



NEAR EAST UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE PROGRAM

**SPOKEN WORD POETRY:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE SELECTED
POEMS OF THE AMERICAN POET ANDREA GIBSON
AND THE KENYAN POET KEN 'MUFASA' KIBET
SELECTED POEMS**

LILIAN SIMULI WALIAULA

MASTER'S THESIS

NICOSIA

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MASTER'S THESIS

THESIS SUPERVISOR

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NICOSIA
2018

ACCEPTANCE/APPROVAL

We as the jury members certify the “Spoken word poetry: A comparative study between the selected poems of the American poet Andrea Gibson and the Kenyan poet Ken ‘Mufasa’ Kibet selected poems” prepared by the Lilian Simuli Waliaula defended on 21/09/2018 Has been found satisfactory for the award of degree of Masters in English Language and Literature.

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DECLARATION

I Lilian Simuli Waliaula, hereby declare that this dissertation entitled: “Spoken Word Poetry: A Comparative Study Between The Selected Poems Of The American Poet Andrea Gibson and The Kenyan Poet Ken ‘Mufasa’ Kibet Selected Poems” has been prepared by myself under the guidance and supervision of “Asst. Prof. Dr. Doina Popescu” in partial fulfilment of The Near East University, Graduate School of Social Sciences regulations and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any Law of Copyrights and has been tested for plagiarism and a copy of the result can be found in the Thesis.

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ABSTRACT

SPOKEN WORD POETRY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE SELECTED POEMS OF THE AMERICAN POET ANDREA GIBSON AND THE KENYAN POET KEN 'MUFASA' KIBET SELECTED POEMS

This thesis seeks to define what spoken word poetry is through comparing selected poetry works of two poets, one from America and the other one from Kenya, who are well known for their spoken word poetry in their countries. The two poets are Kenneth Kibet 'Mufasa' and Andrea Gibson. Their works will be used in this research, which specifically explores the recurring themes addressed in the poems and how the poets have chosen to address them. 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.

Some of the literary works of these poets share similar concepts and literary techniques. My main focus was to analyse the similarities and the differences between their chosen poems to show every artist has a unique way on how they address certain issues affecting society.

This thesis is sectioned into five unique chapters, which are the introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis of the poems and lastly the conclusion. Chapter one and two are based on spoken word poetry and its roots, while chapter three focuses on the methodology the researcher used to conduct this research. The detailed analysis of Gibson and Kibet's selected poems is found in chapter four of this thesis. Chapter five of the thesis sums up the main themes being discussed by the two poets and how they both talk about them through different experiences happening in their societies.

Key words: Poetry, Spoken word poetry, The Black Arts Movement

ÖZ

SÖZLÜ KELİME ŞİİRİ: AMERİKALI ŞAİR ANDREA GIBSON VE KENYALI ŞAİR KEN MUFASA KIBET'İN ŞİİRLERİNİN KARŞILASTIRILMASI

Bu tez, kendi ülkelerinde sözlü kelime şiirlerini yaratmasıyla ünlü olan biri Amerika'dan ve diğeri de Kenya'dan olmak üzere iki şairin yaptığı işlerin karşılaştırılmasıyla, sözlü kelime şiirine açıklık getirmeyi amaçlar. Bu iki şair Kenneth Kibet Mufasa ve Andrea Gibson'dur. Bu araştırmada onların yaptıkları, özellikle şiirlerde ele alınan yinelenen temalara, kullandıkları edebi araçlara ve bunları neden kullanmayı seçtiğine ilişkin nedenlere daha derinden bakmayı amaçlayan çalışmaları kullanılacaktır. Sözlü kelime şiiri son yıllarda çok sayıda benzersiz özellik benimsemiştir ve bir şiir türü niteliği taşımasına rağmen, diğer sanat türlerinden pek çok özellik ödünç aldığı için doğada farklı olduğu düşünülmektedir.

Bu şairlerin eserlerinin çoğu benzer kavramlara, fikirlere, temalara ve edebi araçlara sahiptir dolayısıyla benim odak noktam seçtiğim şiirler arasındaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları analiz etmek olacaktır ki her sanatçının sözlü kelime şiirlerini kendine özgü sanatsal bir şekilde nasıl geçirebileceklerini gösterebilelim. Veri toplama, bir edebiyat türü olan şiir ve sözlü kelime şiiri üzerine yazılar yazmış bilginlerin çalışmaları kapsamlı ve yoğun okuma yöntemleri kullanılarak yapıldı.

Anahtar kelimeler: Şiir, Sözlü kelime şiiri, Siyah Sanat Hareketi

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ABBREVIATIONS

Mic :Microphone,

LGBTQ : Lesbian, Gay, Bisexuals, Transgender and Queer Community

KKK :Ku Klax Klan

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction to Spoken Word Poetry

Spoken word poetry is recognized as a movement that encourages empowerment of the youth and also targets to address issues that affect society. This genre of literature had been ignored until the 20th century when it burst into the lime light yet it exists through hip-hop music, especially rap.

It is also known as performance poetry and has gotten its prominence through poetry slam competitions that have been happening in different countries in the world. When it comes to spoken word, poets try to engage the audience through performance of their works. This is mainly done using literary or oratory aesthetics. Besides that, performance can be accompanied by use of musical instruments, body movements, song or even drama. All this is done to try and address the message intended for the audience by the poet or poets.

Apart from reinventing the very old oral tradition, slam poetry is not only spoken word recitation but a competition amongst poets who are wordsmiths and performers. Kooser (2007) points out that a great part of the slam poem depends highly on the quality of its performance. Deamon (2001) explains this further by recognizing that slam poetry is characterized by 'Baruva performance', live and real time audience performance. When it comes to performance, the poem is neither read nor recited; rather it is performed with emotion and depth. The performances are normally energy filled and no props or anything that will boost performances is allowed.

Dill (2013) credits Marc Smith to be the founder of spoken word poetry by hosting some of the major spoken word events in Chicago, Illinois in the 1980s. He further states that these events invoked memories of the Beat poetry era (1950s) and as a result, they were marked as an unconventional way of social protest used by representatives of marginalized groups or people.

In America, the emergence of spoken word in the 1980s was adopted by college students to describe a new wave of performing arts that emerged in the Postmodern Art Movement. "The Nuyorican Poets Café," in New York happens to be one of the avenues that emerged to give spoken word artists a voice. This is where the first poetry slam was held and documented in 1989. According to Low (2006) spoken word poetry made its way to the main stream media through a television show called *Russell Simons Presents Def Poetry*; popular spoken word artists across America got involved. The Nuyorican Poets Café and Da Poetry Lounge ended up being more connected to slam poetry movements and also being recognized by the Russell Simons Presents Def Poetry.

Politicians use media to pass through their messages while religious leaders use religious places to do the same. When it comes to spoken word artists they use any space, venue or event to have their message passed across.

Africa's roots of modern poetry in spoken word can be traced back to South Africa during the Apartheid era. Apartheid can be explained as:

The apartheid era happened in the seventeenth century (1940s) when the Afrikaner National Party seized power since they were able to gain the majority, from the power split between the English and Dutch. Main reason for apartheid to be introduced was to maintain white domination while extending racial separation. Later, grand Apartheid laws were introduced in 1948 as a way to emphasize territorial separation and police repression but racial discrimination was institutionalized. The enactment of race laws was put in place and these laws touched every aspect of social life, which included interracial marriage, sanctions of white-only jobs. In 1950, all South Africans had to be racially classified as either being white, black (African) or coloured (mixed race). Classification of the people focused on the following: their

appearance, social acceptance and decent were looked at. (students.stanford.edu)

Spoken word poetry was used as a way of rebellion to convey their message to the colonizers; it was acting as a form of protest. This dark period happened to give birth to a rich form of art that is highly respected and has continued to be the country's artistry legacy.

Heterogeneity and Performance of Spoken Word Poetry in Kenya (Ekesa, 2016) highlights that spoken word poetry emerged in Kenya at the beginning of the 21st century with the *Kwani? Open mic* poetry event. The popularity of spoken word then led to the formation of a poetry event called "Rhythm and Rhyme" and through this idea, the Poetry Slam competition came about. These events later created a gateway to other poetry events like *Fatuma's Voice, A word and a mic*, and many more. The massive growth in the spoken word trend later led to more poetry events mushrooming in the outskirts of the capital city, in towns like Nakuru and Eldoret. Ekesa (2016) asserts that spoken word poetry as a genre of oral literature in Kenya, is not fully defined and researched on, though it does not seem to exhibit any ideology, it shares similar characteristics with certain artistic forms like music and prose. Most of the performers in spoken word poetry in Kenya are the young elites from various social backgrounds, who perform pieces based on different themes, like gender based violence, corruption, tribalism or ethnicity. As for the audience, it comprises of both adults and young people who are lovers of poetry.

1.2 Definition of terms

Slam poetry- Sommer-Willems (2005) defines slam poetry as a competitive version of poetry readings. In this research, this word will be used to refer to the competitions amongst spoken word poets.

Open mic- Also known as open mike is a term that has been derived from the word open microphone. This is a live show or event that takes place in public places like pubs, night clubs or coffee houses where anyone can sign up to perform what they want. In this research, this word will be used to refer to the

poetry events that happen in the public areas (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018).

The Black Arts Movement-A group of politically motivated black poets, artists, dramatists, musicians and writers who emerged during the Black Power movement which began in 1965 and ended in 1975 (Blackpast.org)

1.3 Aims of the study

Spoken word poetry having grown in the two countries, USA and Kenya, it has created a vast interest in this genre of poetry. My study aims to carry out a comparison between the spoken word poems of two prominent and well established literary artists. There are several poets who take part in slam poetry competitions and open mic events in Kenya and America.

I focused on a comparative study because I had wanted to see the similarity and differences present in American and Kenyan spoken word poetry. My study was narrowed down to these two poets because of the two different cultural setting they both belong too and that their poetry works feels personal and relatable to many young people struggling to fit in society today. Another reason as to why I narrowed down my study to two major poets is because one is a major slam king in Kenya and the other is the first woman to have ever won the Women of the World Poetry Slam competition in America. These two poets are Andrea Gibson (American poet) and Ken 'Mufasa' Kibet (Kenyan poet). Gibson and Kibet are voices to reckon with when it comes to highlighting issues that affect society. Their artistic works are based on themes like politics, social justice, sexuality, love, humanity, family, bullying, racism, spirituality, social identity and class. I personally find their poems intriguing, relatable and quite artistic, since they make them personal and they understand how to use language in an informative manner so as to pass their message across to the audience.

1.4 Significance of the study

The study itself is mainly focused on the importance of spoken word in America and Kenya. It further describes and gives us reason as to why we need to

support this form of art since it is growing really fast and having a large number of young people identifying themselves with it. Spoken word poetry as a movement helps people have a better understanding of performance poetry.

Spoken word poetry has been neglected and ignored in the field of literary criticism in spite of it being a voice of different marginalized groups by being a platform for addressing certain issues affecting society today. By comparing and contrasting the two well established spoken word artists, this research allows one to see what the Kenyan and American poetry scene have to offer and how the literary works are similar or different to each other.

This research seeks to contribute towards the literary discourse of spoken word poetry, since most scholars doing research on spoken word poetry have it inclined on the pedagogy of education.

Besides my strong desire and passion to explore and understand the new dimension of oral poetry, I am also a poet trying to understand the main reasons that led to the emergence of spoken word poetry, the target audience and why certain oral language is used when it comes to performing these scripted works of arts.

1.5 Limitations of the study

This study is limited to analyse and compare selected poems from each of the two poets mentioned before thus making it not based on comprehensive research. Another limitation is that the study only focuses on two well established spoken word poets who act as representation of other poets in the spoken word field irrespective of their country of origin, race and gender.

1.6 Ethical consideration

This thesis is an original work. No material copied from other sources without used when carrying out research and all the research material used has been referenced. The thesis also passed through the Turnitin application to confirm the originality of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review dwells on the history of how spoken word poetry came into being and its relevance in society today.

2.1 Poetry

It is slightly difficult to define poetry because of the many definitions coming from poets, critics and scholars all over the world. The word poetry itself was derived from the Greek word, *Poiein*. This simply means to make or to construct.

Plato and Aristotle referred to the word poetry as imaginative literature. Samuel Taylor Coleridge defined poetry as a product of a poet's imagination expressed using the best words in the best order. Poetry has also been defined as the art of using language figuratively as a way to convey one's message. While Edgar Poe on the other hand states that poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty.

There is a close relationship between poetry and music (Olembo, 1986). Deutsch (1965) confirms this by defining poetry as an art with imagination orders created by word of speech and song which reveal the realities that the senses record, salute and mid perceives. Deutsch combined structural and sensual qualities of poetry whereas Wordsworth was more interested in the spontaneous overflows of powerful feelings and imaginative expression of strong feelings. Poetry leads to the formation of a poem, that Marsitowarni (2003) further describes it as a meditation or reflection upon life and also argument about something. Poems can be descriptive, reflective, narrative, lyric or sonnets; this ends up having them sharing common features but the

difference comes in when you are looking at the form, style and way of expression.

Mugubi (2005) also describes a poem as a self-contained literary composition in oral verse or written form, they usually are short and compact. Mugubi further expounds that poems are characterized by the presence of creativity, emotions and truth in semi logical and concrete language; they simply are ordered spontaneous outbursts of feelings relocated in calmness. In addition to that, they also have to be arranged in a certain creative manner so as to capture the reader's attention and also try to objectify the feelings present in them so that these works of art do not become mere emotional outbursts lacking in objective and creativity, hence the calmness.

Poems are 'ordered' simply means that poetry comes from a spontaneous emotion, the poet works to exhibit his emotion in a pleasurable manner by arranging it in a proper manner through applying linguistic ornamentation/decoration. 'Calm' since the poet wants to objectify his feelings so that this art does not end up being a sensual outburst lacking in both objectivity and creativity (Mwiti & Mugubi, 2015)

2.1.1 Hip-hop

Hip-hop's roots can be traced back to African diaspora cultural traditions. Baszile (2009) cites Rose (1994) who locates the inception of hip-hop at a period when there was struggle and exacerbated social exaggeration. Rose further states that hip-hop as an arts form was born from an urban post-industrialism of the mid-to-late 1970s. Baszile underlines that hip-hop came about to as a political strategy that helped represent, reproduce and resist the politics of city living. There was a rise in unemployment, urban displacement and widening gaps in social safety net, this led the Black people to develop their own space for living as a form of resistance to the loss and space they previously had.

Hip-hop has spread in many regions of the world over the past three decades and it has taken on many multiple manifestations. Forman (2002) states that hip-hop's varied cultural influences and expressions have spread through

global systems of diffusion and its themes can be heard in other languages around the world, expresses with a shared emphasis on spatial location and identity formation but informed by radically varied contexts and environments. Forman also points out that rap artists are 'alternative cartographers' since they reimagine and remap space.

2.1.2 Spoken word poetry

Much of spoken word literature has its starting point in the Black Arts Movement, which is the cultural wing of the Black Power movement. The foundation of this movement built most of its radical ideologies that challenged prominent ideologies, supported self-determination and also decolonization (Desai, 2010).

The emergence of spoken word poetry came about in the years 1965-1975 and this was out of political urgency of the Black Arts Movement. Many civil rights activists lost faith during the killings of J.F. Kennedy, Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King. They felt that non-violence would influence the United States of America to have its policy of racism at home and war abroad. Civil rights movements like Students Democratic Society started to organize sit-ins at colleges in New York and San Francisco. These sit-ins were used to promote for demands to have black departments created in the universities/colleges. More black artists later joined in declaring war on racism through their art. Black artists raised consciousness amongst themselves by preaching about black unity, power and nationality.

Walker & Kuykendall (2005) purport that spoken word was recognized as a type of poetry which was under performance in the beginning of the mid-late 20th century. This type of poetry later became popular and still is.

There are several definitions of spoken word poetry when it comes to the arts world. These definitions came about according to the understanding of several people and it normally changes but the concept or idea remains the same.

Spoken word poetry can be identified as a poetry form that gathers oral traditions, call-and-response, home languages, storytelling and resistance.

This type of poetry is usually performed in front of an audience. Herndon and Weiss (2001) identify spoken word as the expression of shared language with an audience that creates a bond between the poets and the audience through the insights of society. Spoken word is also viewed as a language for the youth, according to Sparks and Growchoski (2002). Furthermore, this language describes the youth and explains themselves through testimonies of their own experiences and realities they live through.

Low (2006) defined spoken word as a movement and category used to describe forms of poetry and performance in which an artist recites (rather than sings) poetry often to musical accompaniment that might range from jazz ensembles to bongo drummer. It is rarely published and it is about a 3 minutes performance.

Remembering that spoken word poetry is meant for performance, to be heard not read. Fass (2003) quotes it to be a unique form of cultural and ethnic expression, seen as a new rise in cultural phenomena with intense influence on its audience. He further recognizes how poetry originated from oral tradition in an oral form.

2.1.3 The roots of Spoken Word Poetry and Hip-Hop

There is a relation between hip-hop culture and that of spoken word poetry. For us to be able to understand spoken word poetry, we also have to look at the history of hip-hop and how these two genres of art are related to each other. Spoken word poetry can be looked at as a protégé of rap since they share similar themes, ideas and resistance that are seen in the Black Arts era. The two arts continue to motivate each other till today. When it comes to naming the movements such as Black Arts Movement or Nuyorican Arts Movement, which helped bring about spoken word poetry to be known, it has to be understood that spoken word literature carries not extension in the naming of these groups or movements.

Desai (2010), a spoken word scholar discusses the relationship of spoken word poetry and hip-hop in depth. Desai states that apart from spoken word adopting certain things from hip-hop culture, it also has some relations to

African oral traditions that go back centuries. He further expounds on the relationship of African oral history and hip-hop viewed as a reaffirmation of Black identity and culture which see the two literacies as creative self-expression, performed for the purpose of communicating histories, knowledge, stories, making the struggles known and discovering resistance.

Before hip-hop there were other pre-existing art forms such as blues and reggae; and this makes it a continuation of these forms of art and also a cultural re-version of long African traditions (Desai, 2010).

Rappers of the West have been compared to griots of West Africa, story tellers, musicians, and historians who had the power of the word, which is known as 'Nommo'. Desai explained the concept of Nommo to be vital in different black cultural practices since it shows how language can be used to discuss social issues and not only used for entertainment purposes. He viewed spoken word as a form of griot or a continuation of it since it was seen as an oral tradition that has the power of orality which acts as a political voice. When it comes to hip-hop and spoken word, Gilroy's (1992) conception of the "Black Atlantic," is taken into consideration. This conception talks about how oral traditions of the griots have ended up being mixed with other oral traditions across the Atlantic to create different styles of oral expression that look into identities, histories, organize consciousness and political agency. Desai inserts spoken word into the discussion of hip-hop being influenced from works of songs, spirituals, field hollers, blues, soul and reggae which happen to have grown from the influence of 'cross fertilization'. He saw spoken word as a socio-political movement that was directly influenced the hip-hop culture.

2.1.4 Beats Poetry

In the Harlem section of the New York in the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance drew inspiration from music created by black people, these were jazz and blues from the culture and beliefs of Afro-Americans. The creation of a separate, independent identity among American Blacks, beyond the discourse of slavery and discrimination was represented during this period. The

Renaissance period allowed one to tell their experiences out loud through the arts being created (Ondřej Thaisz, 2010)

Beats poetry later brought the 'fine arts' out of the 'Ivory Tower' and into public places like coffee houses, bars and other not so known places. The Beat poets' generation spread the practice of reading poetry out loud and they also lay foundations for a movement that would question white middle-class culture.

Poetry Foundation online highlights how beat poets sought to liberate normal poetry from the academic perspective (Poetry was more formal and conformed to the American middle class materialism) and "bring it back to the streets." Their poetry was read and sometimes it was accompanied by jazz music; the verses were usually chaotic (Free verse and surrealistic) and had obscenities in it. This was not always the case; some were quite powerful and moving so as to have their message passed across. Most of beat poetry's works were centralized against social conformity and literary traditions (Poet.org).

Both beats poetry and spoken word poetry involve commentary on the social issues. There are some slight differences between the two since most of the beat poets are dead and the readings would be accompanied by musical instruments like bongos, saxophones and cellos. Spoken word poetry on the other hand is considered as the modern and 'cooler' version of beats poetry, with more rhythm to it. Apart from that, spoken word poetry's delivery is more confrontational compared to that of beats poetry which was calmer (James Kirk, 2017).

2.1.5 Words and resistance

Somers (2001) describes the functions of art as 'A way to question the actions, motives and moral context of people; it is expected to gnaw away the foundations of status quo, to disturb in a productive way and to provide a counter story to a dominant story'. The literal meaning of this statement can be described as art's main function in society to make people think when they carry out certain actions. As stated previously, literature is a mirror of society and poetry happens to be one of the genres of literature; most of the spoken word poetry pieces are reflections of the social issues we have in society. As

Strovall (2006) acknowledges poetry allows issues such as race, sexuality and gender to be freely questioned and affirmed. This simply means that poetry allows people to hear about experiences or situations and this may end up having them be challenged with their way of thinking.

As previously mentioned, spoken word poetry has its roots in the Black Arts Movements which was the cultural wing of the Black power movement. Most of this movement's ideologies were built on radical views that challenged dormant ideologies, supported self-determination and decolonization (Desai, 2010). Through this movement, spoken word and other arts began to have their connections to large political-cultural movements. The Black Arts Movements supported the oral word more than written word and this later helped it create room for performance in public spaces. From this development the public poetry performances by the poets led to politics being disseminating, raising consciousness encouraging activism, spiritual development and healing. This led to poetry becoming personal allowing issues like race, sexuality, nationality, gender, etc. to be discussed. Social realities and experiences of marginalized and oppressed people were now being discussed openly (Desai, 2010).

Writing and speaking became instruments of creating change since poetry created a forum for this to take place. Through spoken word the lyricism of counter action became possible.

Spoken word artists often manipulate the English language used by the oppressor or colonizer, so as to have their message passed across. *Making Transformative Space: Exploring Youth Spoken Word as a Site of Critical Pedagogy* (Kesselring, 2005) discusses that spoken word deconstructs educational norms related to accuracy and grammar and by doing so, it challenges the very language of the colonizer thus making it to be looked at as a resistance since artists use the colonizer's language to rail back against their conditions. In this, there is a unique power to use the colonizer's language perhaps better than the colonizer. Spoken word acts as a distinctly powerful art in this capacity. The artist can be oppressed and still use this mechanism to articulate their condition, while dually challenging the foundations of 'good'

quality and 'high' art by confronting the notions of quality associated with English writing.

2.1.6 Spoken word and performance

Exactly what fascinates people about these spoken word performances? Spoken word poetry is gaining popularity amongst the young people today due to some aesthetic values it carries. More people are venturing into open mic and slam poetry events as a way to share a story, champion a belief, relieve stress, gain confidence and to have fun (Powerpoetry.org). Walker and Kuykendall (2002) argue that the importance of performance poetry is that it communicates beyond the poet's culture, different cultures are learning to communicate effectively in one room and, because of all this, poetry has become a channel for the new generation today to express the troubles of their neighbourhood, country and their world. For one to be able to understand what is being communicated from the speaker's perspective, they need to listen intently for effective communication to happen. Spun (2002) emphasizes on this by stressing that since spoken word poetry acts as a revolution medium it requires a lot of listening and absolute attention that these voices and ideas demand.

Poets normally perform their works in first person and this encourages the audience to receive a poem as a personal confession of the author even if it may be fictionalized. Having this in mind, slam poets not only perform their written pieces but are a sense of the self at a slam poetry event and also the voice of a poem. Wheeler (2008) supports this by stating that poems performed at slam often intensify audience attention to the speaking body because live performance requires physical demands.

There are rules to be adhered to during slam competitions. Marc Smith, the founder of slam poetry, went ahead and defined these rules in his book *A Poetry Slam* (2009):

- i) Perform your own work
- ii) Performances should be in a span of three minutes or less
- iii) No props or costumes

- iv) Scores range between 0.0 to 10.0 using one decimal places to avoid ties

Slam poetry participations have adopted an open door policy where anyone can sign up to perform and have their work critiqued by a panel of three judges or even the audience.

There is a slight difference when it comes to comparing spoken word poetry and slam poetry. From the definitions stated before, spoken word poetry is noted to be a three minutes performance in front of an audience and performance might be accompanied by music and the use of props. Slam poetry on the other hand is similar to what spoken word has but the only difference is that it is a contest with rules that have to be followed and scores are given to the poets competing to be slam kings or queens (Ekesa,2016).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research questions

The study seeks to answer the following research question:

1. How is the theme of social injustice reflected in the poems of Andrea Gibson and Ken Kibet?

3.2 Research Design

Since the poems by Andrea Gibson and Ken Kibet are being used as object of analysis, the research is set up to use the descriptive analytical approach on each poem included in the research. This study focuses on exploration, analysis and comparison of the structure of ideas and concepts used in the poem. Many literary compositions have conveyed the theme of social injustices found in society and its effect on people. The study deals with two major spoken word poets in the world, Andrea Gibson and Ken Kibet who act as voices for different groups of people in society. The study depends on specific selected samples of their poetry that strongly reveal the themes of sexual violence, privilege, tribalism, early marriage and racial profiling. The purpose of this study lies in showing the major themes found under social injustices in spoken word poetry in Kenya and America. Kibet through his poems talks about the plight of the girl child in an African society and also that of women, the traumas they go through and how it has affected them. While Gibson on the other hand focuses on explaining the trials and tribulations faced by the LGBTQ community and the Black people in America.

3.3 Data Collection

The study depends on the samples of poetry from Ken Kibet and Andrea Gibson that strongly reveal different social political issues affecting society today. Primary resources of this study were collected through the library research technique which had most of the information collected from internet sources, academic articles and books.

The comparison in this study was based on the interpretation of several poems chosen from each of the two prominent spoken word poetry artists who happen to be poetry slam champions. The artists were selected based on their vast participation in slam poetry events, their knowledge in spoken word poetry and also how their poems reflect the day to day life of people in society.

Andrea Gibson is a female poet based in America. She is recognized as the first woman to have won the Women of the World Poetry Slam competition. Besides that she has a couple of awards under her name. Most of her poems are based on issues that affect her country like war, social class, gender, white privilege, bullying etc. Several of her poems selected for analysis reflect on the day to day challenges faced by minority groups in America. The poems are also rich in language and they bring out certain literary techniques in a unique way making her poetry a force to reckon with in the spoken word movement. Another reason her poems were selected for analysis is because the language used is easy to comprehend and it is unique stressing on certain issues people are not ready to talk about.

Her correspondent, Ken Kibet on the other hand is the fortieth winner of the annual Slam Poetry Competition in Kenya. He also has achievements of his own in and outside Kenya. His poetry has had great influence from Gibson's art. Most of his poems are based on gender equality since he is a male feminist, something that is very rare in the African culture. This is one reason that makes his poems unique because he acts as a voice for the woman and the girl child in Kenya.

One similarity these two poets have was that they are both voices of the minorities in society. They bridge the gap between the minority groups and

society by conveying their issues through spoken word poetry. I also wanted to highlight that gender has no hindrance when it comes to addressing certain issues affecting society. Kibet's poems, for example, are mainly based on the plight of the girl child in Kenya, this making him a voice for the women and girls. His counterpart, on the other hand, tackles socio-political issues and taboo topics that women are not allowed to speak off. Nationality was also another reason as to why I chose to focus on the two poets. Kibet being a Kenyan poet focuses on the issues affecting Kenyans and Africa as a whole while Gibson being an American focuses on the issues affecting the minority groups in her country. Gibson being known to be a spear head for the LGBTQ Community she challenges and questions the binary gender norms society has set. Her religious beliefs are also contributed to her poetic works, she questions religions and the effect it has to society today. Unlike her counterpart Kibet, who has his poetry works based on issue that strictly affect the African community, to be specific his country of origin.

Focusing on these two poets was also a way to show that poets will still address major issues affecting society and their nationality cannot be a hindrance. Their poems are not affected by race since both poets belong to different races but they do write about issues affecting other races. Gibson's poem being analysed in this thesis is a perfect example, since she belongs to the white race but is addressing issues that affect the black race.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON

4.1 Analysis of the poems

The analysis of these poems was done by the researcher and supported by academic research articles where possible. This thesis focuses on social injustice as a major theme addressed under different themes by the poets. Besides that it concentrates on the human feeling towards this type of poetry and the views of the poets towards certain things affecting society today. The analysis is based on the synopsis of each poem, followed by the thematic understanding and lastly comparing the literary devices used in these poems.

4.1.1 Ken Kibet

Being a male voice who speaks up on issues affecting the female society in Africa especially Kenya, Kibet has most of his poems are based on female characters. Having been raised by a single mother, it has greatly contributed to the type of poetry he does. Most of his works are based on politics, social identity and anything that praises the girl child or highlights their plight in Kenya.

4.1.2 Andrea Gibson

Gibson's poetry mainly targets a specific minority group of people in society and how they are being treated. She personally happens to belong to one of the minority groups since she does not confide herself to binary norms. Her poetry is based from personal experience as an LGBTQ community member who gets to see social injustices done to the community and also the black community members who suffer under the brutality of police officers in America.

4.2 Privilege

Privilege can be defined as an advantage given to a person or a group of people because of their status in society. It can also be defined as a special right some people in authority have that allows them to do or say certain things that other people are not allowed to (dictionary.cambridge.org).

This being the first theme to be analysed, the following poems were selected: *Privilege is never having to think about it*, *Profit*, *Orlando*, *Letter to white queers*, *The girl I don't know*, *God made man first but God made woman last*, *Form ni gani?* and *Respect the models*. These poems were chosen because they highlight the plight of minority groups in society, especially their challenges.

4.2.1 Privilege is never having to think about it

Gibson has this poem structured into two major stanzas, each introducing a new experience the minority groups have had to face. In the first stanza, the poet explains how she met her friend Sonya and she brings the dressing up issue from this point. As to how it is a privilege for her race to look in a certain manner and they can never be judged from it. Stanza two introduces all the problems faced by the African American race and how they have never gotten any justice out of what they have gone through. It also highlights the injustices done back during the slavery period and how no one was ever compensated for the crimes done to them. At the end of the poem the poet gets to have a feeling of how her daily activities have been affecting the African American race but she never knew it did so.

The poet provides different cases on how white privilege affected the Black community and wants the audience to have an insight to it. Trayvon Martin's court case is discussed in the poem, as to how the jury was full of white mothers and how Trayvon's mother had to try and convince them that she had heard her son screaming (Line 21, 22). If you follow up on Trayvon Martin's case, at first the man who murdered him did not have a case built up against him since he had claimed he was defending himself against the teenager. The police claimed there was no evidence to deny his claims, that he actually was defending himself but it took the masses and the media to highlight this issue

that is when he ended up being charged in court. The justice system ends up being flawed because they pick their own to come and give a verdict that has to have a jury persuaded by a bereaved parent that her son was actually innocent, as he had no weapon on him when he was shot. The jury's 'not guilty' verdict has Sonya be quoted saying the statement "How many different ways can this country tell me I am worthless? (Line 25)", this brings up the issue of how the black community is viewed by people, especially when it comes to having justice prevail.

In line 42, the poet brings up the Emmett Till's case. A fourteen year old black boy who was lynched by the public in 1955 because a white woman claimed he offended her; nothing was done to prevent him from being hurt by the public and after all that, the truth came out that the white lady had actually lied about it. Still, justice was never given to his family. The fact that Emmett was black and all this happened when racism was at its peak in America, the white lady's claims ended up being used against the young man. He got punished for something he had not done because someone who was from a 'superior' race than him had laid false claims that led to his death.

Gibson feels the pain of what the black community goes through and she wished they actually understood that she was not trying to mock them like the white lady who collected the metal collars that were used to chain black children during the auction days when slavery existed in America. The poet saw that as a form of racism since the lady would hang these chains on the walls as decoration. She gets to see there is more to racism when it comes to the clothes she wears and also the things she does, from comparing herself to King Leopold, to tying her shoes. She gets to discover there is more to racism than just one being discriminated upon because of their skin tone.

Gibson further talks about how a haircut also makes one end up being looked at differently. To Sonya, the 75 dollars the poet paid to getting a haircut should be something classy and presentable but instead she gets something that makes her look like, "She could not afford a haircut." (Line11). One's appearance happens to be a factor that affects Sonya, especially if you have

the money to get a good haircut; this takes us back to line 6 and 7 of the poem, where appearance matters to people who belong in her race.

The poem ends with the poet being in a sombre mood saying 'I don't even think about what I wear' (Line 55-56). She does so to try and spark the audience and readers into thinking about the different treatment the black community is subjected yet the white community is never taken through such unfair treatment. It also shows that her struggle is far from being over since she has never ever put to how ones dressing could affect their treatment in society.

4.2.2 Profit

The title of the poem 'Profit' suggests that Gibson is talking about the negative ways people are using religion especially Christianity to benefit themselves while endangering or putting other people in jeopardy. Gibson illustrates the privilege the Christian community enjoys under the immunity of their religion.

In line 5-7 the poet talks about how darkness is now on earth and the way the 'Christians right went wrong.' This can be explained by how Christians keep on prophesying and preaching to people how to go about their day to day lives, they should repent and be Godly people, yet they themselves do not do it. She highlights how Jesus and his mother Mary were never able to foresee how this would have happened yet they have divine power (Lines 1-4 Jesus was a revolutionary prophet and Mary a goddess). Line 11, she quotes the 7th commandment of the Bible "Thou shalt not kill," she does so to highlight how Christians are going against this law by killing people who belong to different religions, or races, claiming it is all done out of the faith of believing in God and that it is His will.

In stanza six of the poem, the poet argues that that Christians are abusing their authority by being extortionists and white supremacists. Line 21 talks about the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) who are a white supremacist group but still recognize themselves as Christians, 'but they have painted their cross red white...' The Hiroshima and Nagasaki disaster is mentioned in line 22 '...and they blew 140,000 Japanese away in one day.' This disaster happened during the

second World War and the fact that it was committed by a country that believes in the Christianity religion even make Gibson argues that the Christians end up abusing the power they have by telling them to 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Line 19-20) but yet they do the opposite of what is expected of them. To her she sees it as abuse of power since they also use it to extort people by seeking of cheap labour from third world countries, claiming to be doing it in the holy name God and using religion as an excuse to do so, line 25-31 of the poem exhibits all this. Gibson also talks about how white Christians deems themselves as supreme and above (Line 58) yet they practice religious hypocrisy and use it to their advantage to favour them and their evil ways that are affecting society today.

The poet finishes of the poem in a scornful tone, making a mockery of the prominent television stations in America, the so called believers and their hypocritical ways. She does so to make the readers to see the severity of the issue being discussed:

'Better cross your heart and hope you die a peaceful death
before Jesus comes back
finds his way to NBC and CBS
calls you out on all war you been living
and all the peace you been talking
Now that would be some reality TV
worth watching.'

(Lines 61-67)

4.2.3 Orlando

In this spoken word poem, Gibson talks about the Orlando massacre that happened in a gay nightclub on the 2nd of June 2016. This poem discusses one of the issues experienced by the LGBTQ community and how society responds to it.

The poem begins by describing the gruesome scene of what happened in the night club:

'When the first responders entered the Pulse Nightclub
 after the massacre in Orlando
 they walked through the horrific scene of bodies and called out,
 "If you were alive, raise your hand.'

(Lines 1-4)

Gibson further talks about how the massacre affected her and her audience making them cautious and filled with fear, expecting the worst to happen, since the shooter had targeted the gay community in the club. Lines 14 to 23 of the poem explains all this by describing the poet's fear; she describes it by saying how she was not able to keep her hand off her heart, scouring the club for fastest exit route, seeing man in the fifth row picking at the seams of duffel bag and how the security man was not keeping his eyes on the door. Gibson port by rays her fear by saying 'Every few seconds, I died (Line 23).' This statement expresses her fear since she is a lesbian and she fears being targeted by another shooter because of her sexual preference/orientation.

The main idea of this poem is to justify how the unfair treatment of the LGBTQ community actually affects them. Gibson talks about how her community is trying to seek acceptance from society but people are not ready to tolerate them hence they get threatened and even killed in the name religion not tolerating their preference. Lines 49-64 brings out a bitter tone by the poet explaining how hurt she is because these actions are out of hate and malice by homophobic people:

'How many years I spent praying my heart could play dead to the
 threat
 was gone to the world changed till history was history,
 but history just keeps coming for the high, shooting up bodies,
 kids drumming up reasons to have metal detectors
 at poetry readings with the poems.
 They're just unanswered calls to people who claim
 their God, their apathy, is unwilling to accept the charges.

Dear God, how broke do you have to be to not buy people,
 time to get out the fucking door when the song goes
 to hell,
 when this world drunk on hate decides blood is wine and drinks its
 fill in the only place they ever thought was safe and the only place
 they thought they did not have to hide in,
 the only place they were
 wanted because,
 because of who they loved and how they loved
 and how they loved
 till someone walked
 to the bodies and asked who was still alive.
 And hardly anyone put their hand up.'

(Lines48-65)

Gibson explains in these lines the homophobic nature of people in society, where they hate people from her community and they commit certain crimes on purpose. She still fears for her life as she ends the poem by linking it to the first part of the poem (Lines 1-3) by stating there was no survivor from the scene of bodies sprawled in the club:

'And hardly anyone put their hand up.' (Line 65)

The theme of privilege is seen in this poem when certain people are allowed to practice their civil rights but they end up infringing into the comfort of a specific community, since they do not agree with their sexual preference and orientation. Gibson explains this by stating how they are filled with hate and they keep getting an excuse to find a way to harm someone plus they are not willing to take up any responsibility for their actions (line 52-53).

4.2.4 Letter to White Queers

This poem explores white privilege and the injustices that have befallen those who are queer, coloured or both. Gibson talks about racism from a white queer person's perspective and how it is affecting her as a person.

Gibson talks about the atrocities committed by the white supremacists to certain persons. She addresses the Matthew Sheperd incident that had him murdered because of his sexual orientation.

‘...was tied to a fence, beat with the butt end of a pistol till his skull cracked, left for eighteen hours in Wyoming frozen cold, his face covered in blood, except for the places his tears had washed clean.’
(Lines 3-6)

The description above gives us a vivid image of how the victim was tortured by his assailants before being left for the dead. Gibson’s main reason for doing so could be for her to have the audience question the culpability in a perpetual racist and stereotypical society. In stanzas 3 to 7 she describe her own personal reaction as to how she felt when Sheperd was murdered. She describes her reaction as ‘feeling unloved’ (Line 13), ‘a grief tsunami from her eyes moving down her knees,’ (Line 8).

She starts raising questions on the people around her (Line 20-21), if she can really trust them or she may end Sheperd. Gibson talks about James Byrd Jr.’s death too who was murdered by white supremacists.

‘...chained to the back of a truck, dragged three miles along the concrete, conscious the entire time, till his head was severed and remains were found in eighty- one separate places along the side of the road.’ (Lines 15-17)

From the lines stated above, she gives the description of the horrendous acts done to him before he died. Due to the hate filled society, these two innocent men got murdered because of their race and sexual orientation. Gibson highlights further how people from her community are easily forgotten or disowned when they pass on. In lines 23-34, she talks about a gay man who committed suicide, his family refused to attend his funeral; they sold his house and burnt the things he once owned. The poet sees this as a cleansing the family did, since they put the house in the market, targeting straight people who are not bothered to know how the previous owner of the house died. Lines 26-34 describe these vivid scenes in the poets head:

'I heard a rumour that the house was gonna sell for an incredible deal. I immediately imagined flocks of straight people going on and on about how his grave would look fabulous with a granite countertop. I kept picturing the holiday party they would throw in the bargain of his unliveable pain. His life nothing but a stain to them, nothing but something to scrub into the rug in the new nursery.

I had walked by his house for weeks, imaging an SUV full of soccer cleats running back and forth over his ghost in the driveway. I had been up all night, picturing what I would say to whatever thief would have the audacity to rip up his garden and plant Bermuda grass when I finally said to my friend: 'ya know, I been writing for sixteen years, and the word 'gentrification' has never made it into a single one of my poems.'

Gibson still questions her white race, with the injustices they keep on carrying out to other races (Line 35- Who are my people? Where is my rage when they are stealing brown and black people's homes?). She even goes ahead and states the privileges of what being white entails and also calls out her fellow countrymen for not being able to speak up of the injustices her own race perpetrates to people of colour. Her tone changes in these in stanzas 13 and 14 as she laments of police brutality that had Eric Garner, a black man choked to death yet he was not resisting his arrest. Gibson is angry and disappointed with herself too for taking a long time to speak up on the demeaning things her race is doing:

'I am writing to tell you that I am furious with my own pace, furious that I could be holding the candlestick of a microphone for this many years and have it burned this far down without shining a hell of a lot more light on the truth of what I know white is.' (Lines 42-44)

In conclusion, Gibson's poems are like a portrait that depicts the suffering of certain minority groups in America. Her poems tell stories that show the emotional and physical damaged caused by people to these groups. The real life scenes she describes sound dramatic and are quite vivid, creating a picture

of how these communities are suffering silently by having their voices ignored or not listened to.

4.2.5 The Girl I don't know

Kibet in this poem raises the issue of male privilege in the African community. This can be seen in line 6 where men are considered the rightful heirs of their family's property. The African customary law recognizes patriarchy as a prevalent feature in which women are considered as the minors in society making them not able to have property under their own name, hold traditional leadership positions and lastly they are not able to inherit property (Tebbe, 2008). In this poem, the poet gives instances where boys get more appreciated than the girls. Line 6 'Her brother is heir to everything they own' this simply means no girl child has the right to inherit the family wealth: as long as she has a brother in existence, he is considered as the heir.

Line 36-37 speaks about the female freedom fighters that belonged to the Mau Mau movement but they were never remembered for the work they did; instead, their male correspondent took all the glory, recognition and ended up being celebrated more than them.

According to the Convention on the Rights of Children Article 28 of 1979, every child has a right to education and it is the duty of the state to ensure so by having free and compulsory primary education. The article further states the aims of education in society which are to develop the child's personality, talents and mental abilities to the fullest potential so that they and the society can benefit from it. Apart from all that, education allows a child to learn how to respect their seniors, give them a cultural identity, a sense of belonging and direction which is a normal requirement for a growing individual. By marrying off, this young girl ends up being denied her right to education and this prevents her from even knowing what she would love to pursue in life since all her decisions are made for her (Line 7, 12, 19). Another form of girls being denied an education is seen in line 26 of the poem, 'There's something about the Taliban man who shoots a girl for going to school.' The Taliban is considered as an extremist Islamic group that is based in the Middle East. A research done by Cortright and Persinger (2009) showed that girl schools in

Pashtun area in Pakistan were being attacked more than boy schools and these attacks were specifically done by Taliban members. The attacks carried out were either by arson, murder of teachers and acid attacks on female students. These attacks made female students get scared to attend school making their parents be protective over them and make them stay home as their male counterparts got an education. All the poet is trying to do is bring forward the debate of educating a girl and why they should not be neglected due to certain culture and tradition.

4.2.6 God made man first but God made woman last

The title of this poem depicts the strength women have and what they go through in their day to day life because they are considered to be the weaker sex. Kibet attempts to tell his readers the struggles women go through in each and every stanza of the poem.

The poem begins with the poet recognizing himself as the son of a strong black woman who has managed to raise him as a single mother with no help from her husband (Line1-6). He goes ahead and says:

‘And I am a son of a pen, the nib on your preferred pens
I am words shaped up by your handwriting
I am known to education simply because my mother
chose to go into that boxing ring and face Mike Tyson
she was bitten on her ear so all my years I can never forget that
I am a son of a woman who fought for my education
Who starved, so I could be educated?’

(Lines 12-18)

This stanza states the sacrifices women in Africa have to make to ensure the comfort of their children. Kibet, compares his mother’s strength by comparing it to her going to fight Mike Tyson, who is considered as one of the world’s greatest boxers. Tyson here symbolizes all the challenges the mother has to face to ensure her children get an education in a society that does not value it as much.

He describes how the mother has to bear with the emotional abuse she goes through at home and never complains about it. Her husband cheats on her and she sticks onto the marriage for the sake of her children and respect to customs and traditions. Since it is considered disrespectful to question your husband's whereabouts even though he is performing his manly duties. This description is seen in stanza 5 and 6 of the poem in lines 22, 26 to 28. She even contracts HIV from her husband but still lives life positively like nothing has happened to her (Line 21). All this depicts the strength some women in the African society have as they go about their day to day life being bread winners for their families.

Stanza 7 of the poem, from lines 30-34 bring up an African tradition that involves a woman being inherited when her husband passes on. The poet shows how the woman is voiceless and is pained by this decision but she has to remain silent and strong for her children:

‘This is for that woman in Ahero, with muscles on her eyes,

Because she has managed to push back tears
so her children could not see her pain
because it hurt when her husband died,
it hurt when she was forced to be inherited by her late husband's
brother.’

(Lines 30-34)

The poet finishes the poem by stating, ‘God made man first but God made woman to last’ (Line 41) which depicts that women are much stronger than men because of how they choose to handle the challenges they experience in life.

In this poem, Kibet highlights the flawed traditions found in the African society that allow men to act in certain ways as their wives, daughters or mothers ensure the family is being provided for. Each stanza in this poem depicts a challenge a certain woman is going through and how they have chosen to handle it. The main ideas of this poem are to show what women in the African

society go through but they choose to remain strong and handle it the best way they can. The poet manages to draw his audience to have a vivid image of the things women have to put up with in society today just to ensure their families are comfortable.

4.2.7 Form ni gani?

In this poem, the poet uses a Sheng title to ask a rhetorical question to the men in society. '*Form ni gani?*' simple means 'What is the plan?' Sheng' is recognized as a slang language spoken by the urban youth in Kenya, so using this title could be a way that poet was targeting a young audience. The poet calls out men to take up responsibility for their actions and choices they make when it comes to family planning and respecting women.

'But look at us... men,
always dying to have sex, unprepared, unprotected,

out of marriage, before marriage, violently...

Yet we will die before we claim our children,
those out of marriage, before marriage,
those we got by forcing ourselves onto daughters of parents raising a
child to raise their future.'

(Lines 9-14)

From the lines above, the poet states the reckless behaviour of men and how it affects girls in society today. He notes men to be quite sexually active, willing to do whatever it takes to suppress their needs which lead them molesting or abusing innocent girls. After doing so, they do not take up responsibility for their actions which end up affecting the girls who fell victim to them. Kibet tries to shame them for being unaccountable for messing the lives of women they do not plan to have anything concrete with.

Kibet gives voice to women by illustrating that they are the ones who take full responsibility of a child she bore:

Where I come from,
 when a child cries, *anapelekwa kwa mama yake* (it is taken to the
 mother)
 When a child poops, *anapelekwa kwa mama yake.* (it is taken to the
 mother)
 When a child needs to eat, *anapelekwa kwa mama yake.* (it is taken
 to the mother)
 When a child needs to be ready for school... *Mama yake.* (the
 mother)
 (Lines 4-8)

The stanza above shows how women are left to cater and care for their children because men are not ready to take up responsibility. In lines 26 to 28, the poet mocks men as to how they would like to have many children but they are not yet ready to take up the duties women have to perform at 3am when their babies start making a fuss.

He ends the poem by calling out to the government representatives to also take up their responsibility and consider the needs of women before theirs (Lines 33-40). He even gives men a piece of advice to give other women the respect they deserve, just like how they treat their female relatives.

Kibet's view in this poem is that men should also take up responsibility when it comes to raising a child and the workload should not only be left to women.

4.2.8 Respect the models

In this poem, Kibet advocates for the rights of female models in Kenya. He talks about how they are taken advantage of by older men. The first part of the poem talks about how the modelling industry targets girls of with a specific body structure:

'And if you are tall enough you can be a model.
 But you have to be petite.
 When you are a young girl with a big body, that's what you are, a
 young girl with a big body,
 not a model.' (Lines 3-6)

The persona of this poem is a naïve village girl called Nakamet, who has her mother struggle to send her to the capital city of Kenya to compete in a prestigious beauty contest (Lines 7-10). Kibet talks about how the beauty industry preys on young girls like Nakamet who take advantage of them in exchange of being 'sponsors.' A sponsor can be defined as an older man ready to take care of your financial needs in exchange of sexual favours (www.bbc.co.uk). Kibet views these men as predators since they have nothing to offer these young girls minus taking advantage of them because they are familiar with the type of background these girls come from:

'When you are in a modelling camp,
they train you how to walk;
they just forget to teach you how to walk away from sexual advances.'

(Lines 13-14)

One major thing the poet notices is that most of these young girls who come to participate in these beauty pageants, want to help their families out when they go back home. He states this by saying:

'When you are an 18 year old girl,
from a home with a missing cow,
you do not want to go home before you have found something bigger
than a goat, as big as a cow, or bigger than a cow.'

(Lines 18-21)

They never get to fulfil this dream because certain men take advantage of their innocence and end up making drop from the competition. Sadly the only thing they end up remembering is how they can still go back home and maybe start new future plans back there (Lines 31-33).

In this final poem, all the poet wants is certain men to stop taking advantage of the young girls in the modelling industry. He wants the girls to actually dream big and learn to turn down sexual advances that may end up ruining their future plans if they ever win a pageant.

Kibet's four poems selected for this thesis paint an image showing how women in the African society need to have their rights looked into. So many are taken advantage of because they are considered as the weaker sex, yet they would

like their dilemmas voiced out. He steps in to do so for them by addressing different issues women experience but nobody voices them out that much.

4.3 Racial Profiling

4.3.1 Privilege is never having to think about it

Gibson brings up the issue of racial profiling in the poem *Privilege is never having to think about it*. Racial profiling is a matter of concern in America but there is not much philosophical research done on it (Zeckhauser & Risse, 2004). Glaser (2004) defines racial profiling as an act that involves singling out a person based on their race or ethnicity; most of the times this is done by people who view themselves to have higher authority to the person they have singled out. Glaser further states that the U.S. Constitution protects anyone against unlawful/unreasonable searches and seizures since everyone is entitled to equal protection as per se of the Fourth Amendment. Sadly, this is not being followed by the legal community or the law enforcers since they have worked to define parameters that allow race or ethnicity to define the behaviour of an individual.

As previously stated in chapter two of this thesis, issues like race, sexuality, nationality, gender etc. are discussed in spoken word poetry since social realities and experiences of marginalized and oppressed people are being discussed openly since these poems become personal (Desai 2010). The poet relates to these statements by highlighting issues of racial profiling through the things she has been doing in her day to day life but did not know somehow end up affecting the Black Community indirectly since she is a white woman. Being on tour with Sonya, who is an African American, she gets to see the harsh reality of things especially when Sonya actually asks her about her dressing:

“...are you going to wear that on stage?”(Line 3)

“She says, ‘honey, do you have any idea how much privilege it takes to think it is cool to be poor? You wear that dirty shirt; you are a radical saving the world. I wear that dirty shirt and I am broke junkie thief getting followed around every store.’” (Lines 6, 7, 8)

To Andrea, she does not feel like there is anything wrong with the way she is dressed, apparently these are thrift store clothes and to her she must have been wearing them for a couple of days since one of the things she is wearing is dirty. Sonya on the other hand is quoted having worn a “glossy elegant tailored boom glittering a bold burgundy neckline (Line 1 and 2)” The difference between the dressing of the two ladies brings out certain truths. This is so because one of them knows that if you belong to her race, you are either treated with respect or suspicion depending on how you look and maybe that is why she goes way out of her hand to look good while the other party puts in no effort at all. Basically as a black person in the states, appearance matters a lot if you really want to be on the safe side without getting into trouble with the authorities or anyone of the opposite race. She brings up the Trayvon Martin case that happened in the year 2012. Line 17 quotes Trayvon got shot because of how he was dressed. He was a 17 year old African American boy who got shot in Florida by a neighbourhood volunteer who thought he was acting suspicious; the shooter later claimed it was out of self-defence. To the poet, this should not have happened if it was a white person dressed the same way Trayvon had that is in a hoodie; she highlights this claim in the lines stated below:

“I know it was right then that I walked upstairs and started counting my hoodies in my closet (Line 26)

I have fourteen (Line 27)

hoodies that tell me I will never be forced to dress a wound as deep as my mother’s heart. (Line 28)”

The poet sees that when Black people wear hoodies they are considered to be criminals but when a white person does it, it is okay. No one is hurt because no one becomes suspicious and this gives a feeling of safety to the people.

4.4 Tribalism

4.4.1 My Mother's Pride

The Oxford dictionary defines tribalism as *'The behaviour and attitudes that stem from strong loyalty to one's own tribe or social group'*. The poem *'My mother's pride'* by Kibet talks about the tribalism found in Kenya and how it affects its citizens. In this poem, the post-election violence that affected Kenya in the year 2007 to early 2008 is addressed in paragraph six of the poem. The post-election crisis happened because of election anomalies that led the supporters of a specific political party leader attack the tribesmen of his rival.

The poet questions society as to why they judge their neighbours in terms of their tribes, instilling fear in them and having them not feel safe in their own homes. One being maltreated because of the tribe they belong to is something the poet wants to stop. In line 73 to 82 the poet addresses the fear instilled in the people and children. He gives an example of Justo, a six year old boy who left his beloved toy behind because they had to live in a hurry:

'Even six year old Justo was not safe while I watched his tennis ball that he loved to kick and bounce around on the ground,

on the ground because they left in a hurry so of course he must have forgotten it

forgotten it because he was not safe and was not safe because of his tribe?'

Through Justo, the poet shows how tribalism affects children and how some are too young to even comprehend the activities being carried out. All they know is they had to go because their parents are trying to keep them safe. This makes them leave behind their cherished belongings.

4.5 Early Marriage

4.5.1 The girl I don't know

In the poem, *The girl I don't know*, Kibet sets to examine one of the factors that inhibits the girl child from getting an education. This happens to be forced early marriage. Munyao (2013) states that numerous problems associated with gender factors affect the Kenyan children especially the girl child. As a result of gender related abuses, the Kenyan girl suffers violation of human rights. The Kenyan constitution recognizes a child as someone like the girl child in Kenya. In lines 7-25 of the poem where the young girl ends up being married off to an old man, she forgets about her dreams and future plans because she has no entitlement to them anymore. She ends up being a mother at an early age yet she is still a child. Her sons get an education and become successful in life but they still repeat the same fate that befell their mother (Marrying a girl who is not of age). The girl child in this situation is denied love and care from her family and since she is a child bride, she ends up being exposed to sexual experiences that causes trauma to her. Kibet, mentions this trauma in line 14-15, he describes it as 'making war on a body that is too young to ask for anything but peace.'

4.6 Sexual Violence

Sexual violence can be defined as: 'Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work (www.who.int).'

4.6.1 The girl I don't know

The poet addresses the sexual molestation young girls go through in the African community. He talks about a young girl being married off to an old man, he ends up forcing himself on her. 'Her body might be hers to wash but you should see her parents hand it over like a bag to an old man' this line shows how the young girl has no right to her own body. She is compared to a bag, a thing held and handled by anyone. Basically this young girl has no voice and

is viewed to be something useless with no much value. This is one reason her parents do not protect her and marry her off to someone older than her own father.

'12 year old wombs have raised sons who went ahead to become doctors, soldiers, then came back home to make use of another 12 year old womb, they call it tradition. I call it violence' the poet addresses how certain practices are still carried. He compares these traumatic experiences to violence since he previously stated 'by making war on a body' he sees it as harmful and destructive. Ironically, these very practices are carried out by educate men who know the destructive nature of forced marriages and sexual violence, but they turn a blind eye, with a simple excuse of this being a tradition practice that must still be carried out.

Young girl's dreams end up being broken because of traditional practices and this causes them to lose their voice '...the girl I don't know becomes what she is told to become...' As he ends the poem, he sees no hope for young girls since most male role models are busy abusing women either physically 'There's something a little girl learns by watching a male leader slapping a woman on national TV and he gets to keep the right to be called a leader.'

4.6.2 Blue Blanket

Gibson forces people to examine what is happening to women in society today. This poem focuses on the theme of sexual violence and its impact to the victims. The poet never specifies the sexuality of the women she is writing about and for. Any sexuality found in the poem is assumed by the listener/reader, but leading comments could also be taken in a non-sexual way with references to a "she." "She" is either a romantic partner or a friend and it's left to the audience to decide and for no other reason than their curiosity – this poem is not about sex or sexuality, it's about survival and change. "She knows how much control is worth, knows what a woman can lose when her power to move is taken away," shows a solidarity between women, reflecting on the idea that rape has nothing to do with sex, but everything to do with control. For too long, survivors of rape and other sexual violence have been forced to keep quiet and not acknowledge that anything happened. "But how much closer to

free would any of us be if even a few of us forgot what too many women in this world cannot," addresses this forced silence. How can other people learn and fight back if everyone simply forgets and moves on, ignoring the epidemic of attacks? Still, no matter how much a woman wants to help, the want to forget and be free again is always there. "Bruises on her knees from praying to forget, she's heard stories of Vietnam vets who can still feel the tingling of their amputated limbs, she's wondering how many women are walking around this world feeling the tingling of their amputated wings..." In the middle of the poem, Andrea describes the physical reaction to rape with "What would you tell your daughter of the womb raped empty, the eyes swollen shut, the gut too frightened to hold food, the thousands upon thousands of bodies used and abused." She brings the body into the poem, showing that it isn't just mental. Political aspects of rape are included with the lines, "listening for the broken record of the defence answer the question, answer the question, answer the question miss, why am I on trial for this," and keeping in mind the fact that rape doesn't happen to only one type of person, "would you talk to your daughter, your sister, your mother like this, I am generations of daughters, sisters, mothers, our bodies battle fields, war grounds, beneath the weapons of your brother's hands." "What would you tell your daughter" is a line repeated throughout the poem, continuously reminding the listener that this fight isn't for today, it's for tomorrow and for children not even born yet. With that in mind, Gibson closes the poem by saying, "She's not asking what you're gonna tell your daughter she's asking what you're gonna teach your son." By teaching our sons what is right and what is wrong and what respect is, it could be possible to eliminate the act of sexual violence by eradicating the need for power over another person and their body (Blue).

Rape is often seen as penetrative, penetration being an act reserved, stereotypically, for men. The very essence of rape (power, dominance, penetration) is rooted in compulsory heterosexuality. It is, historically, a masculine thing to want power, domination, and penetration and rape offers all three at once. The rape doesn't end after the "seven minutes of the worst kind of hell" but continues "bolt the doors to your home... walking to your car alone get the keys in the lock please, please, please, please open like already you

can feel that five fingered noose around your neck two hundred pounds of hatred digging graves into the sacred soil of your flesh” (Blue). Stereotypically, men have the compulsion to be heterosexual and engage in heterosexual sex, while women are expected to comply. Those who don’t, like lesbians, are ostracized and could be forced to comply. “Lesbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. It is also a direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women” (Wittig, 1992).

The very thought of men having a “right of access to women” is part of compulsory heterosexuality. Man brings home the money, while the woman stays to watch after the children and cook and when man wants to have sex, woman better be ready. We have entered a new millennium and the stay-at-home, subservient women are becoming the minority – women are taking control of their bodies, lives, and minds. A concept of Wittig’s I found especially poignant is the discussion on oppression and finding one’s identity within oppression. “There is no possible fight for someone deprived of an identity, no internal motivation for fighting, since, although I can fight only with others, first I fight for myself” could be fitting for many victims of sexual violence (Wittig, 1992).

Women who feel their identity has been ripped away by an attack may have problems joining the “I’m a survivor” brigade until she has found herself once again. Religion can be tricked into compulsory heterosexuality. The line “bury me in a blue blanket so their god doesn’t know I’m a girl cut off my curls I want peace when I’m dead” reflects a concept of religious followers encouraging the thoughts of men being superior (Blue). Gibson’s words lead me to believe she would fear further oppression and pain even after she dies, but only because she is a girl.

4.7 Conclusion

One is able to see how the two poets Kibet and Gibson address issues that affect minority groups in society today, especially in their countries.

Gibson laments on the treatment of members of the LGBTQ Community and the black race in America. She shows how these treatments end up leading to

hate crimes against people from these communities, resulting drastic consequences. Kibet on the other hand tackles issues that affect women in the African community. He shows how certain cultural traditions cause psychological trauma to the victims and sometimes physical damage. They are two different poets but they are united by tackling issues affecting minority groups. They both are pushing for fair treatment of these groups so as to make society better. Any person reading these poems can clearly see how they speak against the atrocities being carried out to these groups and they both see the foolishness of the groups/people perpetrating these heinous acts.

The poems express a sense of bitterness, anxious, disappointment and pensiveness to the heinous acts being committed by certain groups. All they want is someone to put an end to these activities which keep on hurting innocent people.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this research, I set to examine how two spoken word poets discuss the theme of social injustice in some of their selected works. The spoken word poets being dealt with was a female American by the name Andrea Gibson while the other was a Kenyan male by the name Ken 'Mufasa' Kibet. In this study, I looked at the developments of spoken word poetry and how this form of poetry is used to talk about social injustices happening in society today. To understand spoken word poetry and its relation to the representation of social injustices in society, I traced its roots, development and contribution to poetry today. In the past poetry never addressed certain major issues happening in society. Poems were based around themes like war or love. Spoken word poetry opened a gateway to have taboo issues in society today discussed. I personally chose to work on the themes of privilege, early marriage, racial profiling, sexual violence and tribalism (All under social injustices) because these are daily challenges that affect two different communities and sadly nothing much is being done about them by the respected authorities. Having the poets address these issues becomes a major deal because we get to see it from a different perspective since it is vividly described and we get to understand them and see how we can help out.

In the poems 'Privilege is never having to think about it', 'Profit', 'Orlando', 'Letter to white queers', 'The girl I don't know', 'God made but man first but God made woman last', 'Form ni gani' and 'Respect the models' they all bring out the social injustice of privilege or certain groups getting better treatment than others. One major observation viewed from the poems 'Privilege is never having to think about it' and 'Letter to white queers' alludes from past historical events that portrayed certain injustices done to African Americans during the

slavery period and the LGBT community. 'Profit' on the other side alludes from the Bible and war crimes done by the Americans to different countries. 'Profit' acts as a wakeup call to Christians today who live a hypocritical life while defending their actions by claiming their religion is superior to others. By bringing these comparisons in all her poems, the poet Gibson shows how things are yet to improve in society today and people are still committing hate related crimes. By outlining these autocracies through vivid descriptions, she wants the people to question their ways and see how they are affecting other innocent people. Kibet on the other hand in 'God made man first but God made woman last' celebrates the African female leaders like Dr. Wangari Maathai by recognizing himself as her son showing that sees women in society as being strong rather than weaklings to men, as how the African society views them. By recognizing the female freedom fighters and the later Dr. Wangari Maathai, this challenges the notion of the traditional African culture being oppressive to women and that women are not able to provide good leadership in society. Kibet does this to challenge the men who still think women should be treated as second class citizens because of their gender. Drawing most of their resources from historical background the two poets try to merge the present and past so as to have their message conveyed. In order to gain a better understanding from these poems, one needs to be conversant with the history of Black people in America, the freedom fighters in Kenya and also the history of the late Dr. Wangari Maathai.

The theme of sexual violence under the poem 'Blue blanket' Gibson challenges men to be answerable to their actions. By making the audience understand how traumatic sexual violence is to the victim and how it can damage them emotionally; the poet chooses not to reveal the sexual identity of the victim. She does this to let the audience decipher it on their own. This could be a way to show her audience and readers that just like any heterosexual human being members of the LGBTQ community do get sexually molested and that does not mean they should never get justice. By speaking up for the victims, she acts as an assurance by encouraging them to speak up on the inhumane injustice done to them. This is a way of having victims not be silenced and also a way to encourage women to come up, speak about their

experiences and seek help so that they can be healed. Kibet on the other hand in his poem 'The girl I don't know' he addresses the issue of sexual molestation in the African community and how it ends up destroying the future of young girls who are married off at an early age. From my observation and analysis, this poem acts like a challenge to the African society following certain harmful outdated traditions. The plight of the girl child still being a concern in the Africa community, Kibet voices out this dilemma wanting the audience to see the damage it is doing and maybe help to act on it by providing justice to the victims.

By bringing up the theme of racial profiling under her poem 'Privilege is never having to think about it,' the poet wanted the audience to see how their actions affects the Black community. Black people being prosecuted or murdered because of their race is a disturbing trend in America. Gibson highlighting this brings speaks for the race that is affected when they get persecuted because of their dressing. She alludes this poem to certain black history court cases like Emmet Till and Trayvon Martin and by doing so, it creates a vivid image for the reader or audience to see the challenges faced by the black community. How difficult it is for them to wear certain clothing being of certain stereotypical white people who are quick to judge. She wants her audience to understand how it is not easy for the Black community to do certain things that the White community enjoy or are able to do. Basically to her, she sees how it is easy to be a target in America, especially when you are an African American or an African. Kibet on the other hand tackles the theme of tribalism in Kenya in his poem 'My mother's pride.' From the title it is possible to conclude that only the mother of the child is proud of his or her child and will do anything to defend or protect them. Having its focus on the 2007/2008 post-election violence that affected certain communities in Kenya, the poet talks about a child by the name Justo who had his childhood cut short because they had to leave their home. The child does not understand why this happened but he figures out his parents are trying to keep him safe. This poem is a highlight of how the post election violence affected quite a number of people from certain communities. Using Justo as an example, it is evident that children were greatly affected making not understand what is happening, having to start a new life

somewhere new and also leaving their cherished belongings behind. Kibet voices this out by showing the effects tribalism has to an entire nation not just a community.

Kibet in his poem 'The girl I don't know' sets to examine early marriage, a factor that inhibits the girl child from getting an education or having a bright future. He talks about young girls being married off to old men and how the girl's children end up repeating the same mistake their father did. Through this poem, the poet highlights the ignorance present in the African community on how people think marrying off a young girl at a tender age means she will bring more wealth to them. Sadly this misconception ends up destroying the young girl's future, causing her body to experience trauma at a tender age. To the poet, he wants such practices to be put to a halt and addressed if possible.

Andrea Gibson, of being an American poet had most of her poems highlighting the challenges non-Christians, Black people and members of the LGBTQ Community experience. She talks about extortion and hate crimes being perpetrated by people from her own race. The horrors documented in her writing makes her question if she can trust anyone close to her. Gibson belongs to two of the groups that is she is a white lesbian. The irony of this is that her race is the one spear heading majority of these heinous acts targeting these groups. This makes her the voice of these communities since she wants fair treatment for them. Ken Kibet on the hand being a Kenyan poet, he mainly focuses his poems on the plight of women and the girl child in Africa. He sees a bright future for most of the young girls being taken advantage off by being married off early, sexually molested or end up going through certain tribal practices that end up hurting them. Because he recognizes himself as the son of the first African woman to have won the Nobel Peace Prize that is the late Dr. Wangari Maathai. Traditionally, a woman in the African cultural setting is viewed as inferior to men but the poet wants this notion to change since he sees there is more women can do but the only problem is they are not allowed to speak up about it. Kibet acts as the voice of most women in the African society, he talks about their challenges and how solutions can be found. Each poet uses a unique way to address their message, Kibet has several times he uses code switching in his pieces. For instance in his poem 'Form ni gani' the

use of Swahili is meant for a specific target audience, most probably the Kenyan youth planning to start a family or those who are sexually active. By using Swahili, he aims to reaching out to the youth in urban centres of lower socio-economic backgrounds who are vulnerable to instances of unplanned pregnancies.

We see the different views from two poets, Kibet and Gibson but they are united in their shared sense of the necessity to address the brutality experienced by certain groups. By comparing these two poets, the study arrived in a conclusion that both poets might belong to two different races but in terms of their views, they share a similar passion in highlighting injustices happening in society today. While spoken word allows the discussion of certain taboo topics to be addressed, it is vivid that these poets do so by addressing certain topics in a unique and direct manner, ensuring that the message is delivered to the audience.

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APPENDIX I

ANDREA GIBSON'S POEMS

PRIVILEGE IS NEVER HAVING TO THINK ABOUT IT

She steps out of the hotel bathroom dressed to the nines, stilettos sharp in her glossy

elegant tailored boom glittering a bold burgundy neckline.

Locks her shining eyes in the worn T-shirt I haven't changed in days and says "are you going to wear that on stage?"

I smile, gloating in the cool of my gritty apathy, the oh so thrift store of my dirty grunge.

She says 'honey, do you have any idea how much privilege it takes to think it is cool to dress poor? You wear that dirty shirt; you are a radical saving the world. I wear that dirty shirt and I am a broke junkie thief getting followed around every store.

That conversation happened years ago

On the same tour where Sonya watched me pay 75 bucks to have my haircut in a way that would make me look like quote "I couldn't afford a haircut".

The same tour that began the day after I was the feature performer at a university's women of colour symposium.

No. I did not ask whether or not they should feature a woman of colour instead.

Yes. I got paid.

I'm pretty sure it was a good paycheck.

Just like I'm pretty sure someone licked the paycheck when Trayvon Martin's gun range targets got sold out in two days

I know those things are not exactly the same

I know I wanted to burn every noose white seam of our cotton flag when Trayvon Martin's mother was on the witness stand trying to convince a jury of mostly white mothers that she could actually recognize the sound of her own son's scream

I know I wanted to split the fucking sky when I heard the whip of the verdict
and Sonya had posted online

“How many different ways can this country tell me I am worthless”

I know it was right then that I walked upstairs and started counting the
hoodies in my closet

I have fourteen

hoodies that tell me I will never be forced to dress a wound as deep as my
mother’s heart

She will never be woken in her sleep to peel my body off gated grass

To beg God to sow the hole in my chest

I know my family will never have to hear justice say it wasn’t until I was lying
in my casket that I was wearing the right clothes

I know a woman who once knew a woman who collected the metal collars
they used to lock around the necks of black children to chain them to the
auction block

I was told she hung them on the walls of her home for decoration

I remember when I used to believe that was the entire definition of racism

Believed there was no one hanging in my wardrobe

Believed my style had nothing in common with king Leopold’s

Thought I am not outfitting the Congo in spilled blood

I am just buttoning up my shirt here

I am just rolling up my sleeves

I am not unstitching the face of Emmett Till

I am not unzipping the wail of his mother’s grief

The laces of my shoes are just the laces of my shoes

They could not tie a body to a tree.

I am not fashioning a noose here.

Sonya, do you hear me?

My compassion is not a costume

My passivity is not hate
My privilege is not genocide
This is just how I cut my hair
That was just how they cut the cheque
This is just how I dress
Your wound
I don't even think about

what I wear

PROFIT

Jesus was a revolutionary
a prophet
His mother Mary
was a goddess
Still neither could have prophesized

the dark that is now upon us
Since the Christian right
went wrong
Now white men drop bombs
in the name of a faith

born from a song of thou shall not kill
left the will of their God unheard
every word ignored in the name of profit
While it was their prophet
who broke bread with the poor

walked on bare feet
Now they're still talking the path of their God
but they're walking the path of their greed
Preaching do unto others

as you would have them do unto you
but they've painted their cross red white
and blew 140,000 Japanese people away in one day
see
they will always be their brothers' keepers
as long as their brothers are rich and white

You only have to look at the facts
death row is black
Those cloths on American backs sewn by brown hands
in lands they've made theirs for the taking
raping whole cultures

while proclaiming themselves holy
but there are holes in their truth so deep
Jesus would weep for his own name being like that
Christian means Christ-like
and Christ was neither white nor like this

Neither white nor like your so called Christian right
(there's no such thing as a right wing
wings are made for angels
and I'm yet to see a halo on your head
blasphemy defines the things you've said)

Quoting scripture amidst your war cry
your belly full and warm
while millions die beneath the weight of your sins
and there are days I'm ashamed
to wear the colour of your skin

there are days I'm ashamed
I ever prayed to the same god as you

but really I don't believe I did
I don't believe that's true
Because Christian means Christ-like

and Christ was not like you
not like this
wasn't bound to the cross
wearing combat boots and clenched fists
Tonight the world wails an unbearable suffering

and you are the thorns and nails
How many more will you crucify with your white lies
deeming yourself supreme and above
when your God's love
is the last thing you've ever lived by

Better cross your heart and hope you die a peaceful death
before Jesus comes back
finds his way to NBC and CBS
calls you out on all war you been living
and all the peace you been talking

Now that would be some reality TV
worth watching.

ORLANDO

When the first responders entered the Pulse Nightclub
after the massacre in Orlando,
they walked through the horrific scene of bodies and called out,
“If you were alive, raise your hands.”

I was sleeping in a hotel in the Midwest at the time,

but I imagine in that exact moment, my hand twitched in my sleep.

Some unconscious part of me,
aware that I had a pulse that I was alive.

The next day, I woke to the news that an assault rifle had fired
202 bullets to a gay bar in one of the worst massacres in US history.

The massacre of people who did not lead the dance floor when they
heard gunshots because they thought they were the beats of a song.
Everyone around me spent that day grieving and every
tears tasted like someone's dance sweat drying in the morgue.

Later that night, I was performing for an audience that had spent two hours in

line waiting to get to

the bag checks and metal detectors.

On stage, I couldn't keep my hand from covering my heart.

I kept scouring the club for the fastest route to every exit.

I knew the person working security within the

text war and wasn't keeping his eyes on the door.

I knew there was a man in the fifth

row picking at the seams of a duffel bag.

Every few seconds, I died.

The balcony for the glint of whatever might aim to tear the bodies of

the spirits of the boys holding hands or the girls with hair

cut short as my temper when rage as decimal I can actually get to.

When I not just grieve, sick and ruined,

watching history not be history, but in the music not be music.
 Knowing someone having the best night of her whole life said,

"This is my favourite song,"
 and then a rifle lifted over a bathroom stall and
 emptied a magazine into the kidneys of a grown man texting,
 "Mommy I'm going to die "
 his hand prints in blood on the wall

reaching for people dying in the fatal position.
 People covered in their friend's blood,
 sobbing too hard to hide from their own deaths.
 People outside pushing bandannas into bullet wounds.
 It's true, what they say about the gays being so fashionable.

Their ghosts never go out of style.
 Even life, it's like funeral practice.
 Half of us are already dead to our families before we die.
 Half of us on our knees trying to crawl
 into the family photo that night on stage.

I kept remembering being fifteen at Disneyland,
 wearing my best friend's hoodie
 like it was my boyfriend's class ring.
 How many years it took me to just touch her face.
 How many years I spent praying my heart could play dead to the

threat
 was gone to the world changed till history was history,
 but history just keeps coming for the high, shooting up bodies,
 kids drumming up reasons to have metal
 detectors at poetry readings with the poems.

They're just unanswered calls to people who claim

their God, their apathy, is unwilling to accept the charges.
 Dear God, how broke do you have to be to not buy people,
 time to get out the fucking door when the song goes to hell,
 when this world drunk on hate decides blood is wine and drinks its

fill in the only place they ever thought was safe and the only place
 they thought they did not have to hide in,
 the only place they were wanted because,
 because of who they loved and how they loved and how they loved
 till someone walked to the bodies and asked who was still alive.

And hardly anyone put their hand up

LETTER TO WHITE QUEERS

Another Black man has been murdered in our streets. And I am white as a ghost haunting my own grief. Thinking, who am I to feel grief? Thinking, my god, who am I not to?

I am writing to tell you about 1998, when Matthew Shephard, a young gay man from Laramie, Wyoming, was tied to a fence, beat with the butt end of a pistol till his skull cracked, left for eighteen hours in Wyoming's frozen cold, his face entirely covered in blood, except for the places his tears had washed clean.

I'm writing to tell you I was in a coffee shop in Seattle, holding my love's hand when I heard the news. The grief tsunami'd from my eyes immediately down to my knees. I could feel them buckle, each one of them, like a Bible belt snapping around the neck of an eighteen hour scream.

On the street outside the coffee shop, I could feel my last bit of unburied faith reach for the shovel in the dug-out grave of my chest. I could feel my own mother kissing Matthew's forehead in a hospital where she knew even the doctor's god was rooting for a flat line. For weeks, I couldn't look at anyone I

loved, anyone I loved, without imagining hate crushing their spines into a powder that would be snorted at a party after a football game.

Four months prior, James Byrd Jr., a Black man from Jasper, Texas, had been chained to the back of a truck, dragged for three miles along the concrete, conscious the entire time, till his head was severed and his remains were found in eighty-one separate places along the side of the road.

I am writing to tell you that I do not remember where I was or how I felt when I heard that news. For a lot of our community, 1998 was the year only Matthew Shepherd died.

I am writing to tell you, I have been spending a lot of time thinking, who are my people? What determines whose death will storm my chest, will flood my eyes, will make me wanna burn down a fucking city and pray with every ounce of my winded grace that more than the smoke will rise?

Last year, an older gay man in my neighbourhood shot himself in his head in his own bed. After his family refused to attend the funeral, refused to collect his belongings, the mattress was hosed off, tossed in the backyard and his house was foreclosed.

I heard a rumour that the house was gonna sell for an incredible deal. I immediately imagined flocks of straight people going on and on about how his grave would look fabulous with a granite countertop. I kept picturing the holiday party they would throw in the bargain of his unliveable pain. His life nothing but a stain to them, nothing but something to scrub into the rug in the new nursery.

I had walked by his house for weeks, imaging an SUV full of soccer cleats running back and forth over his ghost in the driveway. I had been up all night, picturing what I would say to whatever thief would have the audacity to rip up his garden and plant Bermuda grass when I finally said to my friend: 'ya know, I been writing for sixteen years, and the word 'gentrification' has never

made it into a single one of my poems.'

Who are my people? Where is my rage when they are stealing brown and black people's homes?

Last week, someone posted a comment on my Facebook page that said, 'you're the kind of bitch it would be a pleasure to hang.' And that was tucked in between thousands of other comments, equally as fucked, some of them like yours from people in the queer community who furiously disagreed with the post I wrote about Mike Brown being murdered by a white supremacist system designed to murder the hearts, bodies, and spirits of people of colour.

Something difficult to stomach in this life is the fact that we might all learn and grow at a pace that will hurt people, but I am writing to tell you that I am furious with my own pace, furious that I could be holding the candlestick of a microphone for this many years and have it burned this far down without shining a hell of a lot more light on the truth of what I know white is. You wanna know what white is? White is having somebody tell you you'd be a pleasure to hang, having a whole lot of people agree, and not even thinking to lock your door⁵⁰

that night. White is knowing that if somebody is going to be hung, you are not the one. White is having all of Eric Garner's air in our lungs tonight, no matter how queer we are, no matter how anything we are.

If we are white, we have Eric Garner's air in our lungs tonight and that means our breath is not ours to hold. That means our exhale is owed, is owed to mercy, to the riot of our unowned hearts, to the promise that who we weep and fight and tear down the sun for will not only be our own faces in the mirror. To the knowing that we cannot ever, ever be married to apathy without wearing the rings of the fucking poplar tree when our country is still lynching, is still calling the hung bodies shade. When our country is right now rolling a red carpet from the blood that pours and people are dying for us to notice our footsteps are red. Our silence is not a plastic gun. It is fully loaded. It has lethal aim. It is 1998 and James Byrd Jr. is not yet dead.

He is walking from a party towards his house on the other side of town, and
you and I are somewhere. We are somewhere, pouring what we will pour into
the cups of our hearts, spilling what we will spill into the screamed open
Earth

BLUE BLANKET

Still there are days when there is no way
not even a chance
that I dare for even a second glance at the reflection of my body in the mirror
and she knows why
like I know why she only cries when she feels she's about to lose control
she knows how much control is worth
knows how much a woman can lose when her power to move
is taken away
By a grip so thick with hate it could clip the wings of God
Send the next eight generations of your blood shaking
and tonight something inside me is breaking
My heart beating so deep beneath the sheets of pain
I could give every tear she's crying a name
a year
and a face I'd forever erase if I could just like she would
for you
or me
But how free would any of us be if even a few forgot what too many women
in this world cannot
and what the hell would you tell your daughter?
Your someday-daughter when you have to hold her beautiful face to the
beat-up face of this place that hasn't learned the meaning of STOP
stop
what would you tell your daughter
of the womb raped empty?
the eyes swollen shut, the gut too frightened to hold food

it was seven minutes of the worst kind of hell
seven
And she stopped believing in heaven
mistrust became her law, fear her bible, the only chance of survival
don't trust any of them
bolt the doors to your home, iron-gate the windows, walking to the car alone,
get the key in the lock like
please
please, please, please open
like already she can feel the five-fingered noose around her neck, two-
hundred pounds of hate digging graves into the sacred soil of her flesh
please
please, please, please, please open
already she can hear the broken-record of the defence:
"answer the question, answer the question, answer the question miss"
why am I on trial for this?
Would you talk to your mother, your daughter, your sister like this?
I am generations of mothers, daughters, sisters
Our bodies battlefields, war zones beneath the weapons of your brothers'
hands
do you know they've found land mines in broken women's souls?
black holes in the parts of their hearts that once sang symphonies of creation
as bright as the light on infinity's halo?
She said, I remember how love used to glow like glitter on my skin before he
made his way in,
Now every touch feels like a sin that could crucify Medusa
kali Oshun Mary, bury me in a blue blanket so god doesn't know I'm a girl,
cut off my curls, I want peace when I'm dead
Her friend knocks at the door, it's been three weeks, and don't you think it's
time you got out of bed?
No.
The ceiling fan still feeling like his breath, I think I need just a few more days
of rest
bruises on her knees from begging to forget

she's heard stories of Vietnam vets who can still feel the tingling of their
amputated limbs

she's wondering how many women are walking around this world still feeling
the tingling of their amputated wings,

remembering what it was to fly, to sing

Tonight

she's not wondering what she would tell her daughter

she knows what she would tell her daughter, she'd ask her what gods do you
believe in?

I'll build you temple of mirrors so you can see them

pick the brightest star you ever wished on and I'll show the light in you that
made that wish come true

Tonight

she's not asking what you would tell your daughter, she's life deep in the hell,
the slaughter

has already died a thousand deaths with every unsteady breath

a thousand graves in every pore of her flesh

and she knows the war's not over,

she knows there's bleeding to come

knows she's far from the only woman or girl trusting this world no more than
the hands trust rusted barbed wire

She was whole before that night, believed in heaven before that night

and she knows she's not only one, knows she won't be the only one

Tonight

She's not asking

what you're gonna tell your daughter,

She's asking what

you're going to teach

your son

APPENDIX II

KEN KIBET'S POEMS

THE GIRL I DON'T KNOW.

This is about a girl that I don't know.

This girl that I don't know is 4 feet tall... or probably 3 and a half,

I mean who knows, I don't know!

The girl I don't know doesn't have a phone to keep a playlist on,

but she plays at least with her hair.

Her brother is heir to everything they own...

her body might be hers to wash, but you should see her parents hand it over
like a bag,

to an old man.

They must be so proud,

a broken old man,

broke her virginity without breaking her.

In school, teachers will always tell you to fight for your dreams

but how does a young girl fight for her dreams when an old man is busy

fulfilling his dreams of having 10 children by lying on top of her,

by making war on a body that is too young to ask for any other thing than
peace.

The girls I know want to be married at 26, at 27, at 31,

the girls I know want to be fashion designers, pilots, business owners...

but at 12years old,

the girl I don't know becomes what she is told to become...

an idea of a mother but really just a child in reality.

She can act like a mother but her body can't fake the muscles that took years
to make our mothers,

our mothers.

12 year old wombs have raised sons who went ahead to become doctors,
soldiers,

then came back home to make use of another 12 year old womb, they call it tradition. I call it violence

There's something about the Taliban man who shoots a girl for going to school.

There's something about beautiful weddings that end with rape at night.

There's something about being 17 with three children and a heart full of holes.

There's something about men's interpretation of the Bible and Koran that doesn't come against miserable treatment of women.

There's something about a 14 year old girl contemplating divorce.

There's something about men, about male police officers in Uganda stripping women-but then again the gun in their hand was not handed to them to protect human dignity.

There's something about dignity, about a police officer at the report desk coming back to ask, '*huyo wa rape ako wapi?*'

There's something about history that ignores heroes for being women.

There's something about Mau Mau's history that chooses to forget the role of women.

There's something about history, about men, about the history of men...

like when a law was passed in Yemen, raising the minimum marriage age of girls to 17,

it was met with so much opposition, it was repelled.

There's something about repelling, old men are not supposed to be attracted to 9 year old girls, especially not in the mind of a father.

There's something a little girl learns by watching a male leader slapping a woman on national TV, and he gets to keep the right to be called a leader.

GOD MADE MAN FIRST BUT GOD MADE WOMAN LAST

I am a son of a woman, a black woman,
black, because she is too coloured.

I am a son of a woman,
this woman I call mama, she is strong

and I am not talking muscles here but even if I was,
she is stronger than that gym instructor who made a girl pregnant and ran
away

I am a son of Wangari Maathai, a son of the forest, a son of Africa
I have got paws for hands
I push away negativity with so much force I am a lion on toes
a lion today because yesterday my mother hid her tears and her fears

I told her about my bad days but she never told me about her sleepless
nights

And I am a son of a pen, the nib on your preferred pens
I am words shaped up by your handwriting
I am known to education simply because my mother
chose to go into that boxing ring and face Mike Tyson

she was bitten on her ear so all my years I can never forget that
I am a son of a woman who fought for my education
Who starved, so I could be educated.

And I am a son of a voice
A voice of Fatuma

a single mother living positively with HIV that she did not seek to have
when she chose to love a man who did his manly duties, alright
He went out and brought home food...and HIV

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

So yes this is for a woman, alright

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

This is for that woman in Ahero, with muscles on her eyes,

Because she has managed to push back tears
so her children could not see her pain
because it hurt when her husband died,
it hurt when she was forced to be inherited by her late husband's brother.

It hurt.

So I know of a woman who fights with nothing but her spirit
I know of a woman who in life,
has fought more battles than a few loud mouthed freedom fighters we know
I know of a man living on a 5th floor who will not see my point of view

But let me insist

God made man first but God made woman to last!

FORM NI GANI?

It is not a man's job to carry a child...

Not on his back, not in his belly.

And it's definitely not a man's wish.

Where I come from,

when a child cries, *anapelekwa kwa mama yake*.

When a child poops, *anapelekwa kwa mama yake*.

When a child needs to eat, *anapelekwa kwa mama yake*.

When a child needs to be ready for school... *Mama yake*.

But look at us... men,

always dying to have sex, unprepared, unprotected,

out of marriage, before marriage, violently...

Yet we will die before we claim our children,

those out of marriage, before marriage,

those we got by forcing ourselves onto daughters of parents raising a child to raise their future.

Schools have invitation letters;

you are not a college student until a college accepts you.

But some traditions have made sure there are no invitation letters for girls to accept to be mothers.

I have seen children raise children then call themselves mothers in a child's voice.

How many times have you seen girls drop out of school to raise another son who might as well grow up blind to what it took for him to be 2 years old, 9 years old, 19 years old..

I don't have enough puns or rhymes to make this a dope poem.

Nothing dope or worth a rhyme about watching your belly become a mountain figure, while you figure out how to be a mother and a father figure to a child whose father keeps his class time, keeps his future, and keeps doing everything to be further from you.

But how weird is it for a man to say he wants 8 children, 6, 5, 4, 7...

When he is not the one who wakes up to feed a child at night or sooth the child at 3am...and for 8 children, how many 3am nights are those?

How about what 'we' want for a change...

Where I come from,
men get to parliament then come back home with mountain bellies that will
not give birth to an idea, let alone a child, not even lava!
To my home MP,
put a woman's belly before yours just for one term;
invest in family planning in our local hospitals and areas.
Let's have these conversations man!
Let's protect our societies and our future.
And as men,
respect all women as you would respect your sister.
Let's respect their future as we would respect our sister's.

RESPECT THE MODELS

When you are 18 years old,
you are old enough to do just as you are told.
And if you are tall enough you can be a model.

But you have to be petite.

When you are a young girl with a big body, that's what you are, a young girl
with a big body, not a model.

At 18, Nakamet got a chance to represent her county at the Miss Kenya
beauty pageant.

Her father could not have allowed it,
but when God took him, He took away his decision too.

So her mother sold a cow, to get Nakamet to Nairobi. *Akajitupa Nai, msupa
wa county.*

Make up *kibao, lazima, msupa wa county.*

When you are in a modeling camp,
they train you how to walk;
they just forget to teach you how to walk away from sexual advances.

They advise you to pray to your God.

They just don't tell you on the Seventh day their god did not rest, he made
them predators and you their prey.

When you are an 18 year old girl,
from a home with a missing cow,
you do not want to go home before you have found something bigger than a
goat, as big as a cow, or bigger than a cow.

So a week before the finals Nakamet and the other contestants sat before
men with belly's bigger than her dad's to present their 'project'.

Men with the size of that belly have the ability to sponsor you.

As a matter of fact, marvel should work on a hero with big belly powers.

When you are a dark skinned girl talking about albinism, you don't expect
your body to be part of the presentation.

But it always is,
your body is special.

Nakamet did not find a cow or anything bigger to take home.

She gained a few numbers on her contact list and lost the crown.

Someone took her dignity too and she didn't know how to get it back.
At least she knew her way back home.

MY MOTHER'S PRIDE

I have cornered kings and queens but my friends try to belittle me saying, it was just chess!

I have been told to stop acting like a woman but with a mind like mine it is hard not to be pregnant... with ideas!

I have been told to be realistic, to focus on what is in sight, what is important, but what about that what happens at night, like stealing of coffins in burial sites, isn't that a 'grave' matter?

I am old school, I have been raised with Reebok and Nike so the first time someone said to me Gucci I asked, who she?

I have watched stars, not those in the sky, those on TV

I have watched kids smile at flying kites

I have watched myself in the mirror, long, couple of times!

I have watched them too, give me the same stares,
stares asking when will I be a man

so I have questioned if I have extra balls at least apart from my eye balls!

see, I have doubted my integrity, I have let things SIT

when the lack of school fees, the missed classes STOOD to blame

I have forgotten those times I was a warrior and stuck to that moment when I was low, defeated,

I have died inside, so how can I care about tomorrow?

I have dwelt in the past because I see no future and I am not blind.

I have lost myself, my mind,

so what do I look for first, myself or my mind?

I have been in love,

I have been in love because I have watched her feel for him what I feel for her.

I have been a rock made of ice because I have melted in daylight

I have woken up alone to a loud silence so I have watched time go, move,
just go!

I have paid my rent late for so long last month when I paid early my landlord

said, 'ah, *hatanilikua nimesahau, hii ni ya last month?* [I had even forgotten, this is last month's huh?]

I have been a best man in a wedding before and I watched the bride marry a good guy but I was right there... the best man!!

I have stared at my phone a whole day without it ringing, with just a single text..

not from a best friend but Safaricom!

I guess they didn't have to start with a hi if they simply wanted to remind me about my okoa jahazi balance, I understand.

but I have gone places in my mind

that my feet, can only envy.

I swim in thoughts that no drop of water made be,

I am dying of a hunger that has nothing to do with my stomach

See, I have strength in places my muscles cannot stomach!

So yes, I don't know what my future holds

but as it stands right now, I am single

single because she was the kind that filled her chest with stockings to make them bigger for men eyes, what men eye, while I,

wanted a woman who will feel her heart with word and has a destiny bigger than what men see!

see she, wasn't meant for me, me whom she, dressed in skimpy dresses for showing me her thighs,

her idea to leave me breathless,

when all I have ever wanted is a woman who will make me want to live more not breath less!

so yes I don't know what the future holds

but I know my up has been because of throwing, giving up those memories of my mother throwing up, because of alcohol,

I don't know what my future holds

but I know about yesterday when I stood shaking watching the body of her who I called a friend

and I closed my lips so I could scream in my head

I closed my eyes because that was the only way that I could see her smile
and I realized right there that it is stupid for me to brag that I am tall
when life itself , is short!
so yes I don't know what the future holds but I ask,

I ask will it be different from a past,
that past where Michael Jackson 'moon walked'
because I think it would have made a lot of sense if Neil Armstrong came up
with the moon walk!
I ask myself, who do we think we are when we first think of our class one kids
having laptops,
when there are kids out there learning under trees.
There are kids with empty stomachs
and buying those laptops first for them, means we are saying,
it's okay to die of malnutrition when you get to class three or four but before
you do can you please learn how to double click, you know!

Who do we think we are?
when the first thing that we do when we get to parliament, when we get hired,
is to demand for a pay rise
forgetting that the first thing that we did when we voted you in was divide
ourselves,
forgetting that the first thing that happened in 2007 when we divided
ourselves,
was bloodshed!
so you go strong on your salaries while we stay weak with division.
I keep telling myself, before anyone says that we cannot kick him or her out
of parliament, they should remember we kicked polio out of Africa!

Who do we think we are?
when we choose to define our neighbors by their tribes,
because I have watched an election go bad,
I have watched my neighbor camp in a police station because she was not
safe

and she was not safe because of her tribe?

Even six year old Justo was not safe while I watched his tennis ball that he loved to kick and bounce around on the ground,

on the ground because they left in a hurry so of course he must have forgotten it,

forgotten it because he was not safe and he was not safe because of his tribe?

while the robbers we knew, the child molesters, the wife beaters, the rapists, they were safe as long as they were of a convenient tribe?

see, how we live confuses me

I knew I had a right to be confused in a world where a guinea pig is not a pig, right?

but now I know I really do have a right to be confused in a country where we fight for people who have their houses surrounded with security while we ourselves walk around with bodies that cannot even stand as guards!

If there is anything that life has taught me,
it's that, we should fight!

not our neighbors, but fight those things that will make you and your neighbor to fight!

if there is anything that life has taught me,
it's that, the peace that is needed out there, is in here.

for there to be peace in the world,
there must be peace in our minds, peace in our homes, peace in our neighbourhoods,

that is the kind of peace that is needed out there.

so let it grow, let peace grow,

let it grow as our kids watch us live with ourselves, amongst ourselves,
because they are too short they might need to look up to us!

if there is anything that life has taught me,

it's that I am not my mother's tribe, I am her pride!

because when I was born she didn't say, 'whoa, another Kalenjin!'
she said, 'another son!'
so hire me, work with me, love me, protect me, care for me,
not because of where I am from but because of who I am...
my personality, my ability,
because I am not my hair, I am not the colour on my skin, I am not the size of
my shoe,
I am who I chose to be and those I did not chose!
so yes I am not my mother's tribe, I am her pride.
you and me can make our mother proud by living together in peace, love and
unity
our mother, KENYA!

PLAGIARISM REPORT

SPOKEN WORD POETRY:
 A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE SELECTED POEMS OF THE AMERICAN
 POET ANDREA GIBSON AND THE KENYAN POET KEN 'MUFASA' KIBET SELECTED
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