

# Identity Construction Of The Bukusu People Of Kenya In The Spoken Word Performances Of Sokoto, A Kenyan Poet

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| Abstract:  | <p><b>Background:</b> Spoken word performance has long served as a medium for identity formation, social critique, and cultural preservation in African oral traditions. Among the Bukusu of western Kenya, rapid social change driven by urbanisation, globalisation, colonialism, and westernisation has intensified questions of cultural belonging, moral order, and political accountability. Sokoto, a Bukusu spoken word artist whose performances circulate on digital platforms, provides a valuable site for examining identity negotiation in contemporary postcolonial Kenya.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> This paper examines how identity is constructed in Sokoto's spoken word performances, focusing on the rhetorical strategies and thematic domains through which he negotiates, critiques, and preserves cultural, political, and moral identities amid rapid social change.</p> <p><b>Method:</b> The study employed qualitative content analysis of 20 purposively selected performances drawn from Sokoto's publicly available digital recordings. The performances were translated from Lubukusu into English and verified by a bilingual native speaker with expertise in Bukusu cultural studies. A thematic framework, developed deductively from the research objectives and inductively through repeated textual analysis, identified six identity domains: environment, politics, ethics and morality, love and marriage, family, and religion. Analysis focused particularly on first-person narration as a key site of performative identity construction. The study was informed by Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, postcolonial ecocriticism, and sociological perspectives on cultural identity. Results: Sokoto constructs identity across multiple interconnected domains. Ecologically, he presents himself as an environmental advocate, documenting biodiversity loss while promoting conservation. Politically, he portrays himself as a voice of accountability, critiquing electoral fraud, corruption, and political betrayal beyond ethnic loyalties. Ethically, he combines Bukusu cultural values with Christian teachings to address theft, witchcraft, and communal violence, positioning himself as a moral guide. In the domains of love, marriage, and family, he negotiates tensions between tradition and modernity while addressing polygamy, orphan neglect, and responsibilities toward ageing parents. Religiously, he integrates Christian eschatology with Bukusu moral traditions to construct a confessional yet communally instructive identity.</p> <p><b>Conclusion:</b> Identity in Sokoto's spoken word is dynamic and multidimensional. He simultaneously performs as an environmental advocate, political critic, moral guide, devoted family member, and committed Christian, constructing a vision of authentic Bukusu identity that balances cultural continuity with social change. His performances function as both a cultural mirror, reflecting contemporary challenges, and a cultural compass, promoting values for navigating a changing society.</p> <p><b>Unique Contribution:</b> This study provides the first systematic academic analysis of Sokoto's performances, contributing to scholarship on performative identity, postcolonial African oral literature, and Bukusu cultural studies. It demonstrates that contemporary digital spoken word serves as a powerful medium for cultural preservation, identity negotiation, and social</p> |

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|                  | critique. Key Recommendations: Cultural and educational institutions should archive Sokoto's performances as important texts of Bukusu oral literature. Environmental NGOs should collaborate with spoken word artists to promote conservation awareness through culturally resonant communication. Electoral bodies and civil society organisations should address the political grievances reflected in these performances through electoral reforms and anti-corruption measures. Family welfare organisations should use the issues raised—including orphan neglect, domestic violence, and polygamy—to facilitate community dialogue. Finally, scholars should expand research on contemporary spoken word artists in Kenya and across East Africa, recognising the genre as a significant field of academic inquiry. |
| <b>Keywords:</b> | spoken word, identity construction, Bukusu, postcolonial Kenya, ecological disruption.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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