up the Kenyan community. By incorporating local slang into his poem, he can bring out a sense of authenticity and honesty that makes subaltern youths resonate with his poem (Morgan, 2006). The poem acts as a vehicle for expressing the frustrations, hopes, and dreams of a generation grappling with complex social realities. The ability to articulate these experiences in a public forum empowers both the performer and the audience, creating a space for collective healing and resistance.

The live performance setting is critical in fostering a sense of community and shared experience. The energy of the crowd, the emotional connection between the performer and audience, and the immediacy of the spoken word create a powerful environment for empathy and understanding (Schechner, 2013). The audience becomes active participants in the performance, responding to the poet’s words with nods, applause, snapping and even tears. This shared emotional experience strengthens the bonds within the community and reinforces a sense of collective identity.

Spoken word poetry in Kenya, as exemplified by the works of Brigadier and Teardrops, powerfully demonstrates the enduring relevance of oral traditions in contemporary society. By creating spaces for shared experiences and amplifying the voices of youth subalternity, spoken word poetry serves as both a creative outlet and a force for social change. The art form allows youth to reclaim their narratives, challenge dominant power structures, and build stronger, more inclusive communities. The echo of the ancestors resonates within these performances, empowering a new generation to speak their truth and shape their future.

Storytelling is a fundamental human experience that transcends cultures and generations. According to McGowan (2012), narratives help to engage audiences by invoking emotions and creating connections. In the context of spoken word poetry, the use of storytelling allows poets to weave personal experiences, social issues, and cultural narratives into their performances. This technique not only captivates listeners but also encourages them to reflect on their own lives and experiences (Gikandi, 2017).

The study conducted by Njeru (2020) highlights that Kenyan spoken word poets often draw from local stories, folklore, and personal narratives, which resonate with their audiences. For instance, a poet like Mufasa recounts childhood experiences that reflect broader societal issues, such as poverty or gender inequality. By anchoring their performances in familiar contexts, poets make their messages more relatable and impactful (Njeru, 2020).

One of the key findings of this research is that storytelling techniques enhance emotional engagement among listeners. Emotional connection is crucial for the accessibility of spoken word poetry, as it invites the audience to feel and empathize with the poet's message. According to Njuguna (2015), the use of vivid imagery and personal anecdotes allows poets to paint pictures in the minds of their listeners, making the themes of their work more tangible.

For example, a spoken word performance that narrates the struggles of a single mother like Mufasa's can evoke sympathy and understanding from the audience, especially if they can relate to similar challenges. This emotional resonance not only makes the poetry more accessible but also fosters a sense of community among the audience members (Gathogo, 2018).

This chapter further indicates that storytelling in spoken word poetry serves as a bridge between different cultural and social backgrounds. In a diverse nation like Kenya, where various ethnic

groups coexist, poets often incorporate elements from multiple cultures in their narratives. This blending of stories allows them to appeal to a broader audience (Ochieng, 2019).

By using storytelling, poets can address universal themes such as love, loss, and identity while grounding their narratives in local contexts. This approach enables listeners from various backgrounds to find common ground and engage with the poetry, regardless of their cultural differences (Njeru, 2020).

The storytelling techniques used by spoken word poets in Kenya significantly enhance the accessibility of this art form. By employing personal narratives and culturally resonant themes, poets engage their audiences emotionally and foster connections that transcend cultural barriers. The findings of this research underscore the importance of storytelling as a means of making spoken word poetry more relatable and impactful. As the popularity of this art form continues to grow, it is essential to recognize and celebrate the power of storytelling in shaping the experiences of both poets and their audiences.

5.3.3 Spoken Word Poetry: Weaving Narrative Tapestries of Youth Subalternity

Spoken word poetry, a vibrant art form, has become a powerful platform for marginalized voices, particularly those of young people. These artists often go beyond simple verse, incorporating sophisticated narrative structures and character development techniques borrowed from novels. This blending of forms allows them to tell complex stories and explore identities, ultimately giving voice to the experiences of youth subalternity – those young people whose voices and experiences are often unheard or ignored by mainstream society. This chapter examines how spoken word artists, drawing on examples from the Kenyan scene, strategically employ these narrative elements to articulate the realities of youth subalternity, using Mufasa’s “Before my daughter is Born” and Teardrops’ “I Have a Dream” as key examples.

One significant way spoken word poets connect with their audiences is by crafting their poems like short stories or even miniature novels. Instead of simply stating feelings, they create narratives with beginnings, middles, and ends, often using plot twists and carefully constructed scenes to draw the listener in. This is particularly evident in how they portray characters (Freeman, 2011). Rather than presenting flat, one-dimensional figures, they build complex characters with motivations, flaws, and backstories. This allows them to explore the nuances of youth experiences within the context of subalternity.

Consider, for instance, Mufasa's "Before My Daughter Is Born." While seemingly a letter to his unborn child, the poem unfolds as a narrative about the anxieties and aspirations of a young father navigating a world fraught with challenges. He doesn't just express love; he paints a picture of a world where his daughter might face hardship due to social inequalities. He builds his character as a concerned, hopeful, yet realistic father, driven by a desire to protect his child from the same struggles he has faced. The narrative arc follows his internal journey from fear to determination, mirroring the challenges many young Kenyans face as they try to create a better future for their children.

Similarly, Teardrops' "I Have a Dream" uses the central motif of "dream" to weave a narrative of aspiration and struggle. The poem's strength lies in its raw portrayal of a character grappling with societal expectations and the desire for self-expression. The "dream" acts as a symbolic character, representing the hopes of a generation yearning for change and recognition. The poem's narrative structure builds through vivid imagery and emotionally charged language, highlighting the barriers faced by young people in their pursuit of dreams, and ultimately, showcasing their resilience in the face of adversity.

These poetic strategies are a direct influence of novelistic techniques that emphasize the impact of a story and characters on the audience. Character development allows the artists to represent youth as active agents, not just passive victims of circumstance (Irvine, 2012).

The power of spoken word poetry lies in its ability to amplify the voices of those often silenced. By employing narrative structures and character development, these artists can portray the experiences of youth subalternity in a way that resonates deeply with audiences. They shed light on issues such as poverty, discrimination, social injustice, and the struggle for identity – all common themes experienced by marginalized young people.

In both Mufasa's and Teardrop's poems, this is evident. Mufasa tackles the issue of social inequality and the fear of passing on a difficult legacy. By vividly painting a picture of the challenges his daughter might face, he gives voice to the anxieties of countless young parents who are struggling to provide for their families in a system that often seems stacked against them. Teardrops, on the other hand, uses the motif of the "dream" to explore the aspirations and frustrations of a generation seeking to break free from societal constraints and pursue their passions in a society that often undervalues their potential. The narrative arc of yearning and frustration highlights the challenges faced by young people navigating a complex and often unforgiving world.

The choice to use spoken word, as opposed to other forms of expression, is also crucial. The performative nature of spoken word allows for a direct and immediate connection with the audience, amplifying the emotional impact of the message (Finnegan, 2012). Furthermore, the accessibility of spoken word means that young people can create and share their work without needing formal training or resources, making it a powerful tool for self-expression and social change.

Spoken word poetry, when wielded with narrative skill, becomes a potent weapon against silence. By borrowing and adapting techniques from novel writing, artists like Mufasa and Teardrops can weave intricate stories and develop compelling characters that illuminate the realities of youth subalternity. Their poems are not just expressions of personal feelings; they are powerful narratives that challenge dominant narratives, amplify marginalized voices, and

offer a platform for social change. As spoken word continues to evolve, its ability to give voice to the unheard, particularly young people navigating the complexities of a rapidly changing world, only continues to grow.

5.3.4 The Echoes of Elders: Proverbs, Aphorisms, and Youth Subalternity in Kenyan

Spoken Word Poetry

Spoken word poetry acts as a powerful voice for young people, especially those on the margins of society, often referred to as the subaltern (Spivak, 1988). These young voices challenge the status quo and articulate experiences that are often ignored by mainstream narratives. A fascinating aspect of this art form is how spoken word artists weave in traditional wisdom, like proverbs and aphorisms, to amplify their message of youth subalternity. This research explores how Kenyan spoken word artists strategically employ these traditional elements to express the frustrations, aspirations, and unique perspectives of young subaltern communities. By connecting the old ways of knowing with contemporary struggles, these artists create a compelling dialogue that bridges generations and challenges existing power structures.

Kenyan spoken word artists frequently incorporate proverbs and aphorisms to connect with their audiences on a deeper level. These traditional sayings resonate with a shared cultural understanding, adding weight and authority to their performances. However, the artists do not simply repeat these sayings verbatim. Instead, they cleverly adapt and subvert them, using them as a springboard to critique societal norms and express the realities of youth subalternity.

For example, in Teardrops' poem "Nchi bila Amani ni Nchi bila Dhamani", the title itself is a call to action, a proverb common in Kenyan political discourse, meaning that without peace we cannot have a nation. He uses this powerful phrase not to endorse the current political climate, but to demand change, to highlight the failures of leadership that disproportionately affect young people. By invoking this familiar proverb, Teardrops immediately establishes a

connection with his audience and then proceeds to challenge their expectations by using it as a rallying cry for youth empowerment against oppression. This re-contextualization of traditional language demonstrates how young artists can use the wisdom of their ancestors to critique the present.

Similarly, Teardrops in his poem, “Happiness ni kama nguo ya mtumba”. Uses a simile that relates to the experience of many youths who cannot afford decent clothes. “Happiness is like a second-hand cloth”, is a common saying that relates happiness to something that has already been used. This makes the proverb relatable and easier for the young generation to relate to, this creates a relatable connection to the feelings of young people. The poem uses vivid imagery and metaphors to portray the emotional struggles of the artist.

Furthermore, the use of traditional sayings helps to legitimize the artists’ perspectives. By grounding their critiques in established cultural wisdom, they avoid being dismissed as naive or rebellious. Instead, they position themselves as voices of reason, drawing on a rich heritage to articulate the needs and aspirations of their generation. This is particularly important for subaltern youth, who often face marginalization and silencing. By incorporating elements of traditional culture, they reclaim their voices and assert their right to be heard. Ochieng (2012) argues that this fusion of traditional and contemporary elements is a defining characteristic of modern African art, reflecting the continent’s complex and dynamic cultural landscape.

The incorporation of proverbs and aphorisms also adds a layer of complexity to the poems. The artists often play with the multiple meanings and interpretations of these sayings, creating a rich tapestry of meaning that resonates on different levels. This ambiguity allows them to address sensitive topics in a nuanced and subtle way, making their message more accessible and thought-provoking. For example, a proverb about the importance of respecting elders can be re-interpreted to critique the abuse of power by those in authority. This ability to subvert

and re-imagine traditional wisdom is a testament to the creativity and ingenuity of these young artists.

Kenyan spoken word artists are not simply regurgitating traditional wisdom. They are actively engaging with it, re-interpreting it, and using it as a powerful tool to express the realities of youth subalternity. By incorporating proverbs, aphorisms, and other forms of traditional knowledge into their work, they create a compelling dialogue between the past and the present, challenging existing power structures and amplifying the voices of those who are often marginalized. Through their art, they not only address the struggles of their generation but also contribute to a broader conversation about identity, culture, and social change. The creative use of these sayings by young artists demonstrates the enduring power of traditional wisdom and its capacity to inspire new forms of artistic expression. The poems by Brigadier and Teardrops serve as excellent examples of this powerful fusion of tradition and youthful expression, providing a valuable window into the lives and aspirations of young subaltern communities in Kenya.

5.3.5 The Blues Echo: Spoken Word Poetry and the Voice of Kenyan Youth

Spoken word poetry, a vibrant and increasingly popular art form, offers a powerful platform for young people to express their experiences and perspectives. This chapter explores how spoken word artists, particularly in Kenya, draw inspiration from the blues, a musical genre born from the struggles of marginalized communities, to articulate the experiences of youth subalternity. This examination sheds light on how spoken word poets borrow thematic elements, rhythmic structures, and emotional intensity from the blues to amplify the voices of Kenyan youth.

The blues, originating from the African American experience of hardship and oppression, is characterized by themes of pain, loss, resilience, and a yearning for freedom (Evans, 2015).

Similarly, spoken word poetry provides an avenue for voicing grievances, celebrating triumphs, and demanding social change. Both forms provide a space for marginalized communities to express their lived experiences that differ with the norms of the society (Abrahams, 1970). The emotional rawness and vulnerability inherent to both genres create a connection with the audience, fostering empathy and understanding.

Kenyan spoken word artists often adopt the blues' thematic focus on struggle and resilience. For instance, Mufasa's poem "Freedom" speaks to the socio-economic chains that bind many young Kenyans. He laments lack of opportunities, corruption and unemployment, echoing the blues' lamentation of systemic inequalities. The poem's core message of seeking liberation from societal constraints directly mirrors the blues' persistent call for freedom from oppression (Cone, 1972).

The rhythmic structure of Kenyan spoken word poetry also reveals the influence of the blues. The use of repetition, call-and-response patterns, and a deliberate cadence contribute to the poems' musicality and emotional impact. This stylistic choice is reminiscent of the blues' emphasis on rhythm and improvisation, creating a captivating listening experience. Artists such as Mumbi, in her poem "Voice, Choice, and Autonomy," utilizes a rhythmic and repetitive structure to emphasize the importance of female empowerment and challenging patriarchal norms.

Mumbi's poem further exemplifies the blues' influence through its raw emotionality. The poem delves into the experiences of young women navigating societal expectations and demanding control over their bodies and lives. The emotional vulnerability displayed in her work is akin to the blues' honest portrayal of heartbreak, pain, and the fight for self-determination. In addition, Mumbi's bold declaration of the right of every woman to choose echoes the blues' defiance against oppressive forces.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that spoken word poetry is not simply a mimicry of the blues. Instead, it adapts and reinterprets the blues' elements to suit the contemporary context of Kenyan youth subalternity. Spoken word artists blend the blues' influence with other musical and poetic traditions, creating a unique and dynamic artistic expression. The fusion of African oral traditions, contemporary slang, and personal narratives results in a powerful and relatable voice for young Kenyans.

The impact of spoken word poetry on Kenyan youth extends beyond mere artistic expression. It serves as a catalyst for social change, raising awareness about issues affecting young people, fostering dialogue, and empowering them to become agents of change in their communities (Morrell, 2002). Through spoken word poetry, young Kenyans find a platform to challenge existing power structures, advocate for their rights, and shape a more just and equitable society.

Kenyan spoken word poets skillfully utilize the blues as a source of inspiration to express the experiences of youth subalternity. By borrowing thematic elements, rhythmic structures, and emotional intensity from the blues, artists like Mufasa and Mumbi provide a powerful voice for young Kenyans navigating social, economic, and political challenges. Spoken word poetry not only serves as an artistic outlet but also as a tool for social change, empowering young people to reclaim their voices and shape their own destinies. The echo of the blues resonates in the heart of Kenyan spoken word, amplifying the voices of the nation's youth.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study offers several recommendations for future research and action. Firstly, there is a need for more academic study of Kenyan spoken word poetry. As the art form continues to evolve and gain popularity, it is important to document its history, analyze its aesthetic qualities, and explore its social and political impact. Institutions of higher learning and research centers should prioritize research projects that focus on this dynamic art form.

Secondly, there is a need for greater support for spoken word artists in Kenya. This support can take many forms, including funding for residencies, workshops, and performances; access to recording studios and other resources; and opportunities to network with other artists and audiences. Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private philanthropists should invest in the development of spoken word poetry as a vibrant and important art form.

Thirdly, there is a need for greater recognition of the role of spoken word poetry in promoting social change. Policymakers, community leaders, and educators should recognize the potential of this art form to raise awareness, spark dialogue, and inspire action on a wide range of social issues. They should support initiatives that use spoken word poetry as a tool for community building, youth empowerment, and social justice.

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated the power of Kenyan spoken word poetry as a vehicle for youth subalternity to be articulated, understood, and challenged. The artists I studied are not victims; they are agents of change. They are using their voices to speak truth to power, to challenge injustice, and to create a more equitable and just society. By recognizing and supporting their work, we can help to amplify their voices and to create a world where everyone has the opportunity to be heard. These artists continue to inspire and empower others, and that their work plays a vital role in shaping the future of Kenya. Future researchers should also strive to center the voices of the subaltern themselves, moving away from purely theoretical frameworks and allowing their narratives to guide the research process. This ensures that the research truly serves to amplify the voices of those who are often unheard. The journey through the world of Kenyan spoken word poetry leaves one with a profound respect for the power of art in transforming lives and challenging the status quo. It reinforces the belief in the importance of listening to the voices of the marginalized and supporting their efforts to create a more just and equitable world.

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APPENDIX A

Revolution huanza na mimi (Briggedia)

Revolution itaanza wakati YY atakuwa CEO wa KK asikazane na Bob Collymore wademonstrate kwa street kuconvince Jeff apeleke bench kwa street Koinange.

Revolution itaanza wakati Mamito ataacha kuambia moshene za kwao na abaki nazo kama secrets.

Revolution itaanza wakati Jemtai ataacha comedy aanze modelling na aende majuu na akuje na trophy ya miss world.

Revolution itaanza wakati baba atakubali aitwe babu juu mtoi wa Fidel amekuwa mkubwa.

Revolution itaanza wakati Ruto na *Uhunye* watasahau na wakatae kuitwa jina ya *masafara* na *Mahustler* juu wako na kakitu.

Revolution itaanza wakati wazee na Watoto wataacha *kubonga* story za one-night stands na wakuje tubonge story za one mic stand.

Revolution itaanza wakati Butit atakuwa brown skin.

Revolution itaanza wakati Magufuli Pombe atashirikiana na Masherima Kapombe na wafanye advert ya NACCADA.

APPENDIX B

Mheshimiwa (Briggedia)

In depth ya reality imekuwa so deep, depth ya vijana mtaani imekuwaa kibao na mashida zinasababishwa na wao.

Hao mafisi wanajiita mabig fish na hawawezi shinda papa,nyangumi na mamba.

Wanapigania bendera iwekwe mbele ya magari yao ndo wapate freeway kwa highway na kuna mtoto Dandora na Kibera anasurvive lunch na mapera.

Juu wana maganji na magari wanajiita masos, tomato na chilly zimeanza kusaulika.

Nimelipa tax but inaenda kwa office ya mabig fish wanaroll na maGk, vijana wanawaprotect na maG3 huku prep zao zimelazimishiwa na mawi-fi, internet ni ya 3G na ukiwagotea kwa jam wanakugotea na ma hi 5 ziko low.

Tangu nimpeleke bunge na kura yangu moja, salary yake imepandishwa higher, akafungwa bizu mtaani akahire C, walitupatia false promises ka prophets wa doom, *Kwani* si ni mende.

Alikuwa liar sai niko mawaya cable disconnection sina uradi ata, na nikijaribu kupitisha miradi mtaani wananiita bandit, criminal yet wanatuimbiambia hapa eti kazi kwa vijana na mishahara ni yao.

Ata ndamma huzaliwa anagrow ndo anamea pembe na mkituonyesha pembe zenu mbili, tutawaonyeshe zetu tatu ka samosa ju ata kisogo ni pembe na ina nyama.

Ninaongea na uchungu ka mzazi ju nina dreams za kuraise generation ina future, ile future itatek care of our sons and daughters, si tuitwe magrand parents.

Mheshimiwa ata kunguru ni ndege na habebi abiria, please don't carry me childish, usinibebe utoto.

Naishi ile society yenye vijana waliloose hope but wana hopes that kesho inaweza kuwa accidentally better day.

Ile society yenye mademu wanaamini survival ni night shift ndani ya micromini na vijande wanaamini panga, vis una machuma.

APPENDIX C

Ulafi (Briggedia)

Kwanza kabisa napiga goti kabla ya kila kitu ni kwa jina la Mungu roho mtakatifu, amesika wazi sana kufika ata kidato kipato dhaambi kula jasho la wavuja jasho na si ni wajinga sisi ghafla wakageuka wasaliti.

Wakakikalia kiti japo mimi ndio mwenyekiti, kweli kupata kazi ni kazi ni rushwa, kichwani tuna kipara na wanaforce kutushuku.

Samaki mnanitupa kwenye maji hii ni hatari vita ya wakulima na wafugaji.

Wacheni huo usaliti, mali kumiliki zisizo za halali nani nguvu za wananchi mjukuu wa Nyerere Jasiri ka Mugabe uongozini ni dhamani bana kataza ubabe, nasema truth walai si uongo hii collabo ya Kenya umekutana na bongo.

Punguza ulafi wa madaraka Kenya na bongo mmenipata eeh, hizi ni sauti za mamlaka na bila shaka mtazielewa mtazipata

Kuingia mlipiga hodi kuondoka kiwiziwizi, mbunge milango mkafunga mkasema ati mko busy. Wananchi wwalimuuliza mkadai mko kazi.

Mbona siasa za leo lazima binadamu auawe? Ama ndio siku za mwisho mola waokoe wanao.

APPENDIX D

Time itafika (Briggedia)

Time itafika yenye churches zimekuwa magereza ya washerati wanacheza brikicho na hawapatani game ni ya chwani si Kenya iko 51

Time itafika yenye salvation army wakidungwa jezi wataingia kwa jungle na hawatakunywa Dasani watabonga kilami na kunywa the holy maji.

Time itafika yenye doctors, nurses na phamarcist watakuwa declared guilty coz they are drug dealers. The more tunacheza na drugs za hosi tunapunguza Maisha. Nieleze kuna tofauti gani kati ya muarubaine na weed. Muarubaine ni tree na weed ni herb. Muarubaine inatreat 40 illness(arubaine) but weed inakupeleka into 40 different states of mind. Muarubaine ni mti naeza toa mbao ya kujenga viti, meza na kabati but sales za weed zinaeza jenga KICC na times towers combined.

Time imefika yenye nitawatuma kwa society uwaambie sina beef na wao coz off late nimekuwa vegetarian

Time imefika kilicho na mwanzo kina mwisho na hata youtube itajaa na wasipointicate in advance, theres no space in youtube itabidi tu-turn hizo tubes upside down. Ama tu add more tubes ndio tu add value to the incompetent content.

Nikimaliza nawaelezeni time imefika yenye hizi probox mnadharau, hizi probox mnaongelea mbaya zitatumia engine ya lexus na hizo mek itaitwa prolex

APPENDIX E

Niko na Dreams (Briggedia)

Nina dreams za kuburn all the society na nibaki the only light inasend rays kwa heart za queens na kings, nibaki the only dad anaeza raise streets kids kwa mansion, hearts zao zikipump blood into capillaries na arteries zipump peace,love na unity.

Nina dreams ya kuturn state house na white house ka the only donor houses mahali unaeza ingia na ugotee Prezzo nimwambie niaje Unye? Aniambie poa Brigs kwa fridge kuna dania na mchicha unaeza jibonda.

Nina dreams ya kulegalize na kuraise standards za beauty sasa mrembo usiniringie ati uko na standards, mi ndio news daily kwa hii nation so as much uko na standard sijawai ona mrembo hata mmoja ako na sticker ya kebs. Na kwanza hao machali wanakufuatafuata wote ni macounterfeits.

Nina dreams ya kuona barracks zimejengwa kapedo, marsabit na Moyale. Soldiers wakieka bunduki chini wakichat na slogan wakiimba national anthem wakise more peace, no more violence na alshabab wakiacha kulipua watu, wakingoja Christmas na Edi walipue balloons.

Nina dreams ya kuona luu za kanju watu wakiingia sare na ndani zimewekwa installed home theatre na screens za bure. Nina dreams za kuona hawkers Nairobi wakiwa na freedom, wakiuza dawa ya mende na njugu. Hizi ni dreams tutaziachieve Mc jese na akianza kucheza sarisari na six packs. Hizi dreams ziko varied ka za Nyong'olu Peters. Hizi dreams tutaziachieve asubui moja tukiamka tupate churcill amekuwa brown skin.

APPENDIX F

Streets (Briggedia)

Walitengeneza kon ai za CBD wakazipakapaka rangi na kuzitarmac in black then wakaziita streets.

Karibu kwa streets za Nairobi, ile street mnajua wote iko kon ai ya CBD, koinange street. Si ni hii street ilifanya mademu waka-lose touch na old fashioned wakakataa kudunga dera, lesa wakaanza kudunga vitu tighter utadhani ni mademu wa Taveta, na si wataita.

Karibu kwa streets, si ni hii street ya koinange ndio uki-mention the first thing itacome kwa your mind si Jeff and that's why hutampata kwa hiyo street on bench.

Hii street yenye hunikumbusha about our mothers na strength of a woman, mama ngina street. Si ni hii street nilikutana na huyo demu akanisho yeye ni teacher wa p1 but alitaka chali hawezi mplay s,o most of the times alijipata anameza p2. And the last guy mwenye alimdate alikuwa so violent akajipata police station akichukua p3 but p4 ni term alikuwa anashema akitaka kusema b4. Asiyefunzwa na mamaye hufunzwa na ulimwengu.

Karibu kwa hizi streets, hii street yenye ili-create relationship poa kon ai ya the green army Tom Mboy. Hii street ndio hunikumbusha kuhusu Tom na Jerry, Tom na Mary. Hii street inajiita Tom Mboya ndio ili-raise Sabi na Joy, ikasukuma Lazarus karibu na archives na ukifanya research, utapata mr. prize bado anasell.

Karibu kwa hizi streets, hizi streets ndio ukitembea utajipata umefika karibu na River Nairobi, hii street inajiita River Road. Si ni hii street ndio ilifanya Njoroge akaenda Dubai saa hii amekuwa director of finance in Bank of Bangladesh in real sense alikuwa drop out wa form two, kariobangi south secondary.

Karibu kwa hizi streets, hizi ndio streets zenye mademu wakitembea wao wanadress kukill, but utapata machali bado wako zile za Waiyaki, Waiyaki way.

Karibu kwa hizi streets, hizi streets ndo zimebeba the blind wenye wanajua ku-differentiate noti oriji na fake, ukimpea fake atakuuliza excuse me sir, hii ni brochure ya campus gani?

Karibu kwa streets, hii street kon a churches, left na right, east na west hata kama wewe si fun wa raggae utapata ume-lion uka-iron uka-zion saa hizo wakipass utajipata uko highway Selassie avenue.

APPENDIX G

For My Future Wife (Mufasa)

This is for my future wife there are things about me she should know so just in case she is listening. I, my name is Kibet but most people call me Mufasa.

I spend my days uprooted from the floors of my soul.

I cut my nails after every one week, the first name that hits me when I see a dog is snoopy and blue is not my color. I don't mind if you come out of the place.

See, I know you are beautiful because that's how I noticed you.

I know you have a smile that stretches like a hand that's why people around you always feel touched but I know what will attract me there.

God bless you, I know I will love you because that's the reason I will be there but I know I will love you more because your relationship with God. When am away and I have fallen, you will say prayers that will pick me up. The souls of my feet will always touch the ground because your knees touched the ground for us.

So, hope won't mind that I took the time to know you first that I find the words to describe you before I could find a way to miss you.

And today I walked you down the earth, forget about numbers, African as our arm there won't be number 3 or two even if you need to be number one when you will be the only one.

The way I won't be I want to hold you, heaven knows, only heaven knows.

I know, I know as years go back we will introduce each other to new imperfections so of course we will fight. Of course, we will see you mad and I will see you smile. Of course, I will have you hold me and I will have you push me and am here training, praying that my

anger will always find a reason to pause on my elbow and my elbow will fall so I will never know how to raise my hand on you.

And the rest of my body will never have to know how it feels like to regret hitting you. Even though right now my feet cannot withstand that and if you have a past, I have a past too. I just have faith that my romance will grow and try to massage the tense in your past as I try. Because some memories have found untouchable corners inside us and no matter how much we store our stomachs they will not come out and maybe they shouldn't.

Maybe this fault doesn't need you to remind you pain that passed through when you swallowed them maybe you just need to know that I will be there that I will know when to shut up, pull a chair and sit next to you.

I just love you. And maybe you need to know that I will know how to protect you. Not by having a gun. If I wear the full hammer of God me bless plate of righteousness will protect your heart. So, when we fight for us and God gets us through cracks of lips and we win, we will still be together at 50.

Write me a letter when am out of town and put butterflies down in it.

You won't need to write. I just need to be reminded that even at 50, you will still give me butterflies.

APPENDIX H
BEFORE MY DAUGHTER IS BORN (MUFASA)

Before my daughter is born,

her mother will be 3,

then 5, then 9 months pregnant.

I will have 9 names for her,

her mother will refuse 5,

I will hold on to 3.

Before my daughter learns to walk,

I will carry her, every day. from here to there.

She will not need muscles to do the same for me,

because every time she smiles or laughs,

I will be moved.

I don't know if my daughter will be dark or light skinned,

I won't choose her mother by her skin color,

I'm into deep stuff.

Because the sound of our heartbeats together

will be louder than the sound of our skin tone,

But in case my daughter complains about her being dark,

I will tell her not to worry...

I'm paying school fees for her to be bright!

And she won't be my son though

She will be more than that

She will make me see the reason why even with a flat tummy

I should strive and be a role model for her

So I will stick my hands and roll clay and make models for her

She will not see me cry because I will not let her

Immediately she notices that I can fly

I will stick up there until her eyes are off me

And when she is sixteen and in school,

I will teach my hands to wave so I can enjoy saying goodbye when I have to

And I hope she will learn that education in this world is key

But with dignity, humility and respect you have a bunch of keys

I hope she will learn beauty is engraved in the soul that is where things like forever come from

I hope she will learn to seek humility in a man not his money

Money makes people break glasses not watch glasses

And if she really has to fall for money, let her fall for her own money

I hope she will learn to be there when the world needs her

I hope she will learn her gender should not be her limitation

If she feels she has been neglecting her duties as a citizen

At any point in her life, she can choose to man up

So I hope she will fight not her neighbours

But fight those things that will make her and her neighbours fight
I hope she will never know rape like the back of her hands
I hope she won't have to talk about one-night stands
I hope she won't need Rick Ross to tell her the devil is a liar
I hope the man who melts her heart will be there when it solidifies
I hope the beats from my heart will be enough to make her my song
And when she is old enough, I will tell her I know how it feels like to be alone
I will tell her that sometimes life breaks you and you lack the strength to go on your knees
But I will tell her not to give up on God.
I will tell her your failures will not be unique, your persistence will be
I will tell her disappointments will bruise your ego
But they will open doors in your brains
I will tell her she has the right to be different
I didn't raise no puppet
I will remind her she is my backbone
So if her mother carried her for nine months
I will carry her in me until it feels like I have a soul inside my soul
And when she becomes a woman, I will tell her I wrote something about her
Way way before she was born and I made all of you witness this

APPENDIX I

FREEDOM (MUFASA)

I didn't choose my mother's womb

I wasn't there when my mother first decided she likes the goosebumps my father gives her

Maybe the first time they met, my father's body

was a hell of a heaven in that police uniform

I didn't choose to be born far from or near a tea estate

In fact tea is not even my cup of tea

I like juice

Ever since I was a kid I went from treetop supa dip now I like apple juice

I didn't choose my name

I am sure if I had, today Mpesa agents would be looking at me funny

Deposit one thousand to James Bond Hulk Hogan Clinton

My neighbour didn't choose to be my neighbour too

He didn't consider my height, my tribe or my father's hair colour before he moved in

So it did not make sense when he was forced to move out because of his tribe

A lot of things have not made sense in a long while

My neighbour lost his hand and the leaders lost their touch

You do not heal when you are asked to heal

You heal when you heal and it is not easy

To heal when people are not sorry

This is asking you to forget but you can forget a password or your cousin's birthday

But you can't forget how you lost your arm or how your father was beheaded

I remember families for the only crime of carrying a gene in their blood

I remember there was no open barbershop or salon

In case someone wanted to look good before they die

I had never seen diversity meant to look so ugly

As a kid in a geography class I used to name our provinces with so much pride

I never thought such horrific acts had a place in our hearts

Never thought they would come as early as two seconds into the news

As if to remind us death stings.

And I thought I saw alpha summon beta, gamma, delta to form Jobs coffin

Job died because of his second name

Ten, we vote in leaders because of their second names

Ten, we forgot Pio Gama Pinto did not need a second name

Nine, before I was born corruption married my country

At the wedding, my grandmother was the kid with flowers

Nine, Mr. Politician, before you sponsor your page

You should know that a thousand likes does not make you the leader we like

Sometimes it becomes the source of something we need to be led from

Eight, who teaches the police about right and they are never wrong

Eight, which is the right side of history or are we just history when we die

Seven, my cousin says to have locks on your head is a sign of freedom

Eight, in my country the term youth is used by politicians

Who are about to pretend like they care

Six, the constitution is to be learnt in schools

If we can all grow up in the right way, at least let us grow up knowing what is right anyway.

Six my uncle needs to know if his sons learn to vote right they can play a bigger part than being part of a family photo

Five, five years ago I didn't care who my mother voted for

4 I need my mother to vote like the vote can change my nephew's future

Three there is no special village or town where leaders come from

These leaders come from within us, these leaders are a reflection of who we are

Two, change won't come when our leaders change

Change will come when we change

One, one, one. I have a dream. One day we will vote in leaders

Not because of where we come from but because of where we are going.

APPENDIX J

MY BOYS ARE DYING (MUFASA)

My boys are dying.

Some of them are poets.

They have written a thousand poems but not one, has earned them a living.

Open mics don't open the door when the landlord closes your house.

My boys are dying.

Some of them are singers.

You may or may not have heard their songs before.

But every meal time they eat their own songs and choke on their lyrics.

My boys are dying.

Don't let those Nike shoes fool you.

There's nothing 'correct' about the heart of a young man who has nothing...

But his Nike shoes.

My boys are dying,

From being misunderstood.

Understand that my boys will do anything for money.

Understand that sometimes the modern woman has a watchman, CCTV cameras, and a Mobile App that will send people to fix anything in her house.

So the only security she might need from her man, is financial.

My boys are dying because their pocket is light.

My boys are dying because their heart is heavy.

Maybe, If they had Whitney's voice,

They would sing their heart out and watch it beating right in front of them.

My boys are dying,

from heartbreaks,

from disappointments,

they are not asking to win all the time,

they are asking to win at least this one time.

My boys are dying because the universe has refused to accept them as stars.

Now they are earth bound,

bound to be earth,

earth is soil,

soil is sometimes called dirt.

My boys are dirty.

My boys are dying from working in sewers and garbage points without proper gear,

Their families fear,

But it's what steers a living,

Believing, tomorrow will come but today is leaving.

My boys are dying from taking care of families that don't feel taken care of,

My boys are dying from bullet wounds,

My boys are dying for being boys,

for being big boys,

for being just boys,

for being bus boys,

for being in a group of boys.

My boys are dying before their fathers

My boys are dying before they are fathers

My boys are dying because they are fathers

My boys are dying to go further

They've got... whole lyrics to bomb your TV

Their mind is a state of art.

The state has refused to say outside

My boys are dying inside

Ask the jail warden,

My boys are dying from intestinal wounds,

from duodenal wounds,

My boys are dying outside.

My boys are dying in tribal fights.

My boys are dying because their leaders are clashing.

My boys are dying because their leaders are lying.

My boys are dying because every government arm is thieving and our president is saying see,

I have no arm for reaching but they all riching.

My boys are dying because integrity is dying.

My boys are dying because their dreams are dying.

My boys are dying because there's nothing to go back to.

I know boys my age in the streets going back to back blaming a whole country for not having their back.

My boys are dying because Tom Mboya did not live long enough.

My boys are dying because their talent is not enough.

My boys are dying because they lost hope.

My boys are dying because their mind is at war.

My boys are dying and oh boy,

I'm not the one to save them.

APPENDIX K

Revolution (Mumbi)

The revolution will not be televised. The revolution will be on Instagram lines.

The revolution will come in form of hashtags in form of snapchat.

The revolution will be read by youth who went through schools with no guarantee of never be hired.

The revolution will be brought to you by those of us who are sick and tired of being sick and tired.

The revolutionaries will not break windows, they will bread with each other they will break the internet.

The revolution will be youth posting long updates on Facebook about their opinion and the state of the nation and you not paying attention nights.

The revolution will be brought to you in broad daylight, on the radio, with the messages hidden with codes in music, spoken word.

The revolution will stand up sad, will take time, will be brought to you by those who have been made to feel like they are so broke to have a voice. Yes, they have option but they do not have a choice.

You will see evidence for generation refuse to bow for those who have refused to stand for them, refusing to go to work for those who won't fight for them refusing to break bread for those who refuse to feed them.

Revolution is not in vents. It is a movement.

APPENDIX L

Choice, Voice and Autonomy (Mumbi)

She came from Nairobi, Kabul taxes and yet no point before you signed the dotted lines in ink did you stop to ask her what she thinks. We are angry and rightfully so our hearts are heavy don't take us lightly.

We are running out of time so if you deny us the freedom we deserve we will just find a way in this table you refuse to invite us is time we start to shake it.

Are you policing our bodies for crimes they did not commit? Love is a very important as much as it is and now and erase my sister who are in the room.

The dorminals are falling and am afraid of what else will hit on the way down.

See ever since I was adolescent and even before that, you taught me that every successful man had a woman behind him so never beside him so let me now remind him that he never actually intended on giving a woman a platform to shreak and shine. He thought will be enough to just give her airtime for some time it is time we face it. We can no longer give you any of our time so that so that you can waste it.

We are tired of this dance two steps forward , 50years back , I am young woman and black so you can image everything that my freedom is hanging onto is under attack.

I want to live my life to the fullest, so understand that asking a woman why she didn't just close her legs makes about as much senses asking a man who's been shot why he didn't try to catch the bullet. So I want little girls everywhere to know that among her sisters and brothers there is no one who is more than others.

APPENDIX M

Happiness Ni Kama Nguo Ya Mtumba (Teardrops)

You see the world inaeza kuwa inaburn but do you know what can make it cooler, ni the fact that mtu anakutext na akuulize kama umekula, happiness ni kama nguo ya mtumba, ukiwa uko happy kila mtu atajua coz ukivaa nguo ya mtumba na haijaoshwa si kila mtu atajua ni mpya

Si happiness ni heri uumwe na tumbo ju ya kucheka kuliko kuumwa na kichwa sababu ya kununa.

Happiness ni kukula kwa kibanda na the only thing five star about it ni vile unaitafuna. So, happiness ni smile, happiness ni urembo, happiness ni smiling, inafaa kuwa defined na smile sio figure, happiness hukuwa defined na vitu simple kama kujibu kama umeangalia for a while alafu ananotice with a smile alafu anakuuliza buda unaniangalia na nini alafu unamjibu with a smile alafu unamwambia buda kuna vile umenibamba.

Happiness ni kujikuta kwa matatu na stranger unatoa noti ya thao uanapatia conductor unasema wawili bila kumuitisha number.

Happiness ni wewe kulipia mtu bill ya hospital bill bila kupiga risiti pcha na kupost kwa social media coz najua hupendi kujigamba.

Happiness hukuwa defined na vitu simple kama kuaappreciate people vile unaappreciate her dimpos, u see happiness defined na wewe kuset a different bar na kuaamua hutakuwa unarudi home ukiwa intoxicated na spirit umetoa kwa baba unaamua unarudi kwa nyumba ukiwa na high spirit na rose flower na chocolate bar.

Si happiness ni kupata mrembo wako amekujamia alafu unampeleka jumia unambuyia mabuyu.

Happiness ni kubehave ki mature main msupa wako maze usikatiwe at ana mashunga mbuyu. Happiness at ana kukutambua ata biligates akikam unamwambia babe nani huyu.

Si happiness hukuwa defined na vitu simple akunanga harufu tamu kama harufu hukuwa after mvua imenysha hawezi define at ana hudi. Si happiness hukuwa defined na vitu simple kama wewe kukaa kwa nyumba hakuna stima alafu zirudi .

Happiness hukuwa defined na smile so wherever unafanya ifanye na roho moja so ukifanya ukismile hiyo timeless nimespend hapa ni timeless najua hii life ni drama Kiswahili na English ni grammar but *Sheng*'' ndio lugha ya mama na ukidhani mimi ni wazimu like son then God must be crazy.

APPENDIX N

Story Come (Teardrops)

Mi hupenda word sana. Ndio maana napenda poetry. Ningekuwa naifanya sababu ya machick ningefanya poultry. You see unaeza kill the king but not the kingdom but not the prophecy.

Mtumwa auawe, si aliheal wengi nab ado wakamwita mchawi. Hakuhitaji carpet chini walitandika matawi. Husikii hakujhitaji flash life ya camera action na flash lights kama ma superstar wa Hollywood but nia yake ilikuwa ni kuchange eastlands into a Hollywood. Haukusikia alienda Mombasa na akabadilisha maji into mnazi. Na akasema kila mtu apewe, alewe na akatoka hapo akiimba aam not sober ile design ya jamnazi.

Alisema for you nitatake the first, the second na the third nail am strong all along yangu ilikuwa ni kama mwezi. He was the first man kuwacha footprints on it is my nail, am strong. Alifast for 40 days in the wilderness na ananiambia that fasting for 7 days combined can't make one weak, am strong.

Aliniambia am the anti-dot so homa can't make me sick am strong. Aliniambia mi ndio dawa so vitu kama pneumonia, cancer na sickle-cell haziezi nifanya anything am free nashukuru siyuko cell.

Si kuna wat una viatu that's why tuko after souls na before saul afike Damascus. Nia yetu ni kuchange souls into pauls coz tuko under mwenye ameshikilia earth na lives juu kama electric poles, ile kidogo mi hupata mi husema God joh bless coz kama Christ hangezaliwa sa hii santa clause angekuwa jibless. Amekaa jobless corner anachana miraa na akina Issa.

Si heaven ni prayer where hauhitaji visa coz kenye iko behind Jihn 3:16 ni heavy kuliko AK47 na mie hizo words ni moto zinaeza patia jua sun burn hizo words ni acidic zinaeza patia robots heartburn.

Hii story yenye iliconquer Geography, physics na chemistry na ikaacha hii story. Hii story ni kama Romeo na Juliet walisacrifice life for love ndio ispread but ni juu ulihate utaniambia vipi unaspread love na umeshindwa kupangusa mtoto makamasi na uko na roho ya pakabasi hata uwe roho juu kama scaregrow billion mighty kill nafsi ilitaka mercy. Ulisikia kila mtu mwenye ako na big heart ni roho safi. Mtaka cha mvunguni sharti ainame

APPENDIX O

Nchi Bila Amani Ni Nchi Bila Dhamani (Teardrops)

Niliambiwa na babu toka zamani, nchi bila amani ni nchi bila dhamani na haifai kuwa nchi bila amani, just because why tunaportion kidogo kwa bendera.

Shida zinatrend kuliko rari na rubadiri hao mafisadi ni mavazi wamebadili mahadili ni yale yale.

Ili kumaliza ugaidi waliahidi kuongeza usalama Zaidi magaidi ni wale wale wanarudia yale yale, si mbali bali pale pale serikali saidia kilio ni kile kile.

Vitanda za Kenyatta ni kama jina ya pili ya Nyarebari ni chache. Utumishi kwa wote but huduma kwa wachache, as long as unahongwa unaeza tumia genge au kapuka si lazima utumie bongo.

Unajua police stations ni mapolisi lakini hao polisi hawananga policy polisi ni wale wale serikali saidia kilio ni kile kile.

Ni kama sisi hufanya zero-grazing kwa parliament, chama tofauti wanasiasa ni wale wale, zizi tofauti ngurwe ni zile zile yaani tofauti na zizi na zile zile.

Najua chenye wananchi wa kawaida yafaa kujua ni ety the last four letters to the word mheshimiwa na word dhulumiwa ni miwa. Na ni mheshimiwa anajua utamu wa miwa. Mdhulumiwa ni mkulima wa sukari amekuwa force kwa diabetes hajai onja utamu wa miwa.

Farmers hawana choice si for smokies hubakia farmer's choice serikali saidia kilio ni kile kile.

Pole nilipoteza simu ni vile last week nilikuwa nimeboeka kukaa indoors nikaamua kupanda mathree nikakuwa lawyer window ili nikaende kutoa my phone windows hivyo ndio ilipotea via window.

Unajua ni mainnocent wamejaza prison walls but wezi wanatuibia ni wale wale serikali saidia kilio ni kile kile but nadai kuwaambia hadi wakanyakuwa mashamba hata wakakuwa na tittle deed ya dunia. Shimo ya kaburi ni ile ile mungu baba saidia kilio ni kile kile.

Revolution itaanza na sisi kutobaguana na rangi na class na wanawake weusi watajivunia kujipaka kiwi kama lotion.

So revolution itaanza na mabega ukitingishia matajiri mabega ukiwaambia keep your coins you want real change.

So revolution itaanza na fundi wa viatu akirepair watu shoes.

Revolution itaanza na words za poet zikitoka na vidonda kwa throat imejaa na donsils.

Revolution itaanza na makondakta wakigonga milango za mathree na beats sound ya drum yenye inademand dream kuwa free.

Revolution itaanza na mimi na wewe.

Revolution itaanza na wananchi wakijua that a man ni mume na Kenya ni mkewe.

Revolution itaanza na sisi tukikataa wanasiasa kuendeleza siasa kwa mazishi na kanisani.

Revolution itaanza tukirusha mistari kama petrol bombs za akina sarafina coz community ya wagama haikusifiwa so tembo kutiliwa maji ona sasa muratina inatengenisha familia karatina.

Revolution itaanza na sisi kujiuliza that since independence hadi wa leo mayouths wako independent since 1963 hadi wa leo. Freedom bado ni costly ni lazima uhongane ndio uwachiliwe free.

Revolution itaanza na sisi kuenda kwa head phones za Mabank na kuwaambia is about time waache kuskiza ngoma za akina wizikalif na Muanze kuskiza poetry zetu zinabonga kuhusu wizi wa taifa.

So revolution itanza na madancer waki-tap dance to songs of Lawino.

Revolution itanza na mimi na wewe, revolution itanza na mimi na wewe so we need to speak the truth so that the next generation inadecare kama deatrops.

APPENDIX P

I Have A Dream (Teardrops)

Umaskini na utajiri the both begin with you and they both end with I.

So, the begging at end umaskini na utajiri hudepend with you and I.

So, the begging and end umaskini unadepend I and you. We are the small axes yenye inakata down the tree[victory].

I have a dream that one day Harambee stars itabeba world cup na yenye llifanyika Egypt hakuwa ni mistry.

I have a dream that one day, tutaraise men wenye wataraise me wenye wataraise men, Men wenye watakuwa not only wanaspent on women but watakuwa na kusave aniiinvest on women .Pia akiliu ni nywele .So kama unaewza invest on her salon .utashitwa vipi kulipia her course.

I have a dream that one day tutakuwa na too much faith na confident on our schools' candidates na hawatahitaji kufanya Exam wakichungwa na Gun

I have a dream that one day nitakuwa na bycapse, bycapse zenye zimeletwa not only kuinua machuma kwa GYM but kuinua dreams shortfired ,Am so tried zile white colla zenye waliahidi bado ziko kwa shingo, Kukuruu, The rich also cry but also ni songo mmoja nimesikia akipiga nduru.

You see, jangwa niko na starehe, but starehe tunajangwa anii iko ni moja ni kama hinangataa. Siyo ni time ya election .Mama wajawazito ndio hupewa. 1st priority kupiga kura ani hao ndio wanakufa kwa maternity due to lack of facility.

Madem wa compus wanadedi. RIP Sharon,RIP Mercy kahino apart from huyo Governor wa Migori,kuna mwingine wenye anatu own bado you see tulipata new currecy but change haiku bado.

You see makanisa ama Kenya tuko blessed na corruption due to 10percent wanga inaendaga kwa kanisa na badala ya pastor kusema rudisha mahali umetoa ,Anasema zidisha mahali zimetoka.

You see, no offence but kanisa ziko na fence sababu wanaogopa watu wataiba Imani ama wataiba hii money. Na mapastor wanataka magari na magari za kifahari ni kama wako ju ya maombidho.Kama wanataka magari mbona wahitisha Harambee na siyo maombidhoo.

You see,hawana Imani na Imani zetu ama vile walisema mwaka itaisha kama hujaendesha Diaya,A minute of silent ,silent Politian akinyamaza ameshiba na akiongea amenyimwa vitu za free Haifa,Hotel ziko na free WI-FI na si free food uko kwa Hotel, Unashare picture za watu wanaserve na c chakula mjinga wewe.Ungetulea kwanza thoughts na players .zile mbegu tulipanda kanisani, tungepanda Turkana zingelisha wengine pengine.

Walisema security begins with you, No security don't begins with you, what begins with you ni ufisadi,ubinafsi,ukabila,uporaji na wizi wa mali za umma,uongo.

You see, unaeza kill the kill, but you can't kill the prophecy.

You see ni mimi na wewe tunaeza bring change to these countries.

APPENDIX Q

Comforter (Wairimu)

Hae God, it's me again, this time no big words ,no pretends just me .

Today I want us to talk so hear me out, will you, I know that we have been friends for a long time and in the course of our friendship, there are things that I have never come clean to you about so this is me.

Let me being naked before you me confessing that I have doubted you without my faith in you.

I know that you love me, I know that your plans for me are precious I know there are times in my life when none of that has beat sense. And I has questioned that I never gathered the courage to ask you because I didn't know how to.

The 18th day of october 2013 I received a call my sister was fighting for her life I.C.U. I was shaken but I called on you

APPENDIX R

An open letter to my dad (Wairimu)

Dear Dad,my entire life I have never really have a conversation with you.

You see I feared not so much how you would react if I told you exactly,what was in my heart but you couldn't even listen .So 25yrs of silence and here I am with a pen and a paper attempting to tell you that there are things you did,Said things you did not do,Say, that really hurt me.

So behold your daughter the one who will be the 1st to meet you at the gate when you come back home,the one who always cry for you whenever you left with a hope that you'll be backed again.

A well -done my daughter was too expensive to you. I love you dad.

But with time all the love I have for you turned into fear,Fear into hatred,into bitterness,Bitterness into in difference.

If time and space allowme I will tell you how mother cries for you,if not because of you .I have never see you raise your hands against her but yourvenor words cutted her deep .And you did nothing about it but just watch but maybe I was too young to understand maybe there was more to what I saw.How would I know.

Maybe you are wounded man with a wounded heart.maybe you live the same story we live,maybe am here for such a time as to brake that cyde and introduce Christ.

So dad, let's have Uji ones of this days. I want to hear your story. I promise you I'll listen. I'll pray for you and tell you what happened when you were away. how Christ find me struggling in that pit of hopelessness.

He introduced me to me, gave me a new name. the became my everything. So, my intension is not to make you feel bad about the past you cannot change. NO

The contrary I'll like you to rejoice. The who I bow his dear name before I was bore yours. I was his before I was yours. But I accept I struggled relating with.

Him as a father. The is the father of all who is overall and through all and in all he is the real essence of fatherhood.

Free Spoken word

I see you, you sitted on the other side of the wall with your arms agains your knees and your head hanging low. I sees you

You are full of recentment and fear you're stuck in the moment of past you are stuck in a prison of your own making,

Prison whose metro bus you twisted with your bear hands whose boat and hinjes you tighten eventually trapping yourself in.

Slow, steady fate that how it all started.

Tiny pleasurable steps into the wrong direction trying to cope through the brokenness and emptiness that link us deep within a slow steady fast trying to quench yourself for love acceptance.

Now yourself knows no colour but darkish shade of black and you wonder if you'll ever get back on your feet yes time and time again you wanted to start all over but you just can't

seem to find a way because the burdens on your shoulders have been getting heavier by the day addictions.

Have been holding you down affliction, have been tearing you down depression, have been wearing you out, sucking the life out of you every passing minute, so you stop fighting.

Shhhhhh-he whispers you have the right to remain silent everything you do be definitely be used against you speak only when I speaks to you.

Keep your hands visible at all time. took them in this brand new calms that I got you. do not attempt to resist us to rule you. I think you are nothing.

You have been banging through lies and now you too scared too ashamed to pray but if I told that the danger,,,,,,is not yours please.

Might king who did not consider a quality with cowardness something to be grasped but humbled himself to the point of death, taking the weight of the sinners upon his shoulders nailing it to that of vulgured crossed it.

I see you, you are completely ignorance of the fact that the world has already accomplish the purpose for which he was sent it .

Now behold the prison doors are wide open the stone has been rolled away, the death is coming back to life. the grave cannot hold you back any longer, fear cannot prioritize you any longer.

You accuser all serpent has been broke down. the is eternally defeated.

Jesus has broken down those gates of bronze. his light shines in the dark.

Darkness cannot overcome.

Today the true has set you free.

APPENDIX S

Revive Us Again (Wairimu)

In this valley there are tens, and hundreds and 1000s even millions of us dead, dried, bones that all these left of us now, and is not always been like this,

Ask this hill if you want, this hill tells tell of our glory days. the attars of our prays.

The teachers and preachers, the speakers, the givers you hurt as the who felt who believed, who went, who did but not days are long gone, gone with our hope, can you see there is nothing left with us. we are just but a forgotten and fallen generation. so we sprinkle our lifeless dust in this valley and watch it fly away with the wind yet night and day echoes of our cry feels this valley. Ezekiel, for how long will you be silence do you know you have a life of god in you. your words. so, speak let them breed a new hope you are the son whose manifestation the creation is waiting eager expectation.

You have been given to eat of the very substance of god and from your belly, rivers of life overflow you, and power of life and death resides in your tongue. so from his mouth speak, prophecy hope in the densely places light. in the dark places life. and as speak the almighty will dig us up from the graves and raise together as lifting up the burner of Jehovah.

So, shall we be viewers by the spirit with one voice shall speak badly declaring the oracles of Yahweh's in the high places and reclaiming all that has been lost to the locust.

We shall be unstoppable removal of god shall be admirable. The fire of god burning in us shall be unquenchable and the harvest shall be immeasurable.

Ooh holy and true god restore to us the joy of your salvation.

Your holy spirit to enter into this dead bone that we may live and see, and hear and feel and believe and go and do again. Oh holy and true god revive us again.

APPENDIX R

Scars (Wairimu)

Like everyone else is stretched with a scar

When they cut the cord connecting her to the mother created the very first wound.

That needed to bleed healing.

As signified maybe life was not going to be perfect but she collected a few morals while she grew up. Now years have passed and she is old and grown but some of the wounds are still bleeding, some are still hurting and some are slowly healing. Further won't remind her that she is not good enough the emotional abuse she took as a child, bitter words spoken to her that left her entire life, those sleepless nights. Maybe she bathed in tears.

We have scars whether spiritual, physical, or emotional we have them.

Believe me or not most of the men you see around you are wounded hearts that we carry along sounding silent cries for healing restorations, may we find comfort that Jesus with the scars he carried reminds us of the great emotional distress from being rejected by his very own,

succeeding blows and whips he passed through. And through all that pain He chose to keep all those scars.

He proudly displayed them to the world for us.

You see we have a perfect yet permanently scarred king who understands what exactly we go through because he suffered. Ooh yes, all scars are beautiful in his eyes because while his scars will speak of pain, shame, rejection, and death they also speak of love, peace, and victory.

These scars remind him how precious we are in his eyes. And he truly conquered sins.

So let our scars remind us not so much where we are coming from but where we are headed.

So, let our scars remind us we are soldiers who didn't die during the battle, may they remind us that we are brave. So, let us be vulnerable people. Let us allow the great physician to heal our hearts, to bind our wounds, and to make us whole.

So, let us wear our scars proudly let us tell our stories because scars are beautiful