

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA - LEGON



**A RETURN TO THE PAST: A STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY
GHANAIAN SPOKEN WORD POETRY**

BY

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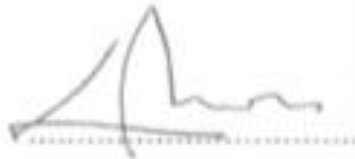
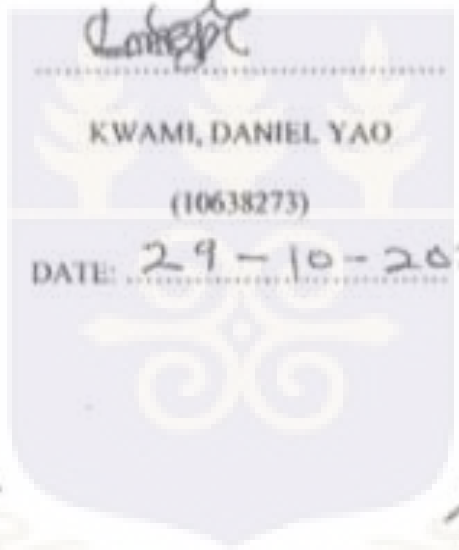

(10638273)

**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA,
LEGON IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR
THE AWARD OF M.PHIL. ENGLISH**

OCTOBER, 2020

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, this work is a result of my own original research under supervision with the exception of the cited references. This work has not been submitted in part or whole to any other university or institution.

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DEDICATION

To my family.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my supervisors, Prof. Kofi Anyidoho and Dr. Kwame Adika for mentoring and guiding me throughout my study. I also wish to acknowledge the help of all lecturers in the Department of English. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Agbogla, my family and friends for their help.



Table of Contents

DECLARATION	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
OVERVIEW	1
1.1. Background	1
1.1.1. Spoken Word Poetry: What is it?	1
1.1.2 Oral Poetry in Africa	4
1.1.3. A Brief History of Spoken Word Poetry in Ghana.....	8
1.1.4. The Contemporary Spoken Word Poets as Artists	12
1.2. Problem and Objective	15
1.2.1. Objectives	15
1.2.3. Research Questions.....	16
1.2.4. Significance of the study	16
1.3. Organization and Methodology.....	16
1.3.1. Organization of Thesis.....	17
1.3.2. Methodology and Scope	18
1.3.3. Expectations.....	21
CHAPTER TWO	22
LITERATURE REVIEW	22
OVERVIEW	22
LITERATURE ON TRADITIONAL AFRICAN ORAL POETRY	22

DISCUSSIONS ON CONTEMPORARY SPOKEN WORD POETRY	29
CHAPTER THREE	37
GESTURES AND, DRUMS AND MUSIC IN CONTEMPORARY SPOKEN WORD POETRY	37
OVERVIEW	37
3.1. Some Spoken Word Stages and Performance in Ghana	38
3.1.1. Introduction	38
3.1.2. Some Spoken Word Stages in Ghana	38
3.1.3. Conclusion	41
3.2. Gestures and other Paralinguistic Devices	41
3.2.1. Introduction	41
3.2.2. Performance at Pensa Meeting – Nana Asaase	42
3.2.3. Performance at Music of Ghanaian Origin (MOGO) – Nana Asaase	48
3.2.4. Performance at Goethe Institut – Nana Asaase	52
3.2.5. Performance at Dr. Hilla Limann’s Memorial Day – Chief Moomen.....	55
3.2.6. Performance on TGIF on Metro TV	61
3.2.7. Solo Performance - Chief Moomen.....	69
3.2.8. Conclusion	75
3.3 Drums, Music and Voice.....	76
3.3.1. Introduction	76
3.3.2. Drums in Contemporary Ghanaian Spoken Word Poetry	78
3.3.3. Music and Voice in Contemporary Ghanaian Spoken Word Poetry.....	86
3.3.4. Conclusion	98
CHAPTER FOUR.....	99
ARTIST – AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP AND STYLISTIC QUALITIES IN CONTEMPORARY SPOKEN WORD POETRY	99

OVERVIEW	99
4.1. More on Spoken Word Stages and Performance in Ghana	100
4.1.1. Introduction	100
4.1.2 Other Spoken Word Stages in Ghana	100
4.1.3. Conclusion	103
4.2. Artist and Audience.....	103
4.2.1. Introduction	103
4.2.2. Artist – Audience Relationship.....	103
4.2.3 Conclusion	118
4.3. Stylistic Qualities	119
4.3.1. Introduction	119
4.3.2. Stylistic Qualities in Contemporary Ghanaian Spoken Word poetry	119
4.3.3. Conclusion	145
OVERVIEW	146
5.1. Conclusion.....	146
5.2. Recommendations	148
5.2.1. Contemporary Spoken Word Poetry as a Tool for Projecting African Values	148
5.2.2. Studying Spoken Word Poetry in Classrooms	149
5.2.3. Spoken Word Poetry as a means to whip up Interest of Children in Poetry	150
Works Cited	150
APPENDIX A.....	155
APPENDIX B	170

ABSTRACT

There are many scholarly works on oral poetry in Africa and Ghana. Some scholars have also on performance poetry in Ghana and Africa as a whole. It is interesting to note however that not much has been done on contemporary spoken word poetry in Ghana. It is undeniable that contemporary spoken word poetry in Ghana is gaining popularity hence the need to study it in order fully understand its role and importance in society. It is observed however that most of the work on contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry is found on non scholarly blogs and social media.

This study therefore aims at taking a look the history of contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry and to trace the link between the art and traditional African oral poetry. In this research, I attempt to identify and examine various features of traditional African oral poetry that are present in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry in order to show how the traditional art is remediated in contemporary times.

This study seeks to arouse more scholarly interest in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry in academia and also encourage the use of the art to teach Ghanaian history, culture and traditions in schools.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a general overview of the study. It provides a background to and a definition of spoken word poetry and touches on various ideas about contemporary spoken word poetry including its possible beginning. This chapter also briefly discusses certain aspects of traditional oral poetry in Africa in order to open up the bases for the discussion on contemporary spoken word poetry in Ghana and its relation to traditional oral poetry.

This chapter as well gives a general review of spoken word poetry in Ghana and points to its origin and how far it has developed in contemporary times. It further mentions popular names in spoken word poetry in Ghana.

The chapter further states the problem and objectives of the study as well as how the study is organized and the methodology used for the study. It further mentions the research questions, purpose and significance of the study.

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Spoken Word Poetry: What is it?

As the name suggests, spoken word poetry could be described as poetry that is spoken or presented by word of mouth. This description points out that, any poem, written or otherwise that is recited could be termed spoken word poetry. Asihene (2017:3) is of the view that spoken word poetry is “a type of performance or oral poetry that places emphasis on word play (pun) and

rhythmic delivery.” His definition stresses the play on words and rhythmic delivery. This emphasis could be attributed to the youthful exuberance that accompanies spoken word poetry since it is the youth that practice this art form most in contemporary times.

Dooley (2014) holds the view that poetry in its various manifestations is as old as humanity and that “spoken poetry bound cultures together in a shared identity and enabled elders to teach fundamental truths to the younger generation.” He adds that “spoken word poetry also gave us the ability to express beauty, making us unique among the world’s species.” (p83). The idea of beauty, togetherness and sharing of certain truths about life appears to play a key role in Dooley’s definition. The importance of spoken word poetry can therefore not be underestimated.

Dooley (2014) adds that:

Spoken word poetry is performed poetry. As with many performance arts, spoken word poetry encourages the performer to focus on gestures, rhythm, and originality. And as with all performance arts, spoken word poetry requires the performer to “show” him or herself to the audience; that is to be seen. This element of seeing and being seen, embedded in spoken word poetry, makes this art form ideal for building a true learning community.” (84)

It is observed that, Dooley identifies spoken word as performance arts. The spoken word poet therefore has to perform his poem and it is this performance feature that makes spoken word poetry interesting and attractive.

Similarly, Raphael d’ Abdon (2016) contends that:

“Spoken word poetry is the process of organising a poetic text around the voice, i.e. the sound produced by the instrument-mouth. This is a twofold process that (regularly) begins with writing and (usually) ends with an oral performance.” (47).

Just like Dooley, d'Abdon also adds the element of performance to his description of spoken word poetry. This leaves no doubt therefore that spoken word poetry goes beyond the mere recitation of poetry and touches on certain actions and gestures that will make the recitation livelier and interesting. It is clear as well that, spoken word poetry is that which must be “spoken” or presented orally, and this presentation must be accompanied with performance. The performance however could vary depending on how the individual poet desires to make his art relevant and admired by an audience.

Another attempt at defining spoken word poetry comes from Grace An (2006:128). She gives a definition of spoken word poetry that pinpoints certain features which are associated with it. She says spoken word could be seen as “a form of literary art or performance in which poetry, stories, and text are spoken rather than sung.” Her definition of spoken word also has the element of performance which points to the fact that performance is key in the art form. She adds that “often associated with background music in a performance setting, spoken word can be improvisational or planned, and, although it is not sung, the prose of spoken word is usually more artistic than normal speech.” (128). This brings forth two other features of spoken word poetry. First, the art is usually accompanied with background music. The poem itself is not sung but as it is recited, background music accompanies it. It could be stated that, music is integral to the performance of spoken word and the poet decides on how to put the music to good use in his performance.

Also, the recitation of the poem is different from normal speech. The recitation of the poem is done in a rhythmic way such that, although it is not in the form of a song, it is neither in the form of everyday speech too. The skill of such recitation makes it artistic and captivating.

Spoken word poetry could therefore be described as the oral performance of written or unwritten poetry to an audience. The poetry could be performed to a live audience or recorded to be watched later.

It is common these days to see young men and women perform poetry and call themselves spoken word poets. These people could be found in the churches, on Facebook and other social media platforms, in schools and during various social functions. This shows how fast the art form is spreading. It is therefore important to consider the study of the art form in order to fully understand it and make it a serious art which could stand the test of time.

1.1.2 Oral Poetry in Africa

The fact that the basic feature of spoken word poetry is its oral mode of presentation leads it to a possible link to the traditional oral art form. Okpewho (1985:3) defines oral literature as “literature delivered by word of mouth.” Other features would be explored in the work in relation to traditional oral literature. For this reason, African traditional oral poetry is discussed briefly in order to open up a clearer background to this study.

Africa was considered by some Europeans as a continent without literature. Ruth Finnegan (1970:23) quotes Burton who holds the view that Africa has no literature and no poetry. This view, Finnegan herself sees as untrue as she writes:

“In fact, there is a strong indigenous tradition of both unwritten and, in some areas, written literature in Africa. The oral literature in particular possesses vastly more aesthetic, social, and personal significance than would be gathered from most general publications on Africa.”

It could be clearly seen that the study of African oral literature offers more information on and about Africa than things that other people have written on Africa since oral literature comes as original information from Africans themselves. This draws attention to the need for the continuous study of oral literature in Africa.

Finnegan (1970:1) further admits that “the concept of oral literature is an unfamiliar one to most people brought up in cultures which like those of contemporary Europe lay stress on the idea of literacy and written tradition.” It is not surprising to see such people regard oral literature in Africa as not important. Okpewho (1985:3-4) observes that European anthropologists of the nineteenth century held the wrong view that “there was nothing of true poetic merit in African oral literature.” These anthropologists felt that “poetry is a mark of an advanced culture.” The implication of this is that, since Africa was considered not advanced, it had nothing like poetry. It falls however on Africans to identify the richness of oral literature and pay particular attention to its study in order to make more advances and do away with all the misconceptions that the Europeans have about African oral literature.

On the importance of oral literature in Africa, Abarry (1994) opines that “oral literature contains our worldview, history, cherished values, fears, hopes, and aspirations.” This suggests that oral

literature is at the centre of African life since the values, hopes and aspirations of Africa are contained in the oral literature. These ideas which are contained in oral literature have been transferred by word of mouth from generation to generation which keeps the African legacy alive. Kabira and Mutahi (1988:1) hold similar view that oral literature “is a medium through which a people’s values and philosophy are transmitted.” They add that “it is of great importance to study oral literature if we are to appreciate the people’s feelings, hopes, fears, aspirations, philosophy and aesthetics.” (p3) The whole life of a people is in their oral literature and the study of the oral literature would open up most of the things there is to learn about the people.

African oral poetry dates back to time immemorial. Nketia (2012:1281) talks of “a tradition of poetry which is recited and not sung.” He observes that this form of poetry is in connection with chieftaincy. Speaking of this form of oral poetry as a tradition indicates that it is an art form which has moved from one generation to another over the years. He identifies some Akan oral poems as praise poetry, recitative poetry, the poetry of horns and drums among others. Indeed African oral poetry is unique and Nketia captures this in the following: “We do not spend time on the daffodils or the nightingale, the night sky and so on as things in themselves, but only in relation to social experience.” The environment is thus used in relation to social life in African traditional oral poetry. In other words, the coexistence of man and his environment is well represented in the oral poetry of the Akan and for that matter Africans.

According to Okpewho (1992), the academic study of African oral literature started in the 19th century. Over the years however, many scholars have contributed much to the study of the

discipline. Perhaps the most important thing to have happened to the study of African oral literature, as noted by Okpewho (1984:12) is the fact that Africans themselves have taken up the task to study their own oral literature. “A major advance in the study of African oral literature as literature came when native African scholars began to undertake research into the oral traditions of their own people. The need to carry out a thorough study of the oral traditions of Africans necessitated the involvement of Africans themselves in the study. Various aspects of the oral tradition which would have been neglected and thrown away by European scholars because they do not understand them well enough could be maintained and explained by Africans themselves since they are familiar with the tradition.

Kofi Awoonor, for instance, is one African scholar who studied African oral traditions. In his work, *Guardians of the Sacred Word, Ewe Poetry* (1974), he admits that some of his poetry was influenced by the traditional oral poetry of Ewes. He states that although he participated in the performance of oral poetry as a child, he has realized as an adult that there is still much to learn from the tradition. This explains that no other person but the African could do a better work in the study of African oral literature.

Awoonor’s work focuses on three Ewe poets, looking at their biography, poems and their performances. Awoonor (1974:1) states that, he has not come to study the oral poetry of his people like a foreigner but as a child of his own people. In his words, he has not come:

“as an ethnographer or a collector armed with modern technology speaking to anonymous informants, but as a child of the soil, a poet who is striving to make some relevant statements on the contemporary African’s condition, eager to absorb the sounds, rhythms, and rituals that nurtured him.”

Oral poetry in Africa should therefore attract more Africans especially to areas which have not been fully explored. Wanjiku Kabira and Mutahi also carry out studies in Gikuyu oral literature. They are of the view that “through oral literature, people can correct the false image and distortions of their past that have occurred through colonial experience.” (Kabira and Mutahi, 1988:3) For them, it is the study of oral literature that could help many Kenyan communities whose culture, self-image and history among others was on the verge of total distortion and destruction by colonialism.

The importance of African oral literature of which oral poetry is an integral part cannot be overemphasized. In recent times, it is important to look at various aspects where oral literature has a strong presence and see how it affects such areas towards a positive development of, and in Africa. From various articles mentioned above, it could be inferred that oral poetry forms the very foundation of the life of Africans which is reflected in the written poetry of most African poets as seen in Kofi Awoonor.

1.1.3. A Brief History of Spoken Word Poetry in Ghana

Spoken word poetry has become popular in Ghana in recent times. By spoken word poetry in Ghana, I mean the situation whereby poets memorize their written poems and perform them on stage to an audience through the use of props, costume and musical instruments. All over social media and at literary festivals, many young men and women put up performances and identify themselves as spoken word artists. Many people however think that the art form is new in Ghana and that Ghanaians have learnt the art from the USA.

Asihene (2017:32) agrees that spoken word poetry in Ghana is “gaining popularity.” He however states that the art form saw its emergence in the mid-2000s. He observed that stage performances of spoken word poetry became vibrant in the mid-2000s. He cited “Ehalakasa Talk Party” which was created in 2007 as the biggest stage for spoken word poetry. Perhaps, it is the inception of Ehalakasa in 2007 that informs Asihene’s conclusion that, spoken word poetry started in the mid- 2000s.

It should be noted however that contemporary spoken word poetry started in Ghana in the 1970s when some Ghanaian poets decided to send poetry to the stage and put it into live performances. Indeed, this decision formed the foundation of the now vibrant spoken word poetry in Ghana.

One of the Ghanaian poets who has been given credit in relation to spoken word poetry is Atukwei Okai, who started performing his poetry in public spaces in the 1970s. Anyidoho (1991:45) notes that, “until recently the central figure in this phenomenon of poetry presentation in performance was Atukwei Okai, and he has been given due credit for helping popularize poetry performance as a legitimate mode of artistic expression.” Spoken word poetry as discussed earlier in this work is identified as poetry delivered by word of mouth through performance. The very beginning of what is seen now as contemporary spoken word poetry could be traced to the 1970s with Atukwei Okai as one of the poets who popularized the art of spoken word poetry in performance in Ghana.

From the 1970s, another situation of spoken word poetry occurred when Afro-Caribbean poet, Edward Kamau Brathwaite visited Ghana in 1987. He also practiced spoken word poetry as he

performed his poems to an audience at the Du-Bois centre. Other poets, Kobena Eyi Acquah, Kofi Anyidoho, and Kofi Awoonor also performed during the event.

It is interesting to note that, the journey did not end there. Some poets took it upon themselves to write poems which could be easily performed beyond reading the text or just memorizing it. Such performances involve the use of more than one person in the actual performance. One such poet, also a pioneer of “lifting the cold text from the page and bringing it to life on the stage” is Kofi Anyidoho. In 1984 for instance, he composed the poem, “Children of the Land: A Sequence for African Liberation” which was staged in Accra to mark O.A.U (A.U) day. This poem was again staged in 1987 and 1988. Other poems from his collection, “Earthchild” were also staged. Such performances and staging of poetry has taken roots from then till now and the young spoken word poets of contemporary times like Chief Moomen have also taken up staging of poetry thereby making spoken word poetry a real art form that can be enjoyed. According to Anyidoho, “this dramatization of poems selected from his collection, Earthchild (1985) was designed as an experiment in returning written African poetry to its dramatic oral roots.” In effect, the beauty and importance of traditional oral poetry could be experienced in the written poetry of contemporary times through performance.

This initiative from Anyidoho has continued to today and some of his poems were staged in 2017 at the National Theatre during the celebration of his 70th birthday.

Another poet who has contributed to the development of spoken word poetry in Ghana is Kobina Eyi Acquah and his group, “The Living Echoes” who also performed most of Kobina Eyi

Acquah's poems in the late 1980s. Indeed, one cannot write the history of spoken word poetry in Ghana without giving due acknowledgment to Kofi Anyidoho, Atu Kwei Okai and their contemporaries who continued performing their poetry until young poets started learning from them. It is interesting to note that although Kofi Anyidoho belongs to a different generation of poets, he mounts stages and performs with young contemporary spoken word artists such as Nana Asaase. Gradually, the art of spoken word poetry started gaining strong grounds in Ghana as performances took place.

Spoken word poetry started seeing more artists especially the youth in the 2000s and this opened the art form to many young poets. In 2007, Sir Black and Nii Lantey, put up a show named "Ehalakasa" where various spoken word poets exhibited their art. Since then, Ehalakasa has been a platform that opens every year. Asihene (2017) describes Ehalakasa as "the oldest and the biggest spoken word platform in the country." This platform has seen performances from the likes of Nana Asaase, Agyei Baa, Chief Moomen, Rhyme Sonny, Jewel King among others.

From Ehalakasa, other platforms for spoken word poetry such as Alewa, Ghana poetry Festival, Anansesemkomo, Sankofa Sessions among others also emerged. Currently, media houses such as Citi fm and Joy fm also provide forums through which spoken word poets present their art.

Contemporary spoken word poetry in Ghana has developed from the 1970s with published poets but currently it is done mainly by young poets and most of them have not published their works in a written document. Spoken word has thus become their way of publishing their works. There are many young men and women all over social media who practise spoken word. This art form is now popular with the youth especially.

1.1.4. The Contemporary Spoken Word Poets as Artists

Since the type of literature under discussion in this work is oral, the one who speaks the words of the poem, the spoken word artist must be considered in the analysis as the very way and manner in which he successfully presents the poem contributes to the totality of the poem. No doubt Okpewho (1984) sees the place of the oral artist as central to the study of African oral literature. He asserts that:

“If there is anything of artistic or literary merit in African oral literature, then it should be possible to examine those who perform this literature and see in what sense they could be given the same sort of recognition that we give to novelists, playwrights, and poets in the culture of writing.” (1984: 20).

Kabira Wanjiku (1987) states some characteristics of the oral artist and is of the view that the "artist's skill is often a question of memory, organization, creation and understanding of the audience." The title of an artist then cannot be seen as a mere title, since it involves the mastering of certain important skills in order to effectively deliver a piece of poetry. The artist can therefore be referred to as the very source of performance because it is from him that the memorized poem comes to life as well as how to plan movement on stage and communication with the audience. The poet as an artist must therefore be seen as a special individual who is psychologically balanced and has mastered the needed skill to memorize and present his poetry to his audience in a way that will leave a great impression. The artist and his performance are therefore one.

It must be noted that, closely associated with the performance is the artist himself. Finnegan (1970:5) observes that “a particular atmosphere...can be conveyed not only by a verbal

evocation of mood but also by the dress, accoutrements, or observed bearing of the performer.” This explains the fact that other things apart from the use of voice, gestures, facial expressions and bodily movements also account for the successful performance of a poem. It must be noted however that the voice and gestures do not occur by themselves. The same can be said about the dress and the poet’s way of behaving during the performance. It is the poet who puts the dress on and it is he who puts up a certain behavior and movement on stage in order to drive home his ideas. The performance of traditional oral poetry or contemporary spoken word poetry cannot be said to be complete without taking into consideration the individual artist who harmonizes costume, props, gesture, voice, facial expressions among others to put up the performance. The individual artist is unique in what he does and every artist differs in their style of performance. It is therefore important to take the individual artist and his performance for study.

In support of the need to take into account the artist as a distinct individual in the study of oral poetry, Okpewho (1992:21) draws a distinction between the artist and the non-artist so that the misconception that every member of a community could also perform a poem or tell a story would be erased. He states that:

Although the artist is exposed to the various forms of cultural and other education available to every member of the society, what generally separates the artist from the non-artist is a more than average sense of what is beautiful and exciting, a high capacity for expressing oneself with effective idioms and images, and a deep interest in practicing a particular type of art.

If this is true of traditional oral literature in Africa, then the contemporary spoken word artist must also be considered as a unique individual who has the special ability to see and understand

life and to put it in a beautiful form to be appreciated by others. This artist should also be seen as an individual who loves art and is driven by passion to tap into its power for the benefit of society.

A Brief Biography of Nana Asaase

Nana Asaase is known in real life as Philip Boakye Dua Oyinka. His artistic name is “Nana Asaase,” a name he got from his grandmother. Nana Asaase means “King of the Earth.” He hails from Nyamekrom in the Eastern Region of Ghana. He attended St. Augustine’s College in Cape Coast and later went to the University of Ghana, Legon where he studied English and History. He worked as a PR Assistant at Origin8 Saatchi & Saatchi and Global Media Alliance. Currently, he is a literary coach at Asaase Inscriptions and has decided to devote his time to the arts. He has performed on many stages including Ehalakasa, Citi FM’s MOGO, GUBA Awards UK, among others. He recently got featured by CNN in a documentary on Kente. His impact on spoken word poetry in Ghana cannot be downplayed hence the use of his works for this study.

A Brief Biography of Chief Moomen

Abdul Moomen Muslim, known in the literary circle as Chief Moomen is a spoken word artist and playwright who hail from the Northern Region of Ghana. He is one of the popular spoken word artists in Ghana and has had the opportunity to perform at various events, national and international. He studied creative writing under Prof. Kofi Anyidoho, one of Africa’s finest poets and playwriting under the renowned playwright, Prof. Martin Owusu at the University of Ghana.

Chief Moomen is the founder of Bambu Centre, a place for the promotion of arts and learning and the development of performance based activities, stage productions and publishing. He currently produces and directs the Heritage Theatre Series, named “Wogbejeke” which is staged

to re-enact the history of Ghana from ancient to modern times through a series of plays. Chief Moomen's contribution to contemporary spoken word poetry cannot be neglected.

1.2. Problem and Objective

Spoken word poetry has gained popularity in Ghana over the years and the fact that some spoken word poets are invited to perform on various occasions both national and private shows the recognition that has been given to the art form. It is important to note however that despite this popularity and recognition, the art form is yet to have any significant effect on the Ghanaian academia. Most articles and discussions on spoken word poetry in Ghana could be seen on non-scholarly blogs. Few works have been done on it in the academia. This leaves the art to be disregarded by many people which prevents the true nature of the art from being uncovered.

It is the aim of this research therefore to stir up scholarly interest in contemporary spoken word poetry in Ghana. This study focuses on various aspects of spoken word performance in order to draw a link to African traditional oral poetry. If this is successfully done, contemporary spoken word could also be considered for serious academic business just as African oral poetry.

1.2.1. Objectives

This research has the following objectives:

- to trace contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry to African traditional oral poetry
- to find out how African traditional oral poetry is remediated in Ghanaian spoken word poetry

- to identify the thematic concerns of Ghanaian spoken word poets
- to identify the importance of spoken word poetry in contemporary times

1.2.3. Research Questions

The following are the questions this study tries to answer;

- does contemporary spoken word depend on African traditional oral poetry?
- how is traditional oral poetry remediated in contemporary spoken word poetry?
- what are the thematic concerns of contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poets?
- what is the importance of spoken word poetry in contemporary times?

1.2.4. Significance of the study

This research is important because of the following reasons:

- It will bring out the relevance of contemporary spoken word poetry in shaping the youth of contemporary times
- It will provide the avenue for more research into understanding the art of spoken word
- It will help educators to adopt spoken word as a means of teaching African history and poetry
- It will also take the art from the “streets” into the classroom

1.3. Organization and Methodology

This part presents a summary of the various chapters and provides information on the research methods employed in this study. It also points out the scope of the study.

1.3.1. Organization of Thesis

This research work is divided into five chapters. Chapter one gives a background of the study, providing a definition of contemporary spoken word poetry. It offers a general view on oral poetry in Africa based on what various scholars have said. It also provides a brief history of spoken word poetry in Ghana and brief biographies of the selected contemporary spoken word artists for this study. In addition, the chapter presents the problem and objectives of the study as well as the significance, theoretical framework and methodology adopted to carry out the study.

Chapter two discusses existing literature on spoken word poetry and oral poetry. Contributions of various scholars on African literature (poetry) are discussed first and literature on spoken word in general and in Ghana are discussed afterwards. Various characteristics of oral poetry and spoken word are discussed.

Chapter three has three parts. The first part discusses some spoken word stages in Ghana and how they help project the art. The second part looks at gestures and paralinguistic devices in selected performances. The third part discusses the use of drums, music and voice.

Chapter four briefly discusses other spoken word stages in Ghana and focuses on artist and audience relationship, and stylistic qualities.

The final chapter, chapter five is mainly a summary of the study. It further offers some recommendations for both scholarly and non-scholarly study on spoken word poetry in Ghana.

1.3.2. Methodology and Scope

For this study, qualitative research method is used. The researcher conducted a library research and read scholarly works on African oral poetry. Audio-visuals of spoken word performances were also downloaded online transcribed and analyzed. [Links to the various performances are provided in the “words cited.”] The researcher also recorded some of the performances live and analyzed them. The choice of audio-visual recordings over tape or voice recordings is due to the fact that the full effect of the performances would not be realized if the gestures, facial expressions, movements among others are not considered in the study. The audio-visuals will present the actual performance which will prevent the discussions from being based on only the voice since the voice alone will lead to the written form of the poetry. As Anyidoho (1983:23) explains, “The oral poem must not only be heard; it must often be seen as well.” Scholarly articles, papers and other publications on spoken word poetry were also used in the study.

Although various works on spoken word poetry in general are used, the study limits itself to the Ghanaian situation. Since all the spoken word poets cannot be studied in this research, two of them are considered. The study limits itself to Philip Oyinka, known in performance as Nana Asaase and Chief Moomen. The spoken word artists are studied because it is through them that the spoken word poetry comes to life. In other words, they are the kegs that hold the fresh wine of spoken word poetry. These poets are selected because they have a good number of followers on social media and they feature often on state and academic related occasions. Anybody who reads this work will therefore be able to relate to the analysis and conclusions drawn.

Framework

In an attempt to state what contemporary Ghanaian spoken word entails, Anyidoho (1991) in his paper, *Poetry as Dramatic Performance* offers some guidance. Anyidoho (1991:42) states that "the concept and practice of performance are central to artistic expression and experience in African tradition." This explains the need to pay particular attention to the performance aspect of any form of oral art in Africa.

Anyidoho (1991) classifies contemporary poetry performance under three groups: Level One Performance - Dramatic Reading, Level Two Performance - Fusion of Poetry, Music, Action, and Level Three Performance - Total Art.

In level one Performance, the poet still holds on to the written poem while he reads it to his audience and adds gestures, facial expressions and other paralinguistic techniques. In Level Two Performance, the poet either memorizes the text and presents it in performance or still holds on to the text but makes little or no reference to it during performance. There is the use of music and the involvement of the audience at this level of performance. For Level Three Performance, the poem is staged in the form of drama with the use of "other artists and technical resource persons - directors, actors/actresses, dancers, singers, drummers, producers, etc. - and by such material accoutrements as costumes, props, lighting and sound effects." Anyidoho (1991:47)

It is observed that what contemporary Ghanaian spoken word artists do comprise elements of Level Two Performance and Level Three Performance. These artists make use of costume, props, drummers and the involvement of the audience as well as the use of the voice, pause, rhythm, gestures and other paralinguistic techniques in their performances. What these artists do

can best be described as a hybrid of level two and three performances. Using this categorization, this study focuses more on the performance rather than the text of the poems.

Since contemporary spoken word poetry in Ghana is oral in nature, it may be a hasty decision to strictly fix its study into a single framework as there is the call by scholars for a multifaceted approach to oral literature. Anyidoho (1985:153) indicates that oral literature "is too complex and varied a field to be neatly summed up in one general theoretical formulation." He again advises that scholars should not put:

undue emphasis on theoretical constructs that, though elegant and impressive in themselves, do not necessarily help to resolve or at least clarify our many methodological dilemmas and our inability to fully account for the various processes of the oral tradition in literature. Anyidoho (1985:153)

This study is therefore mindful of the point made by Anyidoho so as not to fall into the temptation of squeezing the analysis into a tight bottle which could affect its outcomes and the desire for further research into it.

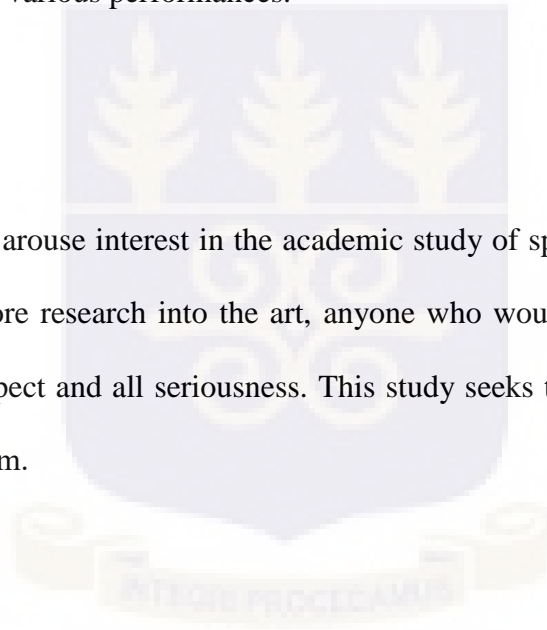
However, in order to provide a clearly defined space for this study, the practical nature of the performances is looked at from a literary point of view as well as their socio-cultural relevance. Anyidoho (1991:41) considers the study of oral literature to be "more of a practical rather than a theoretical nature" since "the dominant mode of communication in Africa is oral." Similarly, Bauman (1977:9) holds the view that verbal art as performance forms a part of human

communication. This point out that attention must be given to its practical occurrence rather than its written text. He thus indicates that "a performance-centered conception of verbal art calls for an approach through performance itself." He further states that "performance becomes constitutive of the domain of verbal art as spoken communication."(11) Both scholars indicate that a flexible approach to oral literature would be much helpful.

Based on the above views of Anyidoho (1991) and Bauman (1977), this study focuses on the practical enactment of the various performances.

1.3.3. Expectations

This study is expected to arouse interest in the academic study of spoken word poetry. It is also expected that through more research into the art, anyone who would like to be a spoken word poet will treat it with respect and all seriousness. This study seeks to lift spoken word from the “streets” into the classroom.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

OVERVIEW

This is where various scholarly works on Spoken Word Poetry are discussed. Since traditional oral poetry shall be used as the basic point of reference in this study, scholarly works on traditional oral poetry as well as spoken word will be discussed in order to open up a clearer idea on the study as outlined in chapter one.

LITERATURE ON TRADITIONAL AFRICAN ORAL POETRY

Different definitions and ideas propounded by various scholars on oral poetry are discussed here. These include various characteristics of the tradition of oral poetry which could be identified in contemporary spoken word poetry.

According to Finnegan (1970), the unwritten forms of Africa's literature are far less widely known and appreciated. She attributes this to the difficulty in recording and presenting them as well as the tendency to overlook them (1970:2). She further adds that "a considerable amount of work has been published on the subject of African oral literature in the last century or so. But the facts are scattered and uneven, often buried in inaccessible journals, and their significance has not been widely appreciated". This phenomenon of overlooking the oral arts of Africa a very worrying one since the continuous neglect of the oral arts may eventually lead to its "death." It is thus important to acknowledge the works of Ruth Finnegan and Isidore Opkewho, J.H. Nketia, among others, who have taken up the study of African oral literature. The work however cannot be left for few scholars to do hence the need to study every available form of oral literature in Africa and for that matter Ghana.

Schneider (2002) is of the view that oral literature is kept alive by the people because they speak to their needs and concerns. This foregrounds the importance of oral poetry as a living part of the culture of a people. It means that oral literature which includes oral poetry affects various aspects of the people's lives. It addresses their religious, emotional and social lives. These people find solution to their needs by picking various forms of advice or drawing encouragement from the words in the poems. Some of these poems are also used during marriage ceremonies and other occasions. Ruth Fennegan makes it clear that oral poetry is performed on many occasions such as weddings, festivals, funerals among others. This shows how oral poetry is at the core of the African society.

Merolla (2011) also notes that folktales, myths, poems, and many other oral genres represent a cultural harvest of human and artistic worth, addressing and giving form to fundamental questions and the acquisitions of individuals and societies alike. As oral literatures are a fundamental part of the intangible heritage of African cultures, it is hardly surprising that the urge to document and understand classic and new forms of oral genres has animated African cultural studies over the past decades. This also goes a long way to emphasize the point that, the oral art needs to be studied since it forms a crucial part of the African culture.

Tanure (1996) sees the importance of oral poetry and says that “though the post-independence generation of Awoonor, Okigbo, Clark and Soyinka was indebted to the oral tradition, it is with the new generation of poets that orality has become a distinctive mark of West African poetry.” This explains that, oral literature cannot be overlooked because it influences the work of many poets including younger ones. The fact that most young Ghanaian poets of today appear to prefer presenting their works by word of mouth rather than writing leads them to the traditional oral arts.

Okpewho (1985) makes this clearer by stating that “as far as oral tradition is concerned, we cannot properly understand the songs (poems) unless we can direct our minds toward the actual performance of them.” This is in support of Finnegan’s view that performance is an essential part of oral poetry since it brings out the true understanding of it. Indeed, it is the performance of the poem that brings it to life and makes it an accepted part of the culture and traditions of a people.

Again, the performer and performance can simply not be ruled out in the practice or study of oral literature because it is the performer who holds the key to using the poem to make any significant impact on his audience, be it to educate or entertain. Kofi Anyidoho (1991) sees that the “rep-resentation of written poetry through the multiple media of African performance tradition holds great potential for overcoming the communication gap that has forced the poet, as a writer, into an often celebrated but clearly marginalized position as a contemporary artist.” This explains the importance of performance in reaching a larger number of people including those who may not get access to the written poems or may not be able to read the written poems. No wonder the young Ghanaian poets who practice “spoken words” have quite a number of following on social media since that is where most of their performances are uploaded.

Finnegan (1970) is of the view that “oral literature (of which oral poetry is a part) is by definition dependent on a performer. She mentions expressiveness of tone, gesture, facial expression, dramatic use of pause and rhythm, and the musical setting of the poem as elements of the actual enactment of oral poetry. She cited a short Ashanti dirge to explain her point. It therefore implies that for the study of every form of poetry that is oral, one must not lose sight of the performance associated with it. It is the performer and the performance that make oral poetry what it is. She adds that, “indeed,” much of what is normally classified as poetry in African oral literature is designed to be performed in a musical setting and the musical and verbal elements are thus

interdependent.” This puts music at a very significant place in the performance of traditional oral poetry. By its very design, oral poetry is to be accompanied with music.

Anyidoho (2013), states that "every student of oral tradition knows that there is no adequate substitute for the experience of oral literature in live performance. But it is also a fact that we cannot always experience live performance situations." He goes on to suggest that modern audio-visual technology should be used to preserve the oral arts. This should make the recorded oral performance reach a wider audience since people who may not have the opportunity to watch the live performance could take time to experience the same performance but in a recorded medium. Whatever the case may be, the true experience of the oral arts rests on the shoulders of performance. Anyidoho thus sees the importance of performance in the oral arts hence his call for it to be recorded.

Peculiar to oral poetry is the audience and the props that the performer uses. An oral poet does not perform to himself. There is an audience with whom the poet interacts. Ruth Fennegan states that a particular atmosphere can be conveyed by the dress, accoutrements, or observed bearing of the performer and even dance... often joined by members of the audience. This explains that the audience alone is enough. Other things such as the costume and props also matter in oral poetry performance. There is no escape for the oral poet from a face to face interaction with his audience. The oral poet therefore involves his audience in his performance.

De Haas (2018) supports the importance of the audience by stating that "in live performances, the performer directly addresses the audience and can immediately respond to the audience's reactions". This means that the poet can take advantage of the positive reactions from the audience to put up a good performance considering the reactions as motivation. Similarly,

negative reactions from the audience means the performance is not going well and must be improved. The audience therefore can be seen as important to the oral poet.

Anyidoho (1991) for instance cites the audience as those who really appreciate the performance of the oral poet. "The members of a typical audience in Africa will probably not applaud a bad performance out of politeness and then walk away mumbling their disgust to themselves. They expect a high display of competence, and they would insist on it. A tedious performer may suddenly receive a loud burst of applause, which is really a warning signal: "Give us a good show or cut it off"! (43). One can thus not write the audience off in the study of oral poetry. Perhaps the audience is the reason for the oral poet's going through a lot of training and learning before appearing on any stage to deliver his poetry.

Again, Isidore Okpewho (1990) describes the oral performer as a member of the society of which the audience is a random sample. He adds that "there is no point at which the artist may be seen to be contravening or rebelling against the outlook of his society of which the audience is a random sample. The success of a performance is judged fundamentally by the degree to which the artist mirrors the outlook and expectations of this society; and the audience of the performance seems obliged primarily to aid the artist in this task of mirroring" (161). It becomes clear that, the oral artist (poet) presents his work to reflect his society. That is, he seeks to comment on happenings in his society and talk about what he can find in his society. He therefore cannot afford to offend his audience by deceiving the audience since they act as judges to his performance. It further means that, the audience makes the existence and credibility of the oral poet and his works to continue to stand. The audience can therefore not be overlooked in the study of any form of the oral art.

Quite apart from the audience, African oral poetry comes with various types of poets who practice it. Okpewho (1985) confirms that there are many situations in which poetry was, and, is spoken or sung in traditional African society. Some oral poets are taken through training to sing in royal courts or for wealthy people. He cites the griot of Mandinka people as well as the kwadwumfuo of the Ashanti in Ghana as examples. He adds that there are other poets who take part in rituals such as the Lo Dagaa of Northern Ghana and the babalawo (diviners) of the Yoruba in Nigeria. According to Okpewho, these poets attain their position after a long period of formal training. He cited the griots as poets who have to undergo such formal training. This training and learning by the oral poets could be seen as necessary to the perfection of the art.

He adds that, there is the "freelance poet who takes advantage of various occasions such as times of merry making or funerals to perform in order to earn some "material rewards." According to him, these poets also go through some sort of training but not as formal as the griots and the diviners. This reveals that an oral poet must go through one form of training or the other in order to do well. The African oral poet therefore cannot be considered as just a performer who uses words by accident but must be seen as a professional who learns and masters his art.

Still in relation to the various categories of the traditional oral poets, Yankah (1983) identifies the oral poet who engages in the singing of appellation. He notes that society uses certain variables to determine who qualifies to become such a poet. He adds that "the assumption of responsibility by the performer to his audience carries with it a greater risk and finds expression in a higher quality of performance" (384). The traditional oral poet is a professional who must be accepted by the society. Two things are worth noting here; first, the study of the oral poet therefore cannot be a mistake because he is considered to hold a vital part in the existence of a society; that is why the society determines who qualifies to become an oral poet like those who

sing the appellation. The second thing to note is that the audience is important in the delivery of oral poetry. By virtue of being an oral poet, the performer becomes responsible to his audience as he is faced with the burden of giving out a good performance in order to maintain his respect and dignity. Here, Yankah also lays emphasis on the audience and performance as vital to oral poetry.

African oral literature and in this situation, poetry has certain stylistic qualities that qualifies it as literature which deserves to be studied. Okpewho (1984) describes certain styles and techniques of presentation in African oral literature as an art form which makes it distinct from written literature. He identifies repetition, piling and association, tonality, idiophones, digression and allusion as some of the techniques and styles which make African oral art richer than the written form. He explains further that the performer has the immediate responsibility to satisfy his audience therefore the performer has to employ some of these techniques in order to achieve his intention within the period of performance. These styles make the oral art an attractive art form and establish a possibility for it to be returned to in order to make impact in contemporary times.

Tanure (1994) identifies some styles of African oral tradition in the written poetry of some West African poets. He is of the view that "it is a conscious effort" of most of these poets to use the traditional form to reach "the generality of the public." It is realized that the oral tradition has a stronger force to appeal to and reach a greater number of people hence its elements being employed by poets to write. Tanure thus sees "orality in the written poems." In his words, "modern African poets look to traditional African Literature for models to express their cultural identity." In this light, he sees the poets as using their long standing poetry tradition to speak to the issues of modern and contemporary times because that is a tradition to which majority of the

people who consume the poems can relate. This explains that African writers need not throw their oral heritage away if they want to make impact in their African settings.

Ohaeto (1994) clearly states that "the competent writer can appropriate the resources of his oral tradition and subject them through an individual creative forge, into varied new and interesting forms". With this, the importance of making effective use of the oral tradition as the foundation for writing by modern and contemporary poets is brought to light. The African poet therefore has a rich source to tap into with his creativity in order to produce a work that will appeal to many people in these times.

It is this same idea that has been proposed by Anyidoho (2013). The new crop of writers and poets stand a much greater advantage when they fall on their oral tradition in order to produce their works in contemporary times. As he puts it, "African contemporary arts and knowledge in general stand a lot to gain from the legacy of ancestral oral traditions." He however adds that, the technology available in contemporary times must not be discarded but should be used effectively to present African literature. It is realized that many African scholars are advocates for the preservation and use of the African traditional oral arts.

DISCUSSIONS ON CONTEMPORARY SPOKEN WORD POETRY

Some scholars have defined and tried to trace the history of what is called "spoken word poetry." Various arguments have been made and more are going on especially in relation to the "spoken word" practiced in other cultures other than the African and Ghanaian situation.

Lowery (2017) observes that "spoken words" derives from three distinct traditions: the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, and the Beat Movement. He continues to add that

spoken word poetry has a strong African oral tradition background and became very popular in the 1960s. Lowery agrees therefore that what is called "spoken words" which has become a popular culture especially among the youth has roots in African oral tradition. The truth cannot be hidden that although he speaks from the American situation, the obvious signs and traces of African oral tradition could not be overlooked. Indeed the mention of Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement points to the fact that Africa cannot be taken out of the spoken word art. It is important therefore to note the traces of African oral tradition in the spoken word of America as well in mind before defining the art form.

A similar comment by Bridget Baurid is worth noting. In her paper on the American spoken word poet Stacey Chin, she acknowledges that contemporary performance poetry (spoken word) has elements such as a play with musical forms, verbal artistry, storytelling, references to the African griot and interaction with the audience as traces in the African oral tradition. She however concludes that spoken word poetry has come to be accepted by the world and should be seen as a cross-cultural and cross-national art which should not be solely associated with Africans. It can be seen that spoken word poetry is becoming a popular art form which has been accepted by various cultures and nations. Asihene (2017) shares this view by saying that technological advancements has enabled performers (from America) to spread the art to other countries. "Not only did the spread of spoken word poetry to other countries increase the audience number of the art, it also expanded the stage and birthed spoken word artists in these countries." The view here is that spoken word poetry emerged from America and is spreading to other parts of world. This view however may not fully apply to all countries and their situations. When poetry is spoken or performed, it is more appealing and even those who may not understand the language in which it is spoken could enjoy the gestures that come with the

performance. Felice Belle (2003:1) believes that poetry is written to be read aloud, not "quarantined to the pages of books left on library shelves." She adds that "a poem is fully experienced when given voice." She is of the view that spoken word poets should be given a chance by the academia and that a good poem is a good poem whether is written or performed. This is interesting to note because most of the spoken word poets appear to have learned the art and they present good poems that can be compared to written ones.

Grace An (2006) describes spoken word poetry as a form of literary art or performance in which poetry, stories, and text are spoken rather than sung. "Often associated with background music in a performance setting, spoken word can be improvisational or planned, and, although it is not sung, the prose of spoken word is usually more artistic than normal speech." Her definition goes along with other scholars who see spoken word poetry as poetry that is performed by word of mouth and normally with music.

Again, Asihene (2017) makes the point that spoken word poetry is becoming popular in Ghana and that "the art has grown in terms of the number of artists, audience and platforms." He adds that the past decade has seen numerous spoken word poetry events and competitions which is a sign of the growth and development of the art form in Ghana. Spoken word poetry no doubt is gradually gaining the support and like that it should have. Many occasions see the performance of various spoken word poets as well. Recently, state funerals, Independence Day celebrations, farmers' day and other national events are graced by spoken word poets like Nana Asaase and Chief Moomen. Television and radio stations also invite these poets to perform during some of their programs. This shows the rate at which the art form is gaining popularity in the country.

McAlpine (2007) suggests that spoken word poetry is poetry that comes with the voice and the voice is central to spoken word poetry. He is of the view that "the physical voice seems to be

intimately bound with one's own subjectivity; it is one of the strongest ways in which we represent ourselves to the world...it is unsurprising that spoken word poetry seems to deal with issues of race, class, sexuality and others..." The spoken word art is done with the voice, gestures and acting and it serves as a medium to speak directly to issues and people who may not have the opportunity to read a written form of the poem (if there is any). Williams agree with him in the following words; "Spoken word poetry workshops and slams can encourage young people to share their stories and develop their voices."

Still speaking on spoken word art, Pamar and Byron (2007) believe that spoken word poetry is a contemporary art form fusing elements of verse, music and theatre. This brings back to mind the performance aspect which is central to spoken word poetry. They further state that "the power of the spoken word holds a sacred position in religious and spiritual traditions the world over. Whether through mantras, prayers, hymns or calls to worship, the link between these varied traditions lies in the understanding that the sound vibrations of a particular utterance possess the power to bring about change". This belief presents the view that spoken word can be used as an instrument to effect change in the society because of its ability to reach a wider audience and to speak to their minds and emotions.

To the African context, D'Abdon writes on spoken word in South Africa. He emphatically states that "spoken word poetry is fully fledged poetry, and not, as some diehard detractors of the genre are prone to suggest, a pedestrian expression of the "accomplished", "serious" poetry published in academic journals and books, or a lesser child of the so-called "canonical" poetry." This is a clear attempt at drawing a respectable attention to spoken word as poetry which should be considered for study. He defines spoken word poetry as the process of organizing a poetic text around the voice, i.e. the sound produced by the instrument-mouth. This is a twofold process that

(regularly) begins with writing and (usually) ends with an oral performance (48). The emphasis on the voice and performance runs through the various studies and definitions of spoken word poetry. To D'Abdon South African spoken word could be traced to poets like Oswald Mtshali, Siphiso Sepalima, Ingoapele Madingoane, among others whose poetry were focused on resistance. Dooley (2014) sees spoken word as a means of encouraging the performer to focus on gestures, rhythm, and originality. "With all performance arts, spoken word poetry requires the performer to "show" him or herself to the audience; that is, to be seen. This element of seeing and being seen, embedded in spoken word poetry, makes this art form ideal." The interaction that takes place between the poet and his or her audience is one that could establish a sort of rapport which could make the performance successful. Dooley therefore sees the presence of the audience as important to spoken word poetry.

Asihene (2017) speaks for spoken word poetry in the Ghanaian context. He says that spoken word poetry in Ghana is gaining popularity in the country. "Since its emergence in the mid-2000s, the art has grown in terms of the number of artists, audience and platforms." (32). It is important to note however that, there are scholarly works that point to the emergence of spoken word poetry way before the 2000s. Anyidoho (1991) refers to a type of poetry performance as "dramatic reading" in which "by the dramatic use of body language, voice, pause, tempo, gesture, and other paralinguistic techniques, the poetry is lifted from the cold print on a page and energized into a warm and living experience, an experience with which the audience spontaneously identifies and which it may enhance through various degrees of participation and through encouraging applause or comment" (44). The above view on performance poetry contains the elements of what is now called spoken word poetry as identified by other scholars

like D'Abdon and Dooley among others. This then tells us that what Anyidoho describes can be associated with spoken words.

Anyidoho (1991) further cites Apronti, Anyidoho and Fraser who all identified that, dramatic reading or poetry "through the medium of public recitals as well as radio and television programs wholly or partly devoted to poetry in English and in Ghanaian languages" became popular in the 1970s (44). This points to the fact that, contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry started in the 1970s and may have rather become popular and more intensified in the 2000s. Indeed Anyidoho identifies Atukwei Okai as the "central figure" in the "phenomenon of poetry presentation in performance". Atukwei Okai has therefore been regarded as the one who held on tightly to poetry performance and he has been given "due credit for helping popularize poetry performance as a legitimate mode of artistic expression".

Again, the Afro-Caribbean poet-historian Edward Kamau Brathwaite is identified by Anyidoho (1991) as another person who practiced the public performance of poetry (spoken words) in Ghana. His "reading of poetry as a public performance, was introduced into the poetic scene in Ghana in early 1987" (45). Other poets who do a public performance of their poems include Kofi Anyidoho, Kofi Awoonor and Kobena Eyi Acquah. Kofi Anyidoho's public performance of some of his poems in the studios of Ghana's national television station, GTV for instance attracted so much attention. From these, it is realized that, for the Ghanaian situation, spoken word poetry came into being in the 1970s and 80s which go way before the 2000s. It is important to note as well that the art is growing at a positive pace considering the number of people who identify themselves as spoken word poets.

Some researchers have identified a major problem of spoken word poetry which is the low attention given to it by the academia. Damon (1998) for instance observes that, poetry critics

handle spoken word poetry as an art that is "beyond the purview of what is considered appropriate matter for serious academic analysis" (326). She is of the view that scholars do not attach importance to spoken word poetry as a respected art form hence their inability to see the artistry in it for proper study. Since most of the spoken word poets perform outside the strict educational system, most people do not regard them as relevant for study.

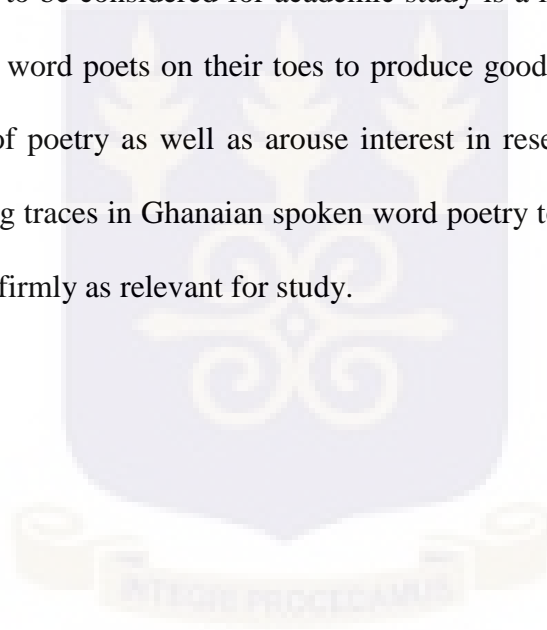
D'Abdon (2016) argues that "curricula should not be sanitized from canonical English poetry, but rather rejuvenated with the injection of large doses of contemporary spoken word poetry" (58). In order to Africanize the syllabi, he notes that the works of "unconventional" (i.e. contemporary African) poets should be taught alongside (and not in opposition to) the works of "conventional" (i.e. past, white, British) poets." Such a call in South Africa is equally important in the Ghanaian context because the contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poet also has something to say which would help develop the educational system if studied.

Mc Alpine (2007) observes that spoken word poetry is regarded as a source of entertainment by many critics, that is why they do not pay any particular attention to it. These critics "view spoken word poetry as a popular art form produced almost exclusively for entertainment value" (82). Until researchers and critics take their time to watch and listen to good spoken word poetry, they may not find anything valuable in studying it. One must agree to an extent also that, it is not all the people who identify themselves as spoken word poets that are able to perform to expectation.

Asihene (2017) acknowledges the growth of spoken word poetry in Ghana but adds that "the popularity of spoken word remains outside the domains of academia. "Most, – if not all – of the research works and writings about spoken word poetry in Ghana are in blog articles and newspaper articles" (32). This he attributes to the blunt consideration of spoken word as not poetry and not literary enough to be considered for academic study. He cites instances where he

was told by people that “Spoken word is not poetry. Period”, “There’s nothing poetic about what the spoken word people are doing. They are just ...talking”, “Spoken word poetry is just a bunch of rhyming speeches, no other poetic devices”, among others (33). He also however admits that, people pass such comments because some of the people who call themselves spoken word poets do not give off their best. It must be acknowledged that, although there may be some poets whose art maybe poor, there are others whose works are rich enough to be considered for academic study.

The call for spoken word to be considered for academic study is a laudable one since it will put the contemporary spoken word poets on their toes to produce good poems. It will also broaden knowledge in the study of poetry as well as arouse interest in researchers who would wish to study the art form. Finding traces in Ghanaian spoken word poetry to the traditional African oral art could help establish it firmly as relevant for study.



CHAPTER THREE

GESTURES AND, DRUMS AND MUSIC IN CONTEMPORARY SPOKEN WORD POETRY

OVERVIEW

Based on the review of related literature in chapter two which points out some important aspects of traditional African oral poetry and contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry, and how they could be related, this chapter discusses contemporary spoken word poetry in Ghana with particular attention on some unique traditional oral poetry elements that feature dominantly during performance. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part briefly talks about some stages or platforms which make it possible for contemporary spoken word poetry to be performed.

The second part discusses the use of gestures and other paralinguistic devices during the performance of spoken word poetry. The impacts of gestures on the performances are further looked at in relation to African traditional oral poetry.

The third part looks at the use of drums and music in contemporary spoken word poetry. The effects of drums and music on performances are discussed with reference to African traditional oral poetry.

Selected performances of Nana Asaase and Chief Moomen are used to illustrate the discussions in this chapter.

3.1. Some Spoken Word Stages and Performance in Ghana

3.1.1. Introduction

Spoken word poetry in Ghana is becoming popular especially with the youth. Since its emergence on the Ghanaian art scene in the 1970s, spoken word poets increase by the days and perform on many occasions such as weddings, book launch, TV programs, literary festivals etc. Although spoken word is gaining popularity, most articles written on it could be found outside the academia on blogs and social media pages. The lack of interest of scholars in spoken word poetry according to Asihene (2017: 40) could be attributed to some of the spoken word poems being “rhyme speeches” which lack poetic quality. There are however many spoken word artistes who take the art form seriously and put up performances that are greatly enjoyed by their audience. It is due to this that many platforms have sprung up to support the growth of spoken word poetry by providing avenues for their performance. Most of these platforms are located in the urban centers thereby making the art popular in the cities and towns.

3.1.2. Some Spoken Word Stages in Ghana

As stated earlier, many platforms have emerged to support spoken word poetry in Ghana. Some of these stages are specifically dedicated to spoken word and poetry in general while others have introduced the performance of spoken word into their programs as a way of supporting the art. Recently, various television programs such as “The One Show” on Gh One Television and “The AM Show” on Joy Prime TV among others have shown interest in spoken word and occasionally feature spoken word artistes to perform on live TV. This has also helped in the growth of the art. The sub-section discusses some platforms that support spoken word poetry in Ghana.

Ghana Poetry Festival

The Ghana Poetry Festival was initiated in 2014 as a way of uniting various poets from all over Ghana to celebrate poetry and poets. The event is powered by a non-government organization, Values for Life which is interested in putting measures in place to promote poetry development in Ghana and by extension, Africa and the world. The first edition of this festival was held on 25th April, 2014 at The Center for National Culture in Accra and considered Atukwei Okai and Ama Ata Aidoo to be celebrated. The second edition of the festival also witnessed the patronage of young spoken word artistes from all over Ghana and was held at the Pan African Writers Association (PAWA) House in Accra. This edition saw the presence of Mawuli Adzei a writer, and Woeli Dekutsey a publisher. The third edition of the festival was held at the W.E.B. Dubois Memorial Center for Pan-Africanism from 11th to 12th November, 2016. The fourth edition of the festival took place from the 13th to 18th November, 2017 at the National Mausoleum in Accra. The fifth Ghana Poetry Festival took place on the 9th and 10th November, 2018 at the Aviation Social Center in Accra under the theme, “Poetry, The Ghanaian Perspective.”

The Ghana Poetry Festival which is still young has over the four five years of its inception helped discover many budding talents such as Richid, Abotreh, Yayra among others. It has so far not been organized in any other part of the country except Accra but has been able to open up another stage for spoken word poetry. Poets and writers who have graced the festival over the years include Atukwei Okai, Lade Wosornu, Nana Gyan Apenteng, Kobina Eyi Acquah, Agyei Baa, Nana Asaase, Chief Moomen among others.

Ehalakasa

Ehalakasa is also a platform that seeks to promote spoken word poetry in Ghana. The term comes from three Ghanaian languages. “Eha” means song in Ewe, “La” means sing in Ga and “Kasa” means talk in Akan. The name itself suggests what it is meant to do. Ehalakasa is an idea brought about by Sir Black and Nii Lantey, a musician/ poet in 2007. Their aim is to bring poetry from the page to the stage as pioneered by Atukwei Okai and Kofi Anyidoho, and to project Ghanaian values. “Ehalakasa has evolved out of the response of artists’ and art lovers’ desire for the awakening and recognition of spoken word performance, live music and poetry in Accra and Ghana.” (www.ehalakasa.com) Ehalakasa could be said to be one of the popular contemporary spoken word stages in Ghana and has since its inception in 2007 carried out successful events like, Ehalakasa Slam, Ehalakasa Talk Party, Ehalakasa International Poetry Day, Ehalakasa Festival, among others.

The Ehalakasa Talk Party is a monthly spoken word poetry event. It is usually a two and a half hour event which consists of about fifteen preselected performances from up-coming poets, and one guest performance from an established spoken word artiste. There are interludes of music. Also, after the guest performance, the audience is given the opportunity to interact with the established artist about his or her work. (Asihene 2017: 35) This platform has played a very significant role in promoting and developing spoken word poetry in Ghana and has almost become synonymous with spoken word in Ghana. Ehalakasa has helped showcase the talents of many spoken word artistes in Ghana today including Nana Asaase, Chief Moomen, Hundred Percent, Mutombo da Poet, Poetra Asantewa, among others. After the Ehalakasa slam competition, the winner travels to selected African countries to take part in their competitions.

Through this, spoken word poetry in Ghana is made to travel beyond the borders of the country thereby making the art popular in and outside.

3.1.3. Conclusion

As stated above, contemporary spoken word poetry in Ghana is on the rise and many young people take delight in it. These young people are usually the spoken word artists. Many stages including the ones discussed above mainly feature spoken word artists in their events and this has contributed in no less way in promoting the art. More of such platforms need to be established and made more attractive in order to draw the attention of people especially the academia so as to encourage the study of the art.

3.2. Gestures and other Paralinguistic Devices

3.2.1. Introduction

This part of the chapter aims at identifying the use of gestures and other paralinguistic devices in the performance of spoken word poetry among contemporary artists. It takes a close look at some performances of Nana Asaase and Chief Moomen to establish how their gestures affect the delivery of the verbal poems.

Indeed, for the performer, gestures and other paralinguistic devices are central since his audience would get additional information to fully understand his message by closely observing such devices. Okpewho (1992:46) notes that:

In appreciating the literary effectiveness of a written work, all we may need to concern ourselves with is the text we have before us. But oral artists use more than their mouths to express their words; to consider the effectiveness of the words, therefore, we should examine the usefulness of those accompanying resources...

It is understood that in the study of oral poetry, one cannot rely on only the words but must consider all other things which are involved in the performance. Okpewho identifies “movements made with the face, hands, or any other part of the body” as some of the resources to study in oral performance. It must be noted that these actions bring the words to life and helps to deduce meaning which may not be got from the words only.

The voice is the basic feature of oral performance but the performance may lose its quality and worth without gestures accompanying it. It is this importance that Anyidoho (1991: 46) explains that “by the dramatic use of body language, voice, pause, tempo, gesture, and other paralinguistic techniques, the poetry is lifted from the cold print on a page and energized into a warm and living experience.” Indeed it is the experience that one comes into contact with during performance that leaves a remarkable effect. The discussion of gestures in this work are not in abstract but based on the evidence of the performances of selected contemporary spoken word artists. The subsequent sub-sections discuss the selected performances of the spoken word artists with particular focus on gestures and paralinguistic devices.

3.2.2. Performance at Pensa Meeting – Nana Asaase

The attempt is made here to draw on gestures and paralinguistic devices which is an integral part of African traditional oral poetry and is found in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry in

order to establish a strong connection between the traditional oral poet and the contemporary spoken word artist. One important resource which is closely connected to gestures and paralinguistic devices is the costume of the performer and the props which he employs. The traditional oral performer dresses to suit an occasion and makes use of the appropriate props to enhance his performance. Okpewho (1992:48) indicates that “narrators adorn themselves with clothes and implements which either associated with the story being told or at any rate are intended to make the narrators more spectacular.” This explains that the costume and props of the performer enhance his gestures and other body movements. In other words, the costume and props make it easier and adds more meaning to the gestures of the performer. In the performance of war songs and hunters’ songs among the Anfoega Ewes for instance guns, knives and animal skins are used by the performers to further bring out the message of precision, bravery and power which they stage through the use of gestures.

In this performance by Nana Asaase, he wears a fine kente with a traditional sandal to match. He leaves a raffia woven hat hanging behind his head and holds a calabash. This dressing gives him a traditional touch although he performs in contemporary times. With this the audience is given the signal to expect a great performance laced with tradition.

Nana Asaase walks on the stage and calls the attention of the audience in the following words:

Ghana muntie (Ghana listen)

Ekristofuo muntie (Christians listen)

PENSA muntie (PENSA listen)

It is observed that he does not stand still as he calls the attention of the audience but he walks. This gives the words an undertone of urgency because he enters the stage and does not stand to rest but asks the audience to listen to him even before he settles to commence his performance.

Apart from the walking which he uses to capture the attention of the audience from the very beginning, Nana Asaase during his performance uses other gestures and body movements to emphasize his message in the poem. After he introduces himself and recites a few lines, he sings in Twi and *Cherepong* (the language spoken by the people of Adukrom.) Then he recites the following lines:

Kwaæ a agye wo no (The forest you sought refuge in)

Yennfræ no kwaæ na (Do not be contemptuous of it)

As he recites the above lines, he walks and faces the drummer who is on stage with him. He turns away from the drummer, walks a few paces, stops and turns to face the drummer again. With this movement on stage, Asaase draws the attention of his audience to the drummer as he seeks to create a cordial relationship between him and the drummer. (Indeed this performance is largely accompanied with the drum as discussed in subsequent sections.) The movement to the drummer and back to the audience reveals that the audience is as important to the performance as the drummer. Asaase therefore gives equal attention to both the audience and the drummer. It must be noted as well that the advice which Asaase gives in the lines recited goes to the audience through the drummer since the drummer actually plays the same lines on his drum. In effect, his movement to the drummer shows that he alerts the drummer to carry the message on to his audience. Without the movement of Asaase towards the drummer and back to the audience, the

dramatic effect of carrying the message to and through the drummer to his audience would be lost thereby bringing a feeling of dullness into the performance.

As Nana Asaase faces the drummer again, he points the calabash towards him and continues in the following words:

Ɛmmɛɛ bi na y'ayera (Some time ago we were lost)

Nka y'asɛɛ (We were useless)

Na yɛrɛkɔku yɛn (And we were going to be killed)

Here, pointing the calabash towards the drummer suggests the offering of drink as a means of providing comfort and to seal an agreement as is usually done during traditional meetings. This gesture also shows that Asaase wants the drummer to pay particular attention to what he is saying before passing it on to the audience. (The drummer repeats the lines on his drum.)

After pointing the calabash to the drummer and reciting the lines above, he turns and walks towards the drummer again, stops and continues:

Yɛ dɛ kɔ duruu ɔhenɛpɔn anim (We appeared before the royal king)

Ɔbisa sɛɛ (He asked that)

Ɔbisa sɛɛ (He asked that)

Ɔbisa sɛɛ (He asked that)

Mmo mu hwan na ɔnyɛɛ bɔne dɔ? (Who amongst you has never committed sin)

Mmonto boɔ mɔ no (Throw a stone at him)

Ɔnyi ne sekaa nfiri ne boha mu (He should bring his sword out from its sheath)

Ɛne se yɛgyina ha a, (As we are gathered here today)

Ɔmama Yesu Kristo (The prominent Jesus Christ)

As he walks to the drummer and stops, the audience focuses on him and the drummer. The action does not end there. Asaase points the calabash towards the drummer at every line that he recites (in the lines above). At this point the gesture creates the scene of a conversation between the artist, Nana Asaase and the drummer. This makes the performance interesting and lively. As indicated earlier that props help to intensify the message that gestures carry, it is noted here that the traditional symbol of the calabash as an object which is used to serve drink or water especially during traditional prayers comes to play. Asaase thus becomes one who offers drink to the drummer to pass his message on to the audience.

Just as he ends the lines above, he starts moving backwards as he continues with the following lines:

Ɔboafuɔ a ɔsɔɛ ɔbrɛfoɔ(The helper who lessens people's burden)

Na ɔma no brɛsuo(And gives them water of relief)

Ɔno na w'ayɛ yɛn saa(He has made us so)

Indeed the backward movement reflects the gradual receding of the lines. It is important to note as well that the use of the calabash to point towards the drummer coupled with the steady pauses

in the recitation of this part of the poem could be linked to the type of prayers offered during libation. This gesture in addition to the choice of language, Twi at this stage goes back to reinforce the tradition of libation as it is common to find traditional priests perform libation in Ghanaian languages during state functions such as independence parade among others.

Similarly, Nana Asaase holds the calabash in his palm, faces the audience and moves his hand back and forth as he recites the following lines and asks the audience to repeat after him:

Yesu, Yesu, Yesu (Jesus ×3)

Ɛne anwumere yi (This evening)

Wote yen ka a (If you hear from us)

Wote yen ne a (If you hear our voices)

Wohwe mfifire eresam yen yi a (If you look at how we are sweating)

Na eye yen PENZA, Alumni (It is we...)

Yen a yewo ho (Those of us at present)

Ne yen a yerebeba (Those yet to be born)

Yema yen ne so kyere wo a (We raise our voices before you)

It is observed here that the drummer does not play the lines above on his drums. The lines are repeated by the audience and to suggest that the message is between him the artist and his

audience, he turns to them and points the calabash to them in the same fashion as in the case of the drummer.

3.2.3. Performance at Music of Ghanaian Origin (MOGO) – Nana Asaase

At various instances in this performance, Nana Asaase puts up certain actions and gestures to bring to life what he says. Anyidoho (1991:47) describes a type of poetry performance where a “text has been memorized, or rather assimilated into an artistic design that makes for spontaneity of performance reinforced by a more elaborate use of body language and paralinguistic devices.” Here, it is noticed that there are poets who are able to master their craft to the extent that, they memorize their poems and present them before an audience as lively as possible with the use of gestures, body language and other forms of action. Nana Asaase in his performance makes use of such technique to communicate more clearly to his audience.

Mazisi Kunene as cited in Anyidoho (1991) gives an example of the Zulu oral poetry tradition situation and states clearly that “the poet does not just recite his poetry but acts it, uses variation of pitch, and aims at communicating his poem through the simulation of all the senses. He produces at one level a symphonic chant, at another, drama, and still, another, music.” (42). It comes to mind therefore that African oral poetry does not come as a boring recitation but it is characterized strongly by action. The poem is therefore acted and in a way dramatized. The oral poet accompanies his recitation with actions and gestures.

To make this point clearer, Kofi Awoonor (1974) talks on Ewe oral poetry and indicates that “the poet – cantor’s symbol is the flywhisk which he swishes during the recitation period; he also uses gestures, manual and facial.” (18). The element of action and gesture comes to play here as well which indicates that traditional oral poetry comes with action and gestures during its

presentation. Awoonor who takes his time to study the traditional oral poetry of the Anlo Ewes of Ghana could not be said to be wrong in his observation that the poets bring their recitation to life with the use of gestures, manual and facial.

This use of action which characterizes traditional oral poetry in Africa is clearly observed in Nana Asaase's presentation of poetry at Music of Ghanaian Origin. In his fine kente and other props such as a sheathed knife and a piece of leather, he starts his poem:

And so the king salutes the drums

As they call his royal names...

All these while, Nana Asaase, although standing at one place, moves his body and makes a pointing gesture using the leather item he holds. This could be likened to the flywhisk that Awoonor describes in *Guardians of the Sacred Word; Ewe Poetry* where the poet-cantor holds and swishes a flywhisk during his performance of poetry. Nana Asaase continues his poem and says:

I will dig to the left (he turns to the left)

And dig to the right (he turns to the right)

There is a pause at this moment and the drums are played. He does not say a word at this time but dances to the left, then to the right. His dance at this moment is done on the rhythm of the drum. It is realized here, right from the beginning of the poem that Nana Asaase brings out the element of acting in the poem by using body movements and gestures.

He continues the poem:

I will jump...

After reciting the line above, he walks sideways to the left and jumps. Indeed at this point as well, Nana Asaase acts out the line he recites with such elegance and gives the idea that he has gone through good practice before appearing on stage. This is what Isidore Okpewho(1985:5) talks about that the poet undergoes special training in order to perform poetry for special and restricted situations such as singing for the king. He adds the freelance poet “whose work is not tied to such narrow situations as the king’s court or the diviner’s consultation room.” He goes on to say that “the training and preparation of the freelance poet is not as formal or regulated as that of the poet in the more restricted environments. (6).

This points to the fact that whether the traditional oral poet falls under the category of special poets who perform for specific and very formal occasions or freelance poets, they still need to go through one form of training or the other. Nana Asaase’s ample movement and acting of various lines in the poem reveals his mastery and suggests that he has undergone some sort of training and practice to be able to perform. The contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poet, Asaase picks on the training and practice of the traditional oral poet to give out an interesting performance.

As Asaase gets to the middle of his presentation, he says:

Welcome to Ghana...

Land of the greatest African

At this point, there is a pause and Nana Asaase paces on the stage. His movement at this point suggests that he may be in deep thought especially because the greatest African may refer to Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana who was overthrown in a coup. Kwame Nkrumah

is well known for his contribution to the independence of Ghana and the growth of postcolonial Africa as a whole. Many people therefore lament about the manner in which his life ended. This particular line enforces a sense of nationalism and “Africanism” in the poem as the poet appears to hold his country, Ghana in high esteem as the land that produced “the greatest African.”

Nana Asaase again puts action and gesture into his presentation as he gets to the following lines:

Ɛɔikan ahoɔden (Strength first)

Ne mom bie woa nim (But open your eyes)

Na wɛn woa su (And cock your ears)

At this point, he bends and holds his ear to put action on what he says. It is observed that, the above lines are in Akan and people who do not speak Akan may find it difficult to understand what the poet says. However, the action that accompanies the words suggests what the poet says since he holds the ear as a form of body language which translates into what is popularly understood to mean “listen carefully.” A recitation without such an act would surely be boring and may make the minds of the audience wander about since their eyes would not be engaged by any form of action.

As Nana Asaase gets to the end of his performance, he points to his chin, raises his arm above his head and turns to point at the drums behind him to reflect his concluding lines:

The elders raise their beard to the dew to lose the pigment of youth

But if you meet an elder who has not got a beard

Mind you, he is at the peak of all of life’s experiences

Back to the roots

Where it all began

From the hollows of ancestral drums

Music of Ghanaian origin

It is observed that in this performance, Nana Asaase does not lose sight of the importance of gestures. As a contemporary spoken word artist in Ghana, he employs an important feature of traditional oral poetry- the use of gestures.

3.2.4. Performance at Goethe Institut – Nana Asaase

In this performance as well, there is the use of gestures and other body movements to complement the message in the poem. After Nana Asaase introduces his audience to what he intends to do in his performance, he turns left and right although he stands at a fixed point. It appears as a soft dance. There is guitar music at the background. He takes a few seconds pause and this pause catches the attention of the audience as they watch carefully to see what he will do. He raises his two hands and moves them from his left to his right and back to his left and says:

Save your drink and pass it round the circle of men

Save your drink and pass it round in this communion of ourselves

At this point, he holds his hands up and moves them in circular motion. It is realized that, the gesture here rightly tallies with the words uttered by the spoken word artist. The circular

movement of Asaase's hands indicates how elders sit under trees for their meetings and share drink among themselves by passing it round until each of them takes a drink. As he says the words and puts the appropriate gesture on it, it is realized that extra meaning is attached to the words and their impact is felt more as it is put in body language. As noted in the previous discussions, gestures, body language and facial expressions form a core part of African traditional oral poetry performance and Nana Asaase appears to have mastered this art so much that he does not come on stage without employing them.

Asaase then moves straight to imitate the offering of libation as he says a prayer. He holds the calabash up, brings it down and imitates the pouring of drink from the calabash at every response of the audience on each line of prayer that he says. The whole act makes the spoken word performance active and interesting and the participation of the audience reveals their excitement and interest in the performance. Nana Asaase goes on to recite the following lines and accompany them with appropriate gestures:

Our gods might have travelled across the fence

To learn from their neighbors overseas

He points his fingers towards the sky to show what he means by "across the fence" and "overseas." It is observed that this gesture lays particular emphasis on the fact that the gods actually seem to have gone very far away but are not that far since they are with their neighbors. There appears to be a contrast between the gesture of the hand pointing to the sky and the actual words of "neighbors overseas." The gesture agrees with "overseas" but not with "neighbors." This quickly brings to mind a sarcastic feeling which is attached to the words. This feeling would have been lost (if not less-felt) in just the normal recitation of the words without adding the body

movement and gesture. Indeed this important part of traditional oral art being used by contemporary Ghanaian spoken word artists reveals the fact that “African contemporary arts and knowledge in general stand a lot to gain from the legacy of ancestral oral traditions.” (Anyidoho2013:24) Contemporary Ghanaian spoken word artists have picked up some portions of the ancestral oral art and are successfully using them to the delight of their audience and making impact in the creative arts in Ghana.

In the course of the performance, Nana Asaase requests that the audience learn a particular song. He accompanies his request with some gestures. He raises his right hand in order to get the attention of the audience. He then asks:

How many know what I am about to teach today?

Some hands are up, some hands are down.

Asaase lifts his hands and drops them to illustrate what he says.

Deep into the performance, Asaase uses some names to sing a song. As he mentions the name “Adwoa,” he asks; “where is Adwoa?” Then he raises his hand and turns it as a gesture of asking the whereabouts of someone. He then calls; “Monday borns!” At this point, Nana Asaase wears a broad smile. He could have just asked of Adwoa but the sign which he employs puts emphasis on his search for Adwoa. The smile also makes the audience to beam with smiles. He asks the audience to sing and as the refrain is about to end, he bends towards his right and stretches out his hand towards the audience to signal them to pause the song. The audience obeys the signal and fades the song to a stop. It is important to note that the artist makes use of gesture to show that he has control over the performance and to communicate to the audience without necessarily using words. This makes him the master of his art.

A similar act occurs as Nana Asaase mentions the name “Yaa” and turns towards his right, and beckons a lady to come up the stage. He signals her to stand in front of him and continues to sing. As he recites this line, “Nti ɛyɛ a dandan wo ho kakra” (So turn around), he turns to the lady and signals her with his forefinger to turn around. He accompanies it with a smile. The lady does so and the audience cheers and urges her on by repeating the words, “dandan wo ho.” The contemporary spoken word artist successfully uses gesture and facial expressions to arouse excitement in his audience. The stage at this point seems to be made up of two characters acting a play where the man talks about the beauty and virtues of the woman who stands and enjoys all the praises being poured upon her. It therefore comes out that gestures and other paralinguistic devices act as ingredients to whip up the interest of an audience.

3.2.5. Performance at Dr. Hilla Limann’s Memorial Day – Chief Moomen

In this performance, Chief Moomen also employs gestures to make his poetry livelier. Finnegan (1970:2-3) indicates that:

The significance of performance in oral literature goes beyond a mere matter of definition: for the nature of the performance itself can make an important contribution to the impact of the particular literary form being exhibited.

Performance thus has the power to clarify certain ideas expressed in a literary work such as a poem because one does not have to depend entirely on his imaginative prowess in order to fully grasp the true message as is done in written works. The various descriptions which are often put into written poetry can actually be seen when the poem is performed. Such things as body language, facial expressions, gestures, tone, pause, rhythmic recitation among others are

physically experienced by the audience through performance. For instance, when the poet closes his eyes, raises his head and clasps his arms around his chest while talking about how he misses his loved one and desires to hold her, the emotions of the audience will be hit real hard and awakened as they see the gesture that accompanies the words.

On the stage, Chief Moomen stands and holds the microphone with two hands. There is the sound of the xylophone, a traditional musical instrument identified with the Northern Region of Ghana in the background. He starts his performance by giving out the title of the poem, “Beyond the Cattle Trail.”

As noted, performance is the heart of traditional oral literature and the use of gestures and body language forms part of this performance. Chief Moomen uses this aspect of traditional oral poetry to bring his poem to life.

From the beginning of the poem, Chief Moomen makes use of some gestures. He for instance raises his hand and stretches it to depict the act of piercing through something as he recites the following words:

At the break of dawn

When the cry of the muezzin

Pierces through the silence of the night...

The use of his arm to depict what he describes in the poem seems to physically bring the idea being expressed before the audience. Indeed the audience will glue their eyes on the performer such that as they hear the words, they watch the action that accompanies such words in order to fully enjoy the poem and also better understand what is being said.

It must be noted that this performance contains vivid imagery which is further deepened by the gestures and expressions that accompany it. Chief Moomen recounts the various stories and history which Ali reads in books as his cattle “grazes gracefully at a distance.” Moomen then continues with the following lines:

He stood on the desert sands and watched

As the pyramids rose to defy the skyline

And proclaim the glory of the Pharaohs

Chief Moomen at this point steps backwards, stops and stands to depict Ali’s standing on the sands while he lifts his hand to portray the gradual rising of the pyramids. The contemporary spoken word artist, Chief Moomen is aware of what he says in his performance so he is able to make gestures and signs that go along with the words that he says so as to convey a better understanding to the audience. This brings to mind the training that traditional oral artists go through in order to be fully prepared for their performances. It can be said that Chief Moomen has gone through training in preparation for this performance hence his ability to recite his poem and add suitable gestures at appropriate times during the performance.

Again in the performance, Chief Moomen opens up more imagination as he talks about Martin Luther nailing his “95 theses in Britannia.”/ “Unto the door of Wittenberg.” Here, Chief Moomen holds his fist up and moves his arm back and forth to depict the act of using the hammer to nail something on a surface. The artist’s use of gesture here as well clarifies the idea of nailing the theses by Martin Luther and further brings the force of the act to life as the audience sees the artist reenact the act.

He continues with the performance and enacts the following lines:

In Japan's bustling city of Kiyoto

He saw the Samurais with their two blades

The Asia's with their alluring gaze

As the actors in their Kimonos dance ...

As Chief Moomen gets to this part of his performance, he swings his arm to depict the act of using the sword in a fight. He then leans forward and backward, and then moves sideways to illustrate the dance of the "actors." He further shuts his eyes as he swings his arms like the sword. This facial expression suggests the strength needed to wield a sword and use it to fight. The audience is again exposed to the action of the sword wielding and the dance of the actors that the artist refers to. The words alone would make sense and meaning to the audience in a regular recitation without gestures but the use of gestures to accompany the words give it additional attention since the audience are there to watch as well as listen. It is for this reason that the traditional oral artist tries to satisfy both eyes and ears of the audience. Chief Moomen does exactly this by using gestures to make the audience glue their eyes on him as they listen to his poem.

Quite apart from the gestures, this performance by Chief Moomen in its generality takes the form of the traditional story telling. He appears to be telling the story of Hilla Limann but instead of the actual name, he uses "Ali." This could be related to the griots who tell the story of great men

especially royals and put such stories in verses. Chief Moomen thus tells the story of a boy from a village in the savanna that despite his inability to attend school regularly is able to learn so much about the world through his reading of books. Chief Moomen links the story to Dr. Hilla Limann in the following lines:

And so today we remember the young boy from Gwolu

Who traversed the limitations of his small town

And became an icon on the national and global stage...

Today we celebrate

Today we honor

Dr. Hilla Limann

The link between the story and Dr. Hilla Limann is seen in the fact that Dr. Limann actually came from Gwolu. Chief Moomen also makes it clear that he celebrates the man, Dr. Limann whose praises he sings. The typical Ghanaian story telling feature which involves the oral artist singing a song which a character supposedly sings in the story is applied by Chief Moomen in this performance. After the following lines, Moomen sings:

Through the ivory cities of

Mogadishu, Mombasa, Zanziba

Through the stony walls of great Zimbabwe

Back in Timbuktu

He heard the griot sing the praise song of Mansa Musa

The above lines talk about Ali's journey through Africa as he reads about Africa in his books. It is after the above lines that Moomen launches into the song:

Mansa Musa eee

Mansa Musa ooo

Mansa Musa

This song imitates how the griots sang the praise of Mansa Musa, a once wealthy emperor of the Mali Empire. As he sings, he holds his hand against his mouth to depict how the griots sang to the hearing of every one. The sound of the song adds more pleasure to the performance as it breaks the monotony of the recitation of words alone.

Again, just as the griots and some traditional poets do, Chief Moomen recounts history in his performance as he touches on various events that occurred at one time or the other in years past. He takes the audience on a journey through history as he mentions the building of the pyramids in Egypt, Cicero of Rome's oratory, the parables of Jesus of Judea, Mohammed of Arabia, the signing of the Magna Carta by King John of England, and the reign of Medici. Chief Moomen also mentions Martin Luther's 95 theses, Shakespeare and his plays, and the old Ghana, Mali and Songhai kingdoms of Africa. He also talks about the building of the Taj Mahal and the travels of Marco Pollo among others.

It is observed after the performance that, the artist succeeds in entertaining as well as educating the audience hence he received a round of applause for putting up a great performance.

3.2.6. Performance on TGIF on Metro TV

In the studio of Metro TV, Chief Moomen performs with Chaka, who plays a traditional guitar made from a large calabash and strings. This guitar is known as the "umbene." Chaka rests his guitar on his laps, plays it and sings to accompany its sound.

Chief Moomen stands laughs heartily and adjusts his shirt well. This already sets the tone of the performance to be a happy and an entertaining one. At this point, no one would expect a performance which is centered on sadness. Chief Moomen then starts his poem with the following lines:

When the harvest is over

We hover around the baobab tree

Until the gourds of pito arrive

After the first line, Moomen clasps his fingers together and after that he throws his fist on every line. Right from the laughter to the clasping of fingers and the throwing of fists, the readiness of Moomen to provide a lively performance is noticed. As Kabira and Mutahi (1988:42) note, "the artist will use both verbal and non-verbal language to fully communicate his message." The traditional oral artist therefore bears in mind that he cannot properly drive home his message if he relies heavily on only his words. He employs gestures and signs to compliment his words. This is what Moomen adopts from the beginning of the performance. He continues his performance:

And fill our calabashes

And we drink deep

In honor of the ancestors

Deep in honor of the gods

Deep in honor of our families

And deep in honor of our unborn children

During the recitation of these lines, Chief Moomen keeps a smiling face. His facial expression reveals his joy as he performs. This facial expression could also have an infectious effect to make the audience to also start smiling. The pleasure of the performance would thus not be got from only the voice or gestures but from facial expressions as well.

After he talks about the filling of their calabashes, he moves on to how they drink and puts a strong stress on “deep” and shouts it. This change in the tone of voice is for the sake of emphasis since the artist appears to inform the audience of how well the drinking has taken place. As he changes his tone and shouts the word, he raises his hand as well to show the power of what he means to say. It could be deduced that there is a lot to drink and people have their fill hence, the stress on the word, “deep.” Again, the word “deep” is stretched in the subsequent lines. Apart from the musical touch the change in tone and stretching of the word adds to the performance, it still lays emphasis on the word to point to its importance in understanding the amount of “pito” available to drink.

Each time Moomen mentions the word “deep,” he raises his hand to act out the power of the word.

The performance continues and Chief Moomen recites the following words:

We talk about who had the largest harvest

And who didn't

We talked about who will marry again

And who wouldn't

He bows and turns towards Chaka as he recites the part on the harvest. He then bows and opens his arms as he mentions the part on marriage. Although this gesture may not fully illustrate the act of harvesting and marriage, it brings a sort of life into the lines and would keep the eyes of the audience focused on the performance since they watch as well as listen.

The following lines are recited and here, Chief Moomen illustrates them with the appropriate gestures and body language. He says:

When Fulera passes by

With her pot of water on her head

And her huge buttocks dancing behind,

Alidu the foolish one will run and have his hands to tap

Fulera will turn and have her slap

During the recitation of the lines above, he raises his hands above his head to depict the carrying of something on the head just as he describes Fulera doing. The artist, Moomen thus puts himself in the place of Fulera and enacts her act of carrying water on the head. From this, he bends

towards his left and moves his body as if he were dancing, and shakes his waist slightly. This body language illustrates how Fulera walks to shake her “huge buttocks.” Moomen further bends and throws his hand in an attempt to hit something. This act also shows how Alidu taps the buttocks of Fulera. He again turns towards his right and throws his hands backwards to indicate a slap. Indeed this gesture depicts the slap that Alidu receives from Fulera. At this point, one could not help but admire the action that brings life into the performance and adds more dose of pleasure in addition to the manipulation of the voice.

Before he ends the first stanza of this performance, he recites these lines and acts on them accordingly:

We burst into a laughter

Raise our calabash into the air

Stamp our feet unto the earth until the dust rises

And chokes our nostrils

And we sneeze, “hiecheeww”

Chief Moomen raises his hands to illustrate the raising of “calabash into the air” while he stamps his foot to depict the stamping of “feet unto the earth.” He then holds his nose, bends and feigns a sneeze together with the sound that is made when one sneezes. This particular part of the performance is so interesting that the audience in the studio have to applaud the artist. This excitement in the audience is made possible by the actions of the artist which correspond with the lines he recites.

The last act of the artist which imitates a sneeze and its sound contains an important stylistic quality of traditional oral literature identified as ideophones. Okpewho (1992:92) defines the ideophone as an “idea-in-sound.” The use of sound to refer to an object or the nature of an occurrence or act is what qualifies as an ideophone. In this performance, the sound “hiecheew” presents the act of sneezing without any second thought. The sound of the sneeze adds beauty to the performance and gives it a sensual effect. It further makes this part of the performance more dramatic as the reality of the effect of the dust which rises into the nostrils is physically demonstrated by the artist.

Chief Moomen after this, sits in the sofa once more, shuts his eyes and nods to the sound of Chaka’s strings as Chaka sings to accompany the sound of his guitar. Then, Moomen gets up again and continues his performance. He makes use of gesture again in the following lines:

And when Adama has drunk deep enough

He offers to slaughter a goat

We give him the cheers; “Adama oo! Adama!”

And he offers to slaughter two

We give him more cheers; “Adama oo! Adama!”

At this point, he raises his hands to enact how people are cheered and urged on to do something great. Moomen throws his hands up on the shout: “Adama oo! Adama!” to show the energy with which Adama is cheered on to slaughter more goats. Again, there is the change in the tone of voice to a higher one to suit the shout of the cheers on Adama. It is important to note that, the manipulation of the voice to equal the shout is also accompanied with a smile from the artist,

Moomen. This brings out the happy mood which he describes in the words for the audience to see because words alone cannot portray that vividly.

The use of body language continues in the performance and throws more light on the skills of Chief Moomen as an artist. Since the use of appropriate gestures involves much skill, the competence of the artist is determined through it. Just like the traditional oral artist, Chief Moomen also exhibits his competence as an artist through the skillful use of body language. He gets to the following lines in the performance:

We stretch our feet

Pick our teeth

And belch as we ran our palm across our bellies...

The women come around

Together we sit and watch the stars dance in the sky

And listen to the birds sing into our very souls.

At this point in the performance, Moomen puts gestures on the lines. He for instance puts his fingers towards his teeth and pull it outwards to illustrate the picking of one's teeth after eating. He then rubs his hand on his stomach in an attempt to show the audience how the palm is ran on the bellies after the belch. He also stretches his hand out and brings them back to his chest to depict how the "women come around" after food is eaten. Moomen further looks up and points to the sky as he describes how they "sit and watch the stars dance in the sky." Finally, he moves his arms close to his body and raises his shoulder which shows how one goes through a deep emotional feeling.

All these gestures and body languages go beyond the images that are created in the mind of the audience and bring the various events and acts before them physically through the artist. The audience therefore sees the men rubbing their “palms on their bellies” after picking their teeth. The audience as well sees the women moving to gather around the men as they sit to “watch the stars dance in the sky” and the chills that run through the spine of the people as they “listen to the birds sing into their very souls” is also made active to the audience. Without great skill, the artist will not be able to apply suitable body language which will bring the words of the voice to life.

The whole performance is entertaining as it adopts story telling in verse. The performance tells the story of a village in which the people gather after their harvest to celebrate and make merry as a united community. They eat, drink and make merry until they get tired and go to sleep. Such is their happiness that Alidu takes advantage to touch the buttocks of Fulera who in turn gives Alidu a slap. This act alone creates much excitement and laughter. The happiness continues as Adama offers to slaughter goats for the men after he drinks much pito. Indeed the communal life of the African and its importance is addressed by Chief Moomen in this performance. He indicates the joy and fulfillment which is in the sharing of a common vision by a society. He therefore in this performance causes the audience to think about the happiness that they see in the communal life in the performance so that they could start sharing a common aim with one another as a society.

The fact that a contemporary spoken word artist decides to talk about life in rural settings especially in relation to the past reveals his commitment to reintroducing the world to very important elements that make life interesting but which are missing in contemporary times. He points out the importance of sharing with others as pito is shared by the men and Adama shares his goats with others. The importance of sitting together to eat as one people is also stressed as

“wives come bearing tuo zaafi with yawayawa and ayoyo soup/Alongside vougagyir.” In addition, the importance of uniting to march towards a common future is emphasized as the people together “sit and watch the stars dance in the sky...As they count their dreams.” Since the people have common dreams, they come together to count them.

Similarly, he touches on the need to talk about marriage as a communal responsibility and the importance of taking “future plans” as one people and the good that comes out when “disputes” are settled. Through this, a simple life which is free of enmity and strife is painted by the artist in order to remind the audience of the “I am because you are and you are because I am” principle of living in a society. It also reminds them of the importance of family ties as the basic point of safety and rest. And:

So sleep begins to steal upon us

So family by family

We drag ourselves to our huts

Until the next harvest

Chief Moomen as well touches on the necessity to tell and listen to the history of families and the land itself in order to teach people about where they are coming from in order to direct them to where they should go. This is seen as “Baba comes to tell us the stories/Handed down from generation to generation.” With this, the life of the African which is embedded in tales, stories and history which is passed on from one generation to the other is kept intact and kept from being lost. No one could deceive the African if he knows his own story.

The support of such performances from contemporary Ghanaian spoken word artists would create cultural awareness in many young Ghanaians and Africans as well as help them to take pride in their identity so that the continuous rejection of African knowledge would see a positive turn.

3.2.7. Solo Performance - Chief Moomen

This performance is a solo one which is recorded in front of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon. This performance sees only Chief Moomen as he presents a poem. This recording presents the opportunity to experience a performance that would have otherwise been lost. It is also in line with Kofi Anyidoho's advice that:

...it is also a fact that we cannot always experience oral literature in live performance situations. For the continuity of the dialogue with oral tradition, it is necessary that we explore the many opportunities offered by modern audio-visual technology. (Anyidoho 2013:32)

The benefit is that an artist could perform at any time that he desires, record it and share with the world instead of waiting for an occasion to be invited to perform.

In the performance, Chief Moomen stands beside one of the statues in a still position, holds his hands against his ear and says: "voices." He then moves forward, spreads his arms, smiles as he says:

Do you hear the voices?

Do you hear the voices of the people

When we gathered at the village square

Under the smiling moon...

At this point he raises his hand and points towards the sky. In this performance as well, it is observed that the artist's presentation of the poem from the very beginning is lively with the use of gestures and smiles although there is no live audience to motivate such bringing of life into the performance. The artist's standing still and holding of hands against his ears corresponds with the question he asks in the poem as to whether the voices of a people are heard or not.

He continues with the performance and recites other lines as he walks forward. He stands in front of the statues and faces the camera closely and goes on with the following lines:

But that was before the West winds

Filled the sails of the hungry ships

And docked them on our shores

And the voices changed

Throughout the recitation of these lines, he moves his hands on the words and suddenly bends and points to the ground as an illustration of how the ships dock on the shores. He then briskly walks and stands beside a female statue. After that he walks forward, bends at the same time, drops his arms and pulls them along, stands, moves and bends again as he points his hands to the ground. He gets up finally and makes the sign of the cross. All these while, he says:

Do you hear the cries of our women

As they were dragged through the thorny sands

Down into the endless dungeons...

And the holy gentlemen stole their honor?

It should be noted that each action that Moomen performs matches the lines that he recites. His rushing towards the female statue is to enact the first line. “As they were dragged through the thorny sands” is also illustrated by his bending and pulling of arms along. The third line is illustrated as he bends and points towards the ground while the sign of the cross acts out the “holy gentlemen.” It is therefore observed that the all the lines above come to life through the gestures and actions of the artist. A poem, which would have rather been cold if printed, is made to come to life to offer pleasure by engaging the eyes of the audience.

Few seconds into the performance, he asks:

Do you hear

The bitter cry of the men...

Then he turns towards a male statue and points his fist at it. It could be said that the location for the video is very suitable as the artist makes use of the statues as if they were live men and women since he engages the statues in the performance.

The performance continues with more action as the artist walks forward and pushes his arms up front and suddenly runs backwards to make the following lines come to life:

Do you hear the regretful sobs of the people

As they were led through the doors of no return

Into the land of untold hardships

This action of the artist is significant as the forward movement shows how the people are led through the “door of no return” which appears to be a walk into their future but turns out to be a journey of “hardship” as the artist takes a backward run. The artist therefore says the words but he succeeds in making these words speak volumes by putting actions on them. In addition to the action on the words, it is observed that the artist puts stress on “do you hear” and stretches it before resorting to a faster recitation of the rest of the lines after that. This gives this part of the performance a particular rhythm which appeals to the ear. Through this, the audience enjoys what he hears as well as what he sees in order to fully appreciate the message which the artist carries in his performance.

Chief Moomen later exerts much energy into the performance by passionately putting stress on certain words and acting out what he actually mean as well. The force and power with which he treats this part of the performance would keep the audience alert and bring those whose mind may wander about a little back to the performance. At this point he recites these:

Do you hear the crack of the whip

On the back of Kunta Kinte...

As he bends to dig the foundation

Of today’s sky scrapers

Each of the lines above takes certain body movements and voice variation from Chief Moomen. He lays a strong emphasis on “crack” and throws his hands down in a manner that shows how something is hit fiercely. As he gets to the word “back,” he lays emphasis on it as well. He then pulls his trousers up swiftly and bends to depict how “Kunta Kinte” bends to receive the whip at

his back. He further puts the same stress on “bends” and acts on it to show how “Kunta Kinte” digs the ground to “build the foundation of today’s skyscrapers.” To make the skyscrapers visible to the audience through actions, Moomen puts his hands up to towards the sky and raises his head to look up the sky as well. It must be noted here that the actions in the above lines come with the specific words, “crack,” “back” and “bend.” However, the actions represent all the ideas expressed in the lines so strongly that one cannot help but admire the skill of the artist.

Deep into the performance, Chief Moomen at a point starts smiling and suddenly turns and runs around the statues, and jumps to one side and the other in a happy manner while he continues with the following in a high tone:

How the people gather like they used to do

And sing

And dance

And tell stories like they used to do

The actions which the artist puts on the lines help to magnify the ideas being expressed. The intensity of the words is felt more with the action as the image of people singing and dancing is physically seen in the jumps of the artist. He then points his hand to his back and changes the tone of his voice once more to a softer tone to say:

Alas

The whip touch their backs

But not their spirits

It is realized from this performance that Chief Moomen, apart from providing a great deal of entertainment, performs one function of the traditional oral poet such as the griot. He educates in this performance. Hale (1998) identifies the griot as a teacher. The griot offers education to his prince as well as his people. In contemporary times however, there are no princes for the spoken word artists to teach since they are not traditional griots. In this performance, Moomen teaches about communal living among Africans where they “sing songs and tell stories” before the “West winds” led ships to the shores of Africa. He touched on slavery in the “dungeons” of the castles and how missionaries (holy gentlemen) “stole the honor” of the African women.

He again goes into history to mention a slave known as Kunta Kinte who was taken from his native home as a free man and made a slave, and who refused to forget his roots. Moomen further identifies some Africans who struggled for the freedom of the continent. He mentions Tafawa Balewa, Patrice Lumumba, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyata, Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Kwame Nkrumah and Nelson Mandela. He thus tells history in his performance and any member of the audience who has no knowledge of some of the things he mentions would then go back home to learn about them.

Since he talks about resistance and revolution, he makes use of appropriate musicians who have revolutionary ideas in the performance. He makes use of Fela Kuti and Bob Marley who are both noted for the manner in which they take pride in Africa. Bob Marley for instance is well known for his reggae songs which seek to address racism and the oppression of the African. The use of these musicians brings to mind their charisma and symbolic nature as those who take pride in Africa.

No wonder Chief Moomen calls on the youth of Africa to learn from the deeds of their ancestors to do their part in making Africa a better place for generations to come and meet. This message is clearly expressed in the following lines:

So virgins of the land

Hear the voices that you must be inspired

To make your voice heard

Sing your part in the melody of the nation

That others after you might sing of you

As you sing of those before you...

The contemporary Ghanaian spoken word artist, Chief Moomen does not stray away from the role of the traditional oral poets. He uses entertainment to tell history and to teach his audience. The words of the poem carry a message of remembering the past and applying it to the present in order to solve Africa's problems because the "Zion train," the train that leads to freedom and joy is coming towards Africa.

3.2.8. Conclusion

In this section, gestures and paralinguistic devices are discussed. It is realized that a poetry performance without gestures and other forms of action would not be as lively as expected. From the performances, the use of gestures does not only make the audience excited. They also make the audience to focus and pay attention to the performance since their eyes are glued to the

beauty of the performance. The words which the audience may not hear are therefore catered for by the appropriate gesture and body language.

It is further realized that unlike a written work which would vividly express an idea and ends there, the performance of a work would bring the idea expressed to life such that the audience would not have to imagine the message but would see it happen before them physically.

The use of gestures plays an important role in the performance of African traditional oral literature and its use in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry reflects its strength and allows for the tradition to go on.

3.3 Drums, Music and Voice

3.3.1. Introduction

This third part of the chapter discusses the use of drums, music and the voice in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry. The use of drums and music are integral parts of traditional oral poetry in Africa. Focus is therefore on their successful use in contemporary spoken word poetry.

It cannot be disputed that the use of drums in Africa has been relevant from time immemorial. According to J.H Kwabena Nketia, “although drums are used in Akan society for making a limited number of announcements, they are also vehicles of literature.” (2012:1287) This proves that, the talking drums form an integral part of traditional oral literature. Nketia further adds that:

There would be no hope for the talking drum if its only function was to give information. On state occasions they drum poems of special interest to the chief and the community as a whole. (2012:1287)

This suggests that although there is the presence of technology in terms of radio, television and other media for the dissemination of information, the use of the drum still holds some value. This point to the fact that the drum goes beyond the provision of information only since the mass media has taken over that function of the drum. The drum however is still used during “state occasions” as a medium of presenting poetry “of special interest.” Attention must be paid to “special interest” because it suggests that, very important poems come through the drums. During traditional festivals, the drums are still used. Indeed because the drum is dear to African culture, it has gradually found its way into the churches as well.

Walter J. Ong notes that:

The extraordinary widespread use of talking drums in Africa suggests an extraordinarily strong current of orality in African cultures, and this suggestion is further reinforced by the way in which the use of slit-gongs and drums for talking merges with their use throughout African cultures in civil and religious ceremonies of all sorts, in the dance, in sports, in celebrations, in war, in work, and many other areas of existence. (1977:428)

This further reiterates the fact that the talking drum cuts across many areas of the life of African societies such that it reinforces the oral nature of African societies. During various ceremonies, the drum takes centre stage as the ceremonies revolve around them. As noted by Nketia earlier, chiefs are treated to “special poems” on the drums and since oral poets are masters of various ceremonies, they cannot be separated from the drums. The drums can thus be said to be their partners in performance.

3.3.2. Drums in Contemporary Ghanaian Spoken Word Poetry

As stated earlier, drums play a very important role in traditional oral performance. It is noteworthy that drums are used in contemporary performances. One spoken word artist who is noted for the use of drums is Nana Asaase. The use of drums in contemporary times reflects the reliance of contemporary spoken word on traditional oral performance.

During Nana Asaase's performance at MOGO for instance, traditional drums of different sizes are used to adorn the stage. Also, as he makes certain movements on stage, the drums are played to accompany them. The drums are very traditional musical instruments and the talking drum as the name suggests has been used to send messages and to communicate with members of a particular society. Whenever talking drums are played for instance among the Ewes of Ghana, coded messages, proverbs and sometimes, the history of the community is heard. Asaase chants a popular Akan call and response song:

Ogya ee ogya aa!

Ogya ee ogya aa!

Ogya ee ogya aa!

Ogya ee ogya aa!

This song is accompanied with the sound of drums, flute and guitar. This injects energy and liveliness into the performance just as it happens in traditional performances. Kofi Awoonor (1974: 16) describes how the drums bring poetry to life in the performance of Ewe poetry. He states that “poetry among the Ewes is embedded in their drums.” He adds that “there is a large body of rhythmic patterns or beats from which each poet-cantor can select. To this he brings to

bear his own music and words (words receive prominence over music) to make that drum his own.” (17) This suggests that, poetry becomes more interesting when the drums accompany music. The possible effect of this is that it allows the poet to take control of both words and music in order to bring out his best. The link could be seen as Nana Asaase uses the drums and music to take charge of his performance just as is done in traditional oral poetry performance. He wields a particular sort of energy just as the song and the drums are introduced in the performance.

As Asaase performs, he states the Akan proverb; “Twene anim ɔa ho a, yen mmɔ nkyɛn” (we cannot ignore the face of the drum and play its sides) and the drummer plays the exact words on the drum.

Femi Osofisan (2012:1263) says of the drum that its beat “rolls down the long centuries, inspiring poets and singers, and dancers...” Indeed, a close observation of traditional festivals in Ghana would reveal the use of ‘talking drums.’ In Akan it is called the ‘Atumpan’ and in Ewe it is called ‘Uugã.’ Various words such as proverbs and praises of chiefs are played on the drums. The role of the drum in traditional African societies can thus, not be downplayed. Even with the influx of foreign musical instruments, Nana Asaase still holds onto the traditional drums as an important aspect of traditional oral poetry which could not be replaced by any foreign instrument in contemporary times. Osofisan (2012:1266) states emphatically that:

The drum which, embodying thus the elements of song, dance and image in its magical reality gave birth to the paradigmatic and synthetic structure of oral poetry is the erstwhile unacknowledged element in the marrow of the most adventurous of our modern

poets. Throbbing with the force and tyranny of a powerful nostalgia, it fashions their vision, dictates their style, and establishes their identity with the indigenous culture.

The contribution of drums to traditional oral poetry becomes obvious and modern poets have tapped into the riches of the drums but most people fail to realize the fact that the use of drums has a long history with oral poetry. Indeed, Nana Asaase adopts this very important aspect of traditional oral poetry and puts it into his practice of contemporary spoken word poetry.

Asaase's performance at PENSA meeting for instance begins with drumming - the playing of the talking drum by the drummer who is situated at the right hand side of the stage. The drummer wraps kente cloth around his waist and is bare chested and bare footed as he drums. The drumming continues in a steady succession and Nana Asaase steps on the stage and says:

Ghana muntie (Ghana listen)

Akristofuo muntie (Christians listen)

PENSA muntie (PENSA listen)

Anytime Nana Asaase says each of the lines, the drummer plays the words on the drums. After the last line, "PENSA muntie" and its corresponding play on the drum, there is a pause and the audience clap and cheer. The cheers Nana Asaase receives from his audience in contemporary times indicate that his performance is enjoyed by the audience. Nana Asaase is able to capture the heart of his audience by adopting the drum, a core element of traditional oral poetry. If Asaase should appear on stage and just recite his poetry, the effect on the audience would not be as great as using the drums.

Further into this same performance, Asaase turns to the drummer and says:

Ɔkyerɛma

Ɔkyerɛma

Ɔdomankoma kyerɛma

Here, the drummer plays each of the lines on the drum just after Nana Asaase recites them. From there on, Asaase recites more lines in Twi which the drummer also plays on his drum. At a point Asaase stops, turns to the drummer and says: “ɔkyerɛma so mi mue.” This literally translates as “Drummer, hold me.” Immediately after the utterance from Asaase, the drummer plays the talking drum in quick but steady beats until Asaase walks to him and says: “medaase, medaase, medaase, medaase.” This means “thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.” It is after these words that the drummer fades the beats to an eventual end. The call on the drummer suggests the importance of the drum in directing the performance. Asaase also thanks the drummer to reveal the respect he has for the drums and to show appreciation for their role in his performance.

Another instance of the drum use in this performance comes at the end where Nana Asaase concludes his poetry presentation. Just after the last line to conclude the performance, the drummer drums in a quick rhythm and gradually fades it to a stop. The drummer therefore comes in at this stage to end the performance that was started by him and his drum. This again points out the reliance of Nana Asaase on a vital element of African traditional oral poetry, the drum.

It is very important to note that during this particular performance, the lines of the poem that are played on the drum after Nana Asaase recites them are all in Twi. The lines in English are not played on the drums. This draws a distinction between the two languages and reveals how the contemporary spoken word poet falls on the traditional oral art since the traditional oral poets

perform in their native languages. This also points to the fact that the talking drums do not speak English because the people that the drums communicate to may not understand English so the drums have to speak the language they understand. Nana Asaase does not force the drummer to play the words in English on the drums. This further suggests that certain statements in native languages carry some sort of power and force which will be diluted when translated into English. This further brings in the role of tone of drums which imitates human voice to send across messages. It could be explained therefore that Asaase is conscious of this and makes the drummer play the words in Twi so as to draw attention to them.

Kwabena Nketia says of the drum that, “they are important vehicles of traditional poetry — the unwritten literature of proverbs, personal poetry...” (2012:1292). In the performance, Nana Asaase calls on the drummer to play his lines on the drum because of the importance of the drum in traditional oral poetry. The drums carry the heartbeat of traditional oral poetry and as Femi Osofisan (2012:1267) puts it, “the beat and rhythm of the drums should be the first yardstick for the proof of identity” of traditional oral poetry in any modern poetry. The lines that are played on the drums in Nana Asaase’s performance come with a certain rhythm as he recites them. The presentation of the lines on the drum further proves that the contemporary spoken word poet directly depends on the rhythmic quality of the drums as an element of traditional oral poetry to put up his performance.

Apart from the drums being used to “talk” or recite various lines of poetry alongside the poet, they also add to making the songs of traditional oral poetry interesting. It is observed that, Nana Asaase employs this element of traditional oral poetry in his performance as he sings on two occasions accompanied with drumming. The drumming here has to do with the drum itself and other musical instruments to add rhythm and life to songs.

The drums bring out the beauty of the traditional oral poetry in Africa. The drum can therefore not be written out of the performance of traditional oral poetry. Awoonor states that:

By drums I do not mean only the physical entities of leather and wood, rattlers, gongs and other instruments which are part of the African musical ensemble. I mean the variety in musical and poetic approaches of the various drumming groups that have become part of the Ewe cultural tradition. (1974:16)

This confirms that the drums also include other musical instruments and these together with the drums serve as the foundation of the poetry that is performed. The use of the drums have gone through many years and have developed variety depending on what a drumming group would like to do with it. The poet therefore can be said to be at liberty to adopt any variety of the drums to help his performance.

During Nana Asaase's performance, he informs his audience of his intention to break into a song in the following words:

A man can only be as true as his mother tongue

Let me not waste your ears with words

I put this one together for α mama Yesu Kristo

My God of songs

He then calls on the gong player thus:

Aḍewuro Kofi (Kofi the gong beater)

Ma wo homene soɛ

The calling on the wielder of the gong clearly shows that the poet is in control of the performance just as the traditional oral poets. In the poetry performance of the Ewes for instance, the gong is one of the first instruments that accompany the chant of various lines of the poem before the rattles and the drums join in. Anyidoho (1983:312) observes that "one percussion instrument generally regarded as the "time keeper" is used to carry the time line. Usually this is the *ganjogui*, the double bell often referred to as "gong-gong." This explains that the gong is used to give a steady rhythm to traditional oral poetry and its importance cannot be overlooked. It is not surprising therefore to see the contemporary spoken word artist fetch this technique of starting his songs with the gong. Asaase decides on what to do during this performance to make it interesting. So he calls on the gong first to show his authority as a poet.

At this point the gong is beaten in a steady rhythm, joined by the drums and followed by the organist. It is observed that various musical instruments come together to form one melodious rhythm in readiness for a song to be sung just as is done in traditional oral poetry performance with the drums. Nana Asaase then sings in Twi accompanied with the gong, drums and keyboard. He moves up and down the stage on the rhythm of the music. The contemporary spoken word artist (Nana Asaase) has in this performance initiated his own drum and sings on it to the delight of the audience.

In traditional oral poetry, as is the case of the Ewes, Awoonor (1974:17) observes that:

There is a large body of rhythmic patterns or beats from which each poet – cantor can select. To this he brings to bear his own music and words to make that drum his own...It is from the voice of the various drums that the poetry proper of the Ewes emerges...

Although Nana Asaase does not directly follow this element of traditional oral poetry in his performance to the letter, (because he does not have his own drumming group) he adopts a rhythm that he can work with and puts his songs on it. Through this he owns the drums at that moment just as the traditional oral poets do. The contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poet goes back into tradition to use the drums in his time as a performer.

After singing, there is a pause and Nana Asaase says:

Meyɛ Okuapemni ba (I come from Akwapim)

Mefri Adukrom (I come from Adukrom)

Adewuro Kofi! Toa ne woreɛ no so... (Kofi the gong player, continue with what you were doing)

He then starts to sing in another Ghanaian language, Cherepong but in the same tune as he does in Twi. It is observed again that he calls on the gong before this song is also produced. The importance of the gong in traditional settings is to alert members of a community to be on their ears before announcements of great significance are made. It is no wonder that the gong plays a vital role in the performance of traditional oral poetry. Asaase, the contemporary spoken word artist falls on the gong as a traditional instrument for making announcements and an instrument in the performance of traditional oral poetry alongside drums to put up his performance in contemporary times. After the first song, he urges the gong beater to “continue with what he was doing.” This suggests the importance of the gong to the artist. He therefore does not wish that the gong should be taken out of his performance so he calls on the gong beater the second time to encourage him that he had done a great job and to keep it up.

The last use of the drums is seen at the end of the performance. Asaase says the following lines to end his performance and exit the stage:

I did not come to pour libation

I only came to raise a song of love to Jesus

My god of songs

Medase (Thank you)

Just after the above lines, the drummer plays the drums in a steady and quick rhythm to indicate the end of the performance and to usher the poet out of the stage. This is significant because the performance begins with the drums and ends with the drums. In other words, part of traditional oral poetry begins the performance and ends it as well to lay emphasis on the adoption and re-enactment of traditional oral poetry in contemporary times.

3.3.3. Music and Voice in Contemporary Ghanaian Spoken Word Poetry

The selected performances for this study and indeed most contemporary spoken word performances are done with music. The artists sing during the performances and sometimes they perform with background music. The artists also use the voice in various ways such as the adoption of high pitch, stress and variation in tone to put across their message.

Okpewho (1992:88) looks at how tonality is used in performances in African oral literature and points out that:

Because the text of African oral literature is performed by the human voice, it benefits greatly from the flexibility of the voice, which is not easily represented on the printed

page...oral literature makes its appeal first through the sound of the words and that the oral performer whose voice is not strong enough gains little popularity.

This emphasizes the importance of the voice and how it is manipulated through the use of various tones in a performance in order to make the performance attractive as well as interesting to an audience.

In Chief Moomen's performance at Dr. Hilla Limann's memorial for instance, he manipulates his voice in order to draw attention to some words as well as create a special effect on the audience. At the beginning of the performance, he raises the tone of his voice and fades it out as he mentions the word “night” in the line below:

Pierces through the silence of the night

This upward turn and fading of tone by the artist gives the performance at this point a musical touch. It also brings out the ending of night as dawn breaks in. The performance continues and Chief Moomen puts stress on “hut” and takes a pause in the following lines:

Ali will rouse himself from his straw mat

In his mud hut

The stress on the “hut” here draws attention to Ali’s background as coming from a humble home. The village setting is also presented here by putting stress on “hut.” The pause after the mention of “hut” allows the artist to take a few seconds breath before going on with the performance. It also gives a rhythmic touch to the performance as well as allowing the audience some time to reflect on the previous lines.

Chief Moomen continues with the performance with passion and energy and says the following lines:

There in the luscious outskirts of the village

Where the grass is green and the rising sun is mellow

The lazy looking animals would indulge themselves in the foliage

And Ali will find a spot under a tree

To pass his time

And it is here

That all the magic happens...

Chief Moomen raises the tone of his voice as he gets to the word “rising.” This high tone goes along with the word itself to show how the sun rises. The effect is that the voice brings the “rising” of the sun to life into the performance. It is observed that the lines, “the lazy looking animals would indulge themselves in the foliage”/ “And Ali will find a spot under a tree...” follow each other in quick succession without a pause. This gives the poem a lyrical and rhythmic effect since the pause initiates the strong beginning of another line. Chief Moomen also stretches “Ali” and “tree” to a certain length. The stretching of these words establish the relationship between “Ali” and “tree” as the former sits under the latter to read books. Through the stretching of these words, the relationship between “Ali” and the “tree” is established to portray the importance of the “tree” in the life of “Ali.” In addition, the stretch on the words draws attention to the rhyme of the /i:/ sound in them to create a musical effect.

As Chief Moomen gets to “And it is here,” he puts a powerful stress on the word “here.” The change in tone quickly pulls the attention of the audience to the word and this goes to relate it to the “tree.” The rhythmic effect created by the stretching of “Ali” and “tree” and the stress on “here” makes it clear that the “tree” is a very key element in the life of Ali. No wonder Moomen goes on to describe the tree as the place where “all the magic happens.”

Farther into the performance, Chief Moomen continues to play with his change in tone and variation in his voice. He puts stress on some words and recites some lines in quick succession.

The following lines serve as an example:

He loved to read

To travel in time and place

And see

And feel

And touch

A world different from his own



In these lines, Moomen puts a strong stress on “loved” so as to point out the fact that Ali actually has reading at heart and would not sacrifice his reading for anything else. The emphasis on “loved” is to quickly bring the audience whose mind may be elsewhere back, to what he (the artist) is saying. The five lines after “He loved to read” are recited in a quick succession. The lines before them take a regular pace. The sudden shift from that pace to a quicker pace and recitation in quick succession creates a musical and rhythmic effect which would keep the audience attracted to the performance by giving them pleasure.

In another instance, Chief Moomen slows down the pace in reciting. In the following lines, the shift from a regular pace to a slower pace also contributes to useful application of the voice to create a special effect in performance. Felice Belle (2003:14) also adds that “a poem is fully experienced when given voice.” When the voice is skillfully used by the poet during performance, it gives much more delight than a mere recitation without any variation in the voice. During the performance, Moomen slows down in these lines:

All the world is a stage

And all the men and women merely players

In this case just as the shift to a faster pace of recitation, the attention of the audience is drawn to the lines. As one enjoys a performance, any change in style will surely arouse his attention and keep his interest in watching the performance. This sudden change to a slower pace also provides a rhythmic appeal to the performance. The use of tonality to provide the audience with a sort of musical happiness even if they do not understand the language in which the performance is done is what Kofi Anyidoho refers to during his performance at the International Poetry Day celebration at Legon in 2015 as the “pleasure principle.” This pleasure principle is what Chief Moomen adopts to suit his performance by varying the tone of his voice and the pace with which he uses his voice to recite the poem.

In his performance on Metro TV as well, Chief Moomen stretches the last three lines that end his poem and slows the pace with which he recites it. The following lines end the poem:

So family by family

We drag ourselves to our huts

Until the next harvest

The last line is the one Moomen takes a slower pace to recite. This sudden shift from a fast pace of recitation places emphasis on the words and let the audience know that the end of the performance is due. It is observed that even in traditional songs, the ending of the songs is stretched and slower pace is applied to indicate the end of the song. This idea is applied in this performance and it gives the performance a musical effect which in turn offers pleasure to the audience. The voice is the main tool available to the traditional oral poet as well as the contemporary spoken word artist and their ability to manipulate it effectively to entertain and impress their audience depends on their personal skills. This skill is what Chief Moomen uses to indicate the end of the performance and also to lay emphasis on the words that the audience should wait for more interesting account during the “next harvest.”

The consistency in the manipulation of voice runs through all selected performances. It is observed that at a point in Chief Moomen's solo performance, he adopts a higher tone and takes to a faster pace with intermittent brief pauses to recite the following lines:

Do you hear the voice of a Garvey

Of a Padmore

Of a Du Bois...

An Nkrumah

On that fateful 57 night declaring to the world

The sudden change in tone and the use of a faster pace create a particular rhythm which suggests the urgency with which “Garvey, Padmore, Du Bois and Nkrumah raised their voices to say

“enough is enough.” The skillful use of the voice at this point injects some energy and youthfulness of the artist into the performance which in turn makes the poem active.

Immediately after the lines above, he switches to the stretching of “at long last” and “free forever” in the lines below while he stands still, raises his head and lifts his hand to the sky:

At long last, the battle has ended

And Ghana your beloved country

Is free forever

Moomen shifts again to a faster pace of reciting the poem as he mentions the names of “Tafawa Balewa,” “Patrice Lumumba,” “Julius Nyerere” and “Jomo Kenyata.” These men in the history are some popular Africans who fought in one way or the other for the overall good of Africa. The to and fro movement of the tone of the voice from stressed to soft and the stretching and quickening of certain words and lines as observed above gives the poem a particular beat which takes the boring monotony of recitation out of the performance.

Moomen in this performance exclaims, “amandla!” as he tries to describe “Mandela screaming from his prison walls.” He walks forward, opens both arms and throws his fist in the air as he shouts the word. “Amandla” in the Nguni language of South Africa means “power” and was used during the resistance of apartheid. The word therefore carries strength and confidence hence the artist’s exclamation to fully put out meaning of the word in the poem. Through this the image of Nelson Mandela fighting for the freedom of his people is rightly brought to life as the artist assumes the figure of Mandela and acts like him in resisting the apartheid system.

The use of music also plays important roles in contemporary spoken word poetry as in traditional oral performance. Both Nana Asaase and Chief Moomen make use of songs in their performances. Nana Asaase sings traditional folk songs as well as call and response songs to engage his audience and to break boredom. The songs also illustrate certain actions and messages. In his performance at MOGO for example, he sings C.K. Mann's highlife song, "fa wokoma ma me." The choice of song first of all depicts the originality of Ghanaian music. Secondly, the lyrics of the song appeal to the audience to take good care of Ghanaian culture. Asaase uses the song to urge the audience to appreciate him as a Ghanaian artist as he sings:

Mo deɛ ne me, nti ɛyɛ a korɔkorɔ me,

(I belong to you so cosset me)

Ghanafuo, mo deɛ a ne me nti ɛye a mmonkorɔkorɔ me

(Ghanaians, I belong to you so cosset me)

Mo deɛ a ne me nti ɛyɛ a mmonkorɔkorɔ me,

(I belong to you so cosset me)

Ghana, mo deɛ a ne me nti ɛyɛ a mmonkorɔkorɔ me

(Ghana, I belong to you so cosset me)

Obi nni m'akyi nti ɛyɛ a, korɔkorɔ me

(No one comes after me so cosset me)

Wonni obi ka me ho Ghana ee korɔkorɔ me

(You have no one apart from me, Ghana cosset me)

The song breaks the monotony of recital of words and still communicates to the audience. To indicate his awareness that songs break boredom in performances, Nana Asaase says the following to his audience during his performance at PENSA meeting before singing a song of praise to his "god of songs":

A man can only be as true as his mother tongue

Let me not waste your ears with words

I put this one together for *ɔmama* Yesu Kristo

My god of songs

The lines above explain that the artist has made enough use of words and a continuous use of them would bring boredom to the audience hence his decision to switch to the use of songs.

Okpewho(1992:45) observes that:

Manipulation of the material is standard ingredient in the performance of oral literature and that the audience is more likely to be impressed by a performer who shows some resourcefulness with the text of a chant or song than by one who simply recites his lines mechanically.

The skillful use of song in an oral performance is thus bound to bring variety which breaks the boring and monotonous recitation of the poem. The song refreshes the mind of both the performer and the audience. It further reiterates the idea that the artist seeks to put across in a more appealing manner.

Nana Asaase's choice of a popular folk song entitled "Pempenaa" during his performance at Goethe Institut summarizes the importance of traditional songs in contemporary spoken word performance. This song was used as the theme song of a very popular story telling television program named "By the Fireside." This program was hosted by a Ghanaian actress, Grace Omaboe who gathered children around her and told them stories as it was done in the traditional settings. The use of this song for the program shows its importance in traditional oral performance. Asaase therefore makes a good choice of song to put up his performance.

It can therefore be said that, the traditional songs have a great potential which was discovered by the traditional oral artists hence the use of such songs during performances. These songs made the traditional performances lively and it can be seen clearly that the return of the contemporary Ghanaian spoken word artist to the tradition of folk songs contributes greatly to making the performance unique and lively as compared to the cold text on paper or a mere recitation of the poem without the use of folk songs to spice it up.

As Chief Moomen also recites his poem in the studio of Metro TV, Chaka plays his guitar. Chaka's guitar sound serves as background music to the performance. In his solo performance Moomen sings to illustrate what he says. For instance he says:

And do you hear the South African girls singing

Then instead of going on with the usual recitation of the words, he brings in variety by singing the following words:

Nkosi sikelele Africa

This line, he takes from the South African anthem which means “God bless Africa.” It should be noted that Chief Moomen uses the voice to illustrate the words he says. For instance, he talks about girls singing, then, he starts to sing in accordance with what he has said. Here, he draws on a part of Africa, South Africa which prays for God’s blessings on Africa to show that Africa is one no matter the differences. Again, the image of girls and their voices singing is seen and heard by the audience through the artist.

Similarly, Chief Moomen continues with his performance and recites the lines:

Do you hear

A Fela Anikulapo singing revolutionary chants

Into your hearts

Then he demonstrates this act of Fela’s singing as well as he sings these words with a smile:

If you call a woman African woman

She no go ‘gree

She go say eee

She go say I be lady o

He moves his hands on the song as he sings and this song actually is one of Fela Kuti, a popular Nigerian musician’s song. The music here changes the mechanical manner in which the presentation takes and injects more delight such that the performance gets a musical effect. Since this song is quite popular, any member of the audience could join him sing if he were performing before a live audience. The possibility however still remains that, anyone who takes this video to

watch and could sing the song will sing along with the artist even though they do not meet physically.

Another significant use of the song in the performance occurs at the end. Moomen slowly and softly recites the following lines:

So virgins of the land...

Sing your part in the melody of the nation...

As you sing of those before you

Because at the end,

Then he sings a line from Bob Marley's song, "Zion Train" thus:

Zion train is coming our way

He equally provides a beat to the song with sounds from his mouth after singing the line. The beat he adds to the song sounds, "chuck chack chuck chack chuck chack." At this point also, Moomen could have decided to just say the words of the song but he decides to sing in order to demonstrate what he says and this is what makes his performance interesting.

Both artists are contemporary spoken word artists but they have employed the voice and music so skillfully that they achieve the same effect that occurs in traditional oral performances.

3.3.4. Conclusion

Contemporary spoken word poetry as observed is gaining grounds in Ghana and one reason is that it taps from traditional oral poetry so as to make Ghanaians relate to it. Music and voice are two important elements of traditional oral performance which are employed by the spoken word artists. These artists such as Chief Moomen and Nana Asaase make use of folk songs, highlife and other songs to keep their performance alive. It is noted that the variation in voice also puts emphasis on certain words to put across the messages of the spoken word artists. Both music and voice break boredom during performance and contemporary Ghanaian spoken word artists make effective use of them to yield the desired result of putting their messages across to their audience.



CHAPTER FOUR

ARTIST – AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP AND STYLISTIC QUALITIES IN CONTEMPORARY SPOKEN WORD POETRY

OVERVIEW

In chapter three, gestures and, drums and music which are features of African traditional oral poetry were discussed. These features are identified in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry. The roles of these features in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry were discussed and it was observed that the features form an integral part of both African traditional oral poetry and contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry. Further identification and analysis of other features which are common to African traditional oral poetry and contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry shall be done in this chapter as a build up on the previous one. This chapter consists of three sections. The first talks briefly about other spoken word stages in Ghana. The second section discusses the relationship between the artist and his audience, how both influence each other during performance and how this contemporary relationship connects to traditional oral performance. The third section discusses some stylistic qualities of traditional oral performance which are found in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry.

For the discussion in this chapter, various instances from selected performances of Nana Asaase and Chief Moomen are used for illustration.

4.1. More on Spoken Word Stages and Performance in Ghana

4.1.1. Introduction

It is common to see many recordings which are referred to as spoken word poetry. During entertainment award ceremonies such as the Ghana Music Awards, some spoken word artists are invited to put up performances. This shows that the spoken word art is gaining grounds in Ghana due to its ability to entertain as well as to inform. There are still more avenues for the performance of spoken word poetry and most of these avenues are powered by young men and women who have love for the arts.

4.1.2 Other Spoken Word Stages in Ghana

As stated earlier, there are many avenues and stages that have sprung up for the performance of spoken word poetry in contemporary times. This has drawn much attention to the art and provides support for it. Such attention and support is important because it gives hope to the art. It is interesting to note that some of these spoken word avenues and platforms are the works of young men and women and the spoken word artists themselves. Some of these avenues and platforms are discussed briefly.

Sankofa Sessions

Sankofa Sessions is a Ghanaian literary series which is the initiative of Philip Oyinka, a spoken word artist popularly known as Nana Asaase. The first session was held at the Spring Field Gardens at Peduase in the Eastern Region of Ghana. This event took place in June 2018. The second edition took place in December 2018 at the African Regent Hotel in Accra. The name Sankofa in Akan means “go back and take.” It reveals the aim of this program which is to “tap experience from the older generation of poets and to identify and grow the voice of the new and

upcoming writers.” (www.writersprojectghana.com) The December 2018 session for instance witnessed the presence of Ghanaian poet Lade Wosornu who shared his experiences with the audience. There was an “open mic” segment where various spoken word artists performed to the delight of the audience. The aim of this platform is to expose young spoken word artists to the knowledge of experienced poets which will help groom better poets.

Media Houses and Television Programmes

For some time now, various media houses in Ghana have shown their strong support for spoken word poetry in Ghana. They invite some of the artists on their programs and give them time to perform to the viewers who can be described as the invisible audience. Some of these Television stations include Joy News which occasionally hosts spoken word artists. On the occasion of Ghana’s Independence in 2018 for instance, Chief Moomen was hosted and he performed a poem in praise of Ghana. Chief Moomen also performed some of his poems on TV Africa. Similarly, Nana Asaase performed at Joy News TV to pay tribute to Komla Dumor. Many other spoken word artists such as Oswald Okaitei, Sefaashi, Rhyme Sonny among others appeared on one TV station or the other to share their art with the world.

Solo Performance Video Recordings

Another development worth noting in relation to the various platforms for the performance of spoken word poetry in Ghana is the video recording of solo performances by the spoken word artists. With this, the artists record their performances in a studio or any location they find appropriate. There is no presence of an audience but the artists assume and imagine an audience since the recording will be put out in the public domain. These artists therefore perform to an “imagined audience.” This new development has given the opportunity to the spoken word artists

to share their creativity and talent with the world without necessarily waiting to be invited to perform at an event or occasion. This keeps the performance on going since anyone who decides to watch the video at any time becomes an audience. The performance thus never ends. Sometimes, the recording involves some characters and it is made to look like a movie. Some examples of such solo performance recordings include Poetra Asantewa's "Mother" and "All is Well." Others are Nana Asaase's video recording for "Sacho Inspires," Oswald Okaitei's "The Eighth Ode to Ali," Chief Moomen's "Voices" and "Ancestral Flames" among others. These video recordings are kept online and shared on social media to preserve the works of the artists for future generations to watch.

It must be noted that this development was preceded by audio recordings and Kofi Anyidoho for instance recorded some of his poems and produced two audio CD and Cassette recordings for *PraiseSong for TheLand* which was published in 2002 and *A Place We Call Home and Other Poems*, published in 2011. Indeed, listening to the audio of the written poems brings the text to life in the ears of the reader/listener. This is made possible by the voice and its intonation, stress, rhythm and pause. Through this the words are heard and felt acting rather than "sitting still" in print. This reveals that poetry is more appealing and attractive when spoken rather than read hence Anyidoho's decision to record his poems, especially his poems in Ewe (which are on CDs) so as to reach people who cannot read English. The video recordings of today can therefore be seen as a build-up on the audio recordings.

4.1.3. Conclusion

There are many avenues for contemporary spoken word artists to display their talents. These platforms apart from grooming more talents also contribute to the expansion of spoken word poetry. Some of these platforms require the presence of an audience but recently spoken word artists can do a video recording of themselves performing any of their pieces and upload it online for people to watch. Indeed contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry is finding its foot and would be better if attention is given to its study.

4.2. Artist and Audience

4.2.1. Introduction

As noted early on in the discussion in chapter one, the artist is central to performance since there cannot be any performance without actors and in this case the major actor is the spoken word artist and his job is to perform. It is because of the artist that there is an audience and it is because of an audience that there is the artist. Both the artist and the audience are therefore the two sides of one coin. The existence of both makes the performances complete hence the need to discuss how they relate during performances. Illustrations are drawn from performances of Nana Asaase and Chief Moomen.

4.2.2. Artist – Audience Relationship

Anyidoho (1991:43) observes that the audience plays a very important role in performance in Africa which encourages the artist or puts him on his toes to improve upon his performance. He notes that:

The members of a typical audience in Africa will probably not applaud a bad performance out of politeness and then walk away mumbling their disgust to themselves. They expect a high display of competence, and they would insist on it. A tedious performer may suddenly receive a loud burst of applause, which is really a warning signal: "Give us a good show or cut it off!"

This explains that the performer has the responsibility to put up a good show to satisfy his audience. In order to get more audience during subsequent performances the artist needs to please his audience since the audience will not hesitate to boo the artist over a poor performance just as they will not hesitate to applaud a good performance.

Anyidoho (1991:44) further states some positive roles of the audience:

The audience is not necessarily a threat to the performer. On the contrary, the audience is more likely to be an ally, a prompter, and an inspirer to excellence, than an obstacle to a satisfying experience. After all, the audience is anxious to be offered the pleasures of performance, just as the performer experiences a sense of personal satisfaction over a successful performance.

It is realized from the above that the audience just desires to be entertained and to get value for his entrance fee (if he pays any). He therefore becomes a friend to the performer to help in the performance (if need be), to cheer the performer on to a great delivery as well as prompt the performer when a performance starts to go bad. In contemporary Ghanaian spoken word performances, it is observed that the artists establish good relationships with their audiences and this relationship helps them to put up exciting performances which receive applause from their audiences.

An encouraging role of the audience to a contemporary spoken word artist is observed in Nana Asaase's performance at PENSA (Pentecost Students and Associates) gathering. As Nana Asaase enters the stage, he recites the following lines with their accompanied sounds on the talking drum:

Ghana muntie(Ghana Listen)

Ekristofuo muntie(Christians Listen)

PENSA muntie(PENSA Listen)

Just after the above lines and the sound of the talking drums, the audience gives an excited outburst and applause. Indeed this reaction from the audience from the very beginning of the performance is an indication that they have already fallen in love with whatever Nana Asaase intends to do. It also gives satisfaction to Asaase and encourages him to do more to the delight of his audience.

Similarly, Asaase recites the following lines to end his performance and he receives intense cheers and applause:

I did not come to pour libation

I only came to raise a song of love to Jesus

My god of songs

Medase(Thanks)

The applause at the end of the performance suggests that the audience have enjoyed the performance and that they are ready to see him perform on another occasion. It is important to note as well that at the end of the performance, Asaase says “Medase(Thanks).” This suggests Asaase’s appreciation to his audience for giving him their full attention and participating in the performance. Since he gives that respect to the audience, it is only right that he receives such applause from the audience. It is in place to note that such applauses occur in traditional oral performances as Anyidoho (1983:275) gives an example of a performance by Elder Ahiaba, an Ewe oral poet who receives “more applause, laughter, and murmurs of approval” from his audience. It is not new therefore that the audience applauds the artist. Indeed the absence of applause may mean that the performance was poor.

Apart from the cheers and applause from the audience, it is observed that the artist engages the audiences in the performance by inviting them to repeat words after him, having a conversation with them and inviting them to sing along with him. All these make the performances lively and fascinating. For instance, farther into the performance at PENSAs gathering, Asaase invites the audience to repeat some lines after him. Here, the audience is not engaged in any song or chorus; instead Asaase offers a prayer and the audience follow him. First, he asks them to raise their right hand then he asks them to say the following after him:

Yesu, Yesu, Yesu (Jesus ×3)

Enɛ anwumerɛ yi (This evening)

Wote yɛn ka a (If you hear from us)

Wote yɛn ne a (If you hear our voices)

Wohwɛ mfifire ɛresam yɛn yi a (If you look at how we are sweating)

Na ɛyɛ yɛn PENSA, Alumni (It is we...)

Yɛn a yɛwɔ hɔ (Those of us at present)

Ne yɛn a yɛrebɛba (Those yet to be born)

Yɛma yɛn ne so kyɛrɛ wo a (We raise our voices before you)

The involvement of members of the audience in this way makes them feel to be a true part of the performance. In this way, the actual effect of the message that the audience repeat after the artist is felt more and the audience is likely to go home remembering the part of the performance where they participated.

One other way through which the audience is engaged in performances is by inviting them to sing a song together with the artist or join in the singing of a chorus. In this way, the artist breaks away from the continuous use of words to whip up the interest of the audience through songs. With this, even a tired member of the audience will quickly wake up from his dosing to the tune of the song.

An instance is seen in Nana Asaase's performance at MOGO (Music of Ghanaian Origin) in Accra. As Finnegan (1970:10) notes, the audience could be involved in the performance of poetry "particularly in sung lyrics where it is common practice for the poet to act as leader, singing and improvising the verse line, while the audience performs as chorus..." This involvement of the audience keeps them on almost the same level as the poet since they are involved in the

performance as well. The close relationship between the poet and the audience is thus established through the involvement of the audience in part of the performance.

Nana Asaase at a point in his performance says the following lines:

Let me take you back to the fireside

Where our identities were born...

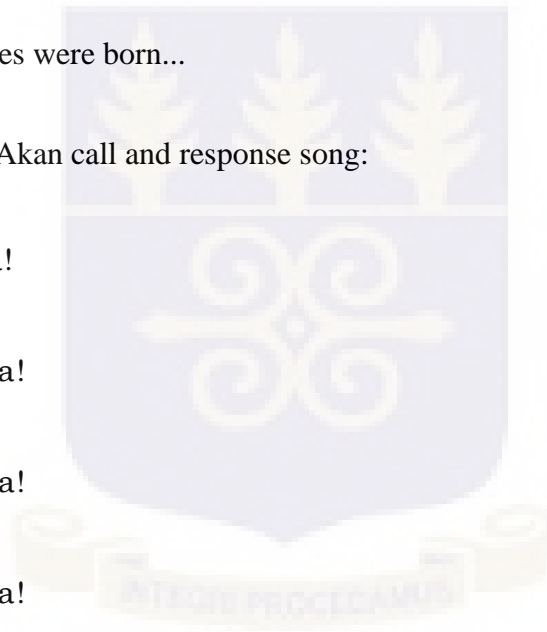
He then chants a popular Akan call and response song:

Ogyaee ogya aa!

Ogya ee ogya aa!

Ogya ee ogya aa!

Ogya ee ogya aa!



The audience responds accordingly in the following words:

Eee ogya!

At this point, it is observed that the audience is not bored but is alert and enjoying the performance. The response from the audience could also be seen as a form of encouragement to the poet in an attempt to say “we are here with you so, go on!” From personal experience with oral literature as a child among children audience who listen to stories from elders, we learnt the

art of taking part in the presentation by singing along with the narrator. This role of the audience which is part of traditional oral poetry is picked up and integrated into contemporary spoken word poetry by Nana Asaase. The contemporary spoken word poet in Ghana such as Nana Asaase could therefore be said to be conscious of his past in relation to how oral poetry is performed. He therefore relies on this past to work in the present. He does not come up on stage to just talk to the audience as if they never existed. The communal life of the African which is evident in traditional oral poetry is fully represented in contemporary times.

Another important way to establish a good relationship between the artist and his audience is to engage the audience in a conversation. In other words, the artist interacts with the audience during the performance. Such an atmosphere is created by Nana Asaase at Goethe institut during one of his performance sessions. (I was present and recorded this performance.)

Right from the start of the performance, Nana Asaase creates an interactive scene as he does not launch directly into the poems. He talks to the audience and asks them questions in order to make the audience understand what he is doing as well as to create a very cordial relationship between him and his audience. With this, he could feel at ease knowing very well that he is performing to his friends. This works for him as it is observed throughout the performance that the audience follow him and cheer him on in the performance.

Nana Asaase starts this very performance in the following words:

Agoo! Agoo! Agoo!

The above is a traditional way of knocking at someone's door or seeking permission from someone before entering his compound or room. It is also used to seek the consent of someone before talking. Anytime someone says "agoo" in Ghana, the response is "amee." In this

performance, as Nana Asaase says “agoo,” the audience responds “amee” accordingly. This tells the artist that his audience is ready for his performance. Nana Asaase uses this traditional means of seeking permission to start his performance. It could then be said that Asaase has taken a step back into tradition to adopt an important mode of seeking permission and applies it in his contemporary performance.

To show that he is ready to involve the audience in his performance, he says the following to the audience after seeking permission with “agoo!”

Now, the next one is entitled “Libation.” You know how we pour libation to the gods?
And I say that ermmm... Maybe the land is a bit dizzy because it had too much schnapps
and so sometimes I feel it can't think straight. So we suffer drought and sometimes our
crops do not come out right because they neglect all their duties and they can't seem to
get things straight and they attempt to be humans...You get what I mean?

The above indicates that the artist prepares his audience for what he is about to say. Here, he informs them about his intention to talk about libation and that the gods are unable to help the African although libation is offered to them always. It is observed in African traditional oral performance as well that, whenever the traditional oral poet is about to perform, he interacts with the audience in order to prepare them for the performance. In the performance of some traditional songs among the Ewes for instance, the poet-cantor asks the drummers and the chorus of their readiness before the actual performance begins. He asks “mie yiyi ge a?” This literally translates as “shall we go?” And the chorus responds, “mie yiyi ge!” which translates as “we shall go!” The poet-cantor here, seeks to know whether the chorus is ready or not. Sometimes, the audience also responds in order to show their readiness for the performance. There is

therefore the presence of interaction between the performer and his audience. Awoonor (1974:18) notes that at a typical performance session, “the poet-cantor runs through the song at a pace which does not conform to any regular drum beat thereby reminding his listeners of the importance of his words.” With this for instance, the audience is led into the words of the actual performance before it begins so that they are aware of what the oral artist is about. This prepares the audience for the performance just as Asaase summarizes what he intends to say in his poem for the audience in order to prepare them for the performance.

Minutes into the performance, Nana Asaase recites the following lines:

Our gods might have travelled across the fence

To learn from their neighbors overseas

After the recitation of the above lines, Nana Asaase takes a few seconds pause, almost as if he has finished with the performance. The pause here creates suspense among the audience and gives the artist some time to quickly put himself together in case he becomes quite divided on what to do or say next. After the pause, he goes on and says:

And so now, let us pour libation:

He then instructs the audience as to how they can be a part of the performance in the following words:

Asaase: When I call it, you say “wie!”

Asaase: This is to the gods

Asaase: May their curses rot their teeth

Audience: Wiε!

There is laughter from the audience as they respond to the call of prayer from the artist. This suggests that the audience is enjoying the performance and is being entertained by it. The performance continues:

Nana Asaase: May their neglect of duty be their shame

Audience: Wiε!

Asaase: May they fall in a hole with shame and disgrace for their love for schnapps and whisky

Audience: Wiε!

Asaase: May they, when they return find out that their seats have been taken in public places

Audience: Wiε!

Asaase: And when they care to be humans, may they always produce things

Audience: Wiε!

Asaase: But you see...By the time they return, we would have done what they were supposed to do

Audience: Wiε!

It is observed in the above that the audience is not left out of the performance at all. They are made to take part in the prayers and this brings out the communal feature of African traditional

oral poetry which is present in contemporary spoken word poetry. It is observed that there is laughter and excitement among the audience during this part of the performance and this can be attributed to their involvement. Since they take part in the performance, they pay attention to whatever the poet says before giving their response. This makes them laugh at various lines in the performance.

Deep into the performance, Asaase stops for a while and continues to ask the audience what they would like him to perform on for them. The audience requested something on love. Asaase then agrees to do a performance for all women using their traditional day names. He asks the women present among the audience to check their birth days and get ready for the performance. He states that in Africa, performance is very communal so, the audience should help him during the performance. He cites the pounding of fufu, a traditional Ghanaian dish as one which is prepared in a communal way and that no one could complain that it is not delicious after it is served. This example from Asaase could be seen as a metaphor for performance in Africa where both the artist and his audience together put up successful performances.

He begins another performance instantly by asking the audience to lend him their hands to clap on a particular beat and rhythm accompanied by a tune on the guitar. Nana Asaase leads the clap and the audience follows suit. After a few seconds of clapping, he sings a popular Akan folk song and asks the audience to join him sing the song. They all sing:

Seeniwa dɛdɛndɛ yi

Seeniwa dɛdɛndɛ yi

Seeniwa dɛdɛndɛ yi

Seeniwa

He then signals the audience with both hands that the pitch being used to sing is too high and should be lowered. Then he says:

Keep calm

Keep calm

Keep calm

From the onset of the performance, Nana Asaase indicates that he is in control of the performance and has to make sure that he dictates the direction of the performance so that his involvement of the audience does not disrupt the performance. It is true that the audience is very important to the artist but he must not allow the audience to “steal his show” or disturb the free flow of the performance. He therefore determines when the audience should sing and when they should not.

Just like the traditional oral artist who knows how to motivate his audience in order to keep their interest in the performance, Nana Asaase realizes that some members of the audience, especially Europeans are unable to sing the song; so in order to sustain their interest, he asks the audience to teach one another in the following words:

Please, those who know, teach those who don't know...so please with this simple song, those who know should teach those who don't know. Can we do this together?

As he says the above words, he adjusts his sheathed knife which hangs around his waist and starts to clap once more, as the audience and the guitarist join him. Nana Asaase initiates the

song again before the audience joins him and this time, the refrain comes from more voices than the first time which shows that Asaase motivates his audience well enough to learn the song and to sing it. He then brings in calls while the audience helps with the refrain response:

Mefere me ɔ̃ fo pa

Refrain: Seeniwa ɔ̃ɔ̃ɔ̃ yi, Seeniwa

Gye me so Adwoa

Refrain: Seeniwa ɔ̃ɔ̃ɔ̃ yi, Seeniwa

Abenfo Abena – Tuesday

Refrain: Seeniwa ɔ̃ɔ̃ɔ̃ yi, Seeniwa

Ahoofe Akua – Wednesday

Refrain: Seeniwa ɔ̃ɔ̃ɔ̃ yi, Seeniwa

Ene Yaa Sika

Refrain: Seeniwa ɔ̃ɔ̃ɔ̃ yi, Seeniwa

Forceful Afia

Refrain: Seeniwa ɔ̃ɔ̃ɔ̃ yi, Seeniwa

Ama Nyamekye

Refrain: Seeniwa ɔ̃ɔ̃ɔ̃ yi, Seeniwa

Delicate Akosua

Refrain: Seeniwa dɛdɛndɛ yi, Seeniwa

Yɛnhwe mmomueɛ

After this, the refrain is repeated. It is important to note that during this call and response, Nana Asaase interjects and interacts with the audience so as to still keep them on their ears throughout the performance. When he mentions Adwoa, he asks; “where is Adwoa?” Then he adds; “Monday borns.” At this point, members who are called Adwoa shout and raise their hands. This technique of interacting with the audience just as is done in traditional oral poetry performance creates a special bond between the artist and the audience so that the whole performance becomes inclusive and takes the form of a conversation so that the artist comes to the same level as the audience in order to have a successful performance.

As the audience sing the refrain Asaase dances on the rhythm and as the refrain is about to end, Nana Asaase bends towards his right and stretches out his hand towards the audience to signal them to pause the song and says softly, “agoo.” The Audience fades the song and stops. Here again, the artist shows his control over the performance although he allows the audience to have a cordial relationship with him during the performance. This makes him the master of his art.

After singing the song above, Nana Asaase uses another traditional Akan song to capture his audience and get them to participate in the performance. After he sings the praises of “Adwoa” the name given to a woman born on a Monday, he claps and the audience joins him to sing the folk song. He first says “Pimpinaa” and the audience responds “Nanaa.” Since this is also a popular song of entertainment for children and the youth in Akan settings, most members of the

audience are able to sing it because they are familiar with it. Nana Asaase starts the song itself and the audience joins him thus:

Asaase: Penpenaa

Audience: Nanaa

Asaase: Penpenaa

Audience: Nanaa

Asaase and Audience: siisiisii, sii nana koo, tata bonku,
bonkotu,bonkotu,bonkotu grɛɖɛ! Eei maame ee, eei papa ee yiri bombom...

This song as seen above has a call and response part where Nana Asaase calls and the audience responds. After that, both Asaase and his audience continue with the rest of the song to fade. There is cheers and laughter from members of the audience which reveals that their involvement in the performance makes them excited.

Finally, Asaase invites a member of the audience to join him on stage during the performance. At this point in the performance, Asaase asks female members of the audience who were born on a Thursday to raise their hands. He says:

I do not know why she is called Yaa

Thursday – Yaa

Yaa mepa wo kyɛw bra kakra (Yaa, please come)

Ao! Yaa meretwen wo... (Yaa, I am waiting for you)

No member of the audience at this point comes out to represent those who were born on a Thursday so Nana Asaase takes control of his performance once again and signals one lady to come up stage. He then asks her to stand in front of him and says:

I know Yaa is proud

I know Yaa is majestic

Yaa is pronounced

Yaa is outspoken

Wohwe no n'ano ate (You can see that she is articulate)

Yaa is brave

Obaa Yaa Asantewa Abrefi kɔtɔ

Obaa kokɔdurufɔɔ (A brave woman)...

It is realized that the audience is brought closer to the artist by inviting one member up stage. The praises that Asaase sings for “Yaa” appear to be for that particular lady that he invites on to the stage. The artist and his audience thus have a close bond and the joy and excitement that they both derive by using this relationship during performances cannot be undermined.

4.2.3 Conclusion

The artist and his audience work together for the success of performances. In traditional oral performance in Africa, the role that the audience plays is very key in every performance hence

the artist's involvement of the audience in performances. In contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry, it is observed that the spoken word artist is conscious of the role of the audience so the artist establishes a cordial relationship with his audience go get fulfillment in their performances. Members of the audience sing and clap along with the artist, they serve as chorus singers, they interact with the artist (and sometimes suggest a theme on which the artist should perform), and they join the artist on stage and applaud the artist among others. Indeed the audience is not just a passive observer but one who works hand in hand with the artist. This is clearly present in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry just as it is in traditional African oral performance.

4.3. Stylistic Qualities

4.3.1. Introduction

African traditional oral performance has various elements which make it unique compared to written literature. Oral performance goes beyond the generality of the sound and action which is put into it. It must be noted again that oral literature is presented by word of mouth and particular attention needs to be given to how the sound and words are skillfully used by the artist. There are details that make it the beautiful art that it is. These details or qualities of the style of oral performance are discussed in this section.

4.3.2. Stylistic Qualities in Contemporary Ghanaian Spoken Word poetry

Okpewho (1992:4) throws light on what stylistic qualities entail by stating that:

The appeal of sound can indeed be so strong, the premium placed on it so high, that performers can at times indulge in certain “nonsense” words or other kinds of sound

either for sheer entertainment effect or perhaps to fill in a gap when they forget what to say next.

The oral artist makes use of sound and words in various ways to add more beauty and class to his performance since he is aware that it is the sound he makes and the words he uses that appeal most to his audience. As Okpewho (1992:4) indicates, the artists are motivated to employ words and sound skillfully because they are “anxious to say things that will please the ears of their audiences” and to “ensure the steady flow of their presentation.”

Repetition

One of the stylistic qualities employed in African traditional oral performance and found in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry is repetition. Okpewho (1992:71) observes that some scholars leave out repetitions in their works due to impatience and “in so doing, they have tampered with the very heart of the(se) texts.” This explains that repetition is not “unnecessary” in oral performance but has its special role to play.

The traditional oral poet employs repetition for its aesthetic value and for the sake of emphasis. Although the repetition maybe long and appear boring, its value in the performance cannot be overlooked. In Nana Asaase, a contemporary spoken word artist’s performances, he employs repetition at various instances. These repetitions bring traditional oral poetry into his performances. From the very beginning of his performance at PENSA gathering for instance, repetition is observed. Nana Asaase starts the performance in the following words:

Ghana muntie

Ekristofuo muntie

PENSA muntie

From the above, the word “muntie” which means “listen” is repeated. Apart from the beauty that this repetition adds to the poem through the intonation adopted by Asaase in presenting this part of the poem, it strongly calls the attention of the audience to cork their ears in readiness for what the artist has to say in the performance. It is observed that, just after the above lines, the audience bursts into a loud excited applause and cheers. This indicates that the audience is thrilled by the repetition and again, the response from the audience shows that Asaase has succeeded in capturing the attention of his audience which points out that he is set to have a great performance.

At the beginning of the performance, Nana Asaase introduces himself and before he ends the performance, he repeats the same words with which he introduces himself as a way of signing off stage. He says:

Nana Asaase

Ɔmamakorɔ Gyebi wɔfase

Writer king who sips communion wine from the calabash

I did not come to pour libation

I only came to raise a song of love...

In this situation, a word or a line is not repeated to form a thought but a group of lines which is said at the beginning of the performance is repeated at the end of the performance. This brings

out a variety of the repetition where a whole idea which is said earlier is brought back at another point. This form of repetition may not necessarily play an aesthetic role but it seeks to bring a pause in the performance in order to allow the performer to quickly reorganize himself as to what to do next. This stylistic quality is taken up by Asaase who uses it effectively to hold his presentation together.

Another importance of the above repetition is that, the spoken word artist informs his audience of what he intends to do during the performance – “to raise a song of love to his god of songs.” It therefore makes sense to see the artist remind his audience that he has done exactly what he intended to do. The effect of this is that the focus of the audience is directed and redirected by the artist to pay particular attention to what he is doing and has done in the performance so that they do not read any other meaning which might not be appropriate into his performance. This technique helps traditional oral poets to get their audiences to be good followers as they (the poets) lead the performance to a successful end to the delight of the audience. Nana Asaase uses this in contemporary times to achieve a good result as the audience clap and cheer after the performance to show that they actually enjoyed the performance.

Another instance of repetition is observed in Asaase’s performance when he recites the following words:

Emmɛɛ bi na y’ayera (Some time ago we were lost)

Nka y’asɛɛ (We were useless)

Na yɛrɛkɔku yɛn (And we were going to be killed)

Yɛɖɛ kɔ duruu ɔhenɛpɔn anim (We appeared before the royal king)

Ɔbisa sɛɛ (He asked that)

Ɔbisa sɛɛ (He asked that)

Ɔbisa sɛɛ... (He asked that)

Mmo mu hwan na ɔnye bɔne ɖa (Who amongst you have never committed sin)

It is observed that Asaase repeats “Ɔbisa sɛɛ” in succession. This repetition just like the others discussed earlier is also for the sake of emphasis. It is realized that a particular king is being referred to in the poem who asks a question. The performer succeeds in using the repetition to keep the audience on their ears in anticipation to hear what the king has to say. It is observed as well that the performer moves towards the drummer and stops as he repeats the words because he wants the drummer through whom he appears to speak to repeat the words on the drum and also to draw the attention of the audience to the words on the drum. Through the use of repetition here, the performer prepares the audience to listen to what he says next and this attaches some importance to what is to be expected from the performer.

One important use of the repetition in traditional oral poetry is to cause a pause in the performance so that the performer could carefully think about what to say next, especially when he seems to have forgotten what to say. In this performance, it cannot be firmly said that Nana Asaase has forgotten what he intends to say hence his repetition of “Ɔbisa sɛɛ.” However, it could be said that the repetition suggests an attempt to enjoy a break in the flow of the poetry in order to put the audience in suspense and this clearly reinforces the presence of traditional oral poetry in the performance of nana Asaase. In addition, this repetition adds poetic beauty to the performance.

Nana Asaase's performance at Goethe Institut further explains the importance of repetition in contemporary spoken word poetry. As he asks members of his audience to repeat the word "wis" while he offers a traditional prayer, it is observed that it gives the performance a musical effect. It is necessary to consider the fact that, due to the repetition in this part of the performance, the audience is able to quickly assimilate the repeated response and they join in the performance happily and willingly. It is observed that, some Europeans who form part of the audience are also able to join the performance because of the repeated word, "wis." This ability of repetition to pull the audience along with the performer comes from the traditional oral art and still has impact on the audience of the contemporary spoken word artist. In effect, when the heart of the performance is intact, the performance lives on.

Chief Moomen's performance at Metro TV also contributes to the discussion on the use of repetition in contemporary spoken word poetry in Ghana. During this performance, he describes how they drink pito (a local drink from the Northern part of Ghana) in the following words:

And fill our calabashes

And we drink deep

In honor of the ancestors

Deep in honor of the gods

Deep in honor of our families

And deep in honor of our unborn children

From the above, it is observed that there is the repetition of “deep” four times. The repetition as a quality of traditional oral literature is also meant to give a “sing-song quality to it.” (Okpewho 1992:71) This musical effect keeps the interest of the audience in the performance and also leaves the audience to remember the repeated words. Quite apart from that, there is the creation of a level of excitement as certain points are emphasized through repetition. In this performance, the repetition of the word, “deep” creates a rhythmic effect and the word may as well get stuck in the memory of members of the audience because they hear it over and over again as it emphasizes the manner in which the “pito” is drunk.

Parallelism

One other stylistic feature of African traditional oral performance worth noting in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry is the use of parallelism. Okpewho (1992:78) states that “this device, whereby the oral artist brings together in a balanced relationship ideas and images that may seem independent of one another is called parallelism.” In an attempt to explain the importance of the skill needed in putting together this device in a performance, he adds that:

For a performer to succeed, the imagination of the artist will need to do a delicate job of selecting details that may seem to be independent of one another but at bottom have a common affinity, and of bringing these together to present a convincing picture or image. Okpewho (1992:78).

It is clear that if the oral artist is not careful enough, he may not be able to make use of this stylistic feature in his performance. It is observed in Nana Asaase's performances that he adopts this feature of the traditional oral artist and carefully makes it a part of his poem. Asaase for instance employs parallelism in the following lines at the PENZA performance:

Mpanin bɛka mpaninsɛm (The old will tell history)

Mmɔfra bɛto anansesɛm (Children will tell folktales)

Here, poetic beauty and balance is observed as two things, the idea of the experiences of the elderly and children are placed in contrast in the same structures of statement. The elderly have seen many occurrences in their life time from childhood to adulthood which put them in a better position to recount their life experiences as history. On the other hand, children are yet to experience much in life like the elderly, so they can only retell folktales that they have heard from the elderly. A child can therefore do only what he is supposed to do. This idea, if presented in another way may not achieve the beauty and wit which it adds to the performance through parallelism.

Another instance of parallelism in the performance occurs in the following lines:

If I had all the time in the world

If I had all the time for the rest of this evening

The poetic beauty of parallelism in traditional oral poetry comes to play in the above lines as well. Here, there is a balance of the ideas of "time in the world" and "time for the rest of the evening." The world is bigger than the evening but the performer desires to have the time "in the world" as well as "the time for the rest of the evening." The contrast which is established

between these two ideas in relation to time adds an exciting touch to the idea of how the poet wishes to have all the time to himself to put up an even greater performance to the delight of his audience. The contemporary spoken word artist therefore creates the impression that he is competent enough to give off a good performance provided he has the available time at his disposal. It is noted that the traditional oral poet owes it a duty to satisfy his audience by performing for a considerable length of time. It is this idea that Nana Asaase the contemporary spoken word poet adopts and successfully communicates this to his audience by adopting parallelism, which is another quality of traditional oral poetry.

Piling and Association

Piling and association, another stylistic device in African traditional oral poetry is observed in contemporary spoken word poetry. It should be borne in mind that the oral artist desires to impress his audience and any device at his disposal which would help achieve that would be used as effectively as possible. One way of impressing an audience is by the use of piling and association.

In traditional oral poetry, the artist carefully builds one idea on the other until he gradually reaches a point where he succeeds in putting across a point in order to present a longer performance which is aimed at exciting the audience. Through this, the artist achieves fullness by building up ideas to make as much sense as possible in order to have a lasting impression on the

audience. Okpewho (1992:83) is of the view that “in African oral literature, it is perhaps true to say that fullness, not economy of expression, is a fundamental virtue.” This means that a short performance is likely to cause dissatisfaction in the audience but a full or longer performance gives much satisfaction to the audience and the African traditional oral artist remembers this and applies it in their performance.

In a contemporary Ghanaian spoken word performance such as the PENSA gathering, Nana Asaase employs the device of piling and association to thrill his audience. An example is observed in the following lines:

They say uneasy lies the head that wears the crown

Let me add

Uneasy lies the seat that sits on the throne

Again let me add

Uneasy lies the mouth that pronounces one king

Here, Nana Asaase builds the idea of the crown on the seat and builds it further on the mouth, which makes all these possible by naming or swearing in the king who wears the crown and sits on the throne. Indeed the piling leads the audience to keenly listen to the performer in order to reach the climax of what he says. This skill in traditional oral poetry is fused into contemporary spoken word poetry.

The idea of piling and association is that each line takes an idea from its preceding line and builds the ideas up to develop a bigger idea or climax as observed in the following lines of the same performance by Asaase:

I am seed child of the creator in heaven

Planted in the virgin wombs of Asaase the keeper of fertility

Watered with the dew from the inner sanctum of *osuro*

I am that hot metal hammered on the anvils of time

Quenched in the froth of a sea song

I am gossip carried by four winds over the seven seas...

It is observed here that Nana Asaase carefully takes the idea of a “seed” which is “planted” and later “watered.” The process of planting and nurturing a plant is evoked here and Asaase successfully piles the processes up one after the other to reach a climax in order to convey a full meaning to the audience about the kind of poet he is and also to impress them that he is well formed to give them the best performance.

He moves on to create the image of the blacksmith as “a hot metal is hammered” and later “quenched in the froth of a sea.” The process of a red hot metal which is reshaped and later put into water to cool and harden is established here. The process is started from the beginning to its end which is the climax. This provides a form of completeness in the poem and shows that the spoken word artist is in charge of his performance just as the traditional oral poet.

The lines extracted above also follow the pattern of the African traditional medicine man’s chants or war songs that seek to express their powers and strength in a boastful manner. It is observed that a contemporary spoken word poet like Asaase takes to the boastful nature of war songs or chants in his performance to say that he is the child of “the creator in heaven” who has

been “planted in the virgin wombs of *Asaase* the keeper of fertility.” He boasts about his origin and claims that he is of a likely immaculate conception therefore making him rise above all other humans since he is the child of the creator himself. He adds that the “dew from the inner sanctum of *osuro*” has nurtured him. Through this, he creates the impression that the most sacred care has been given to him from childhood.

He further claims that he has immense strength and power and uses the metaphor of a “hot metal” which is “hammered” and made hard in the “froth of a sea.” A hot metal which is hardened in a vast water body such as the sea must have great importance and strength. *Asaase* finally says that he is the “gossip carried by four winds over seven seas.” He again boasts about his importance here since he is so useful that it takes four winds probably from the four parts of the world to carry him across seven seas in order to reach so many people. Indeed the whole boast is to establish how important he is as a spoken word artist but in doing so, he returns to the very traditional way of such boasts in war songs and chants of medicine men and this he successfully does through piling and association.

Digression

Okpewho (1992:96) identifies digression as:

a device whereby the oral performer departs for a moment from the main line of the subject of a story or song either to address an object (or person) at the scene of performance or to comment on an issue which may be closely or remotely connected with the main subject.

Digression has to do with the oral artist's moving away from the main idea in a poem to talk about other ideas or situations that could be related to the performance. The performer could decide to comment on the appearance of some members of his audience, some reactions of his audience or a popular subject that is being talked about in town. This the performer does in a way so as to relate what he comments on to his poem in order to satisfy his audience. This device is also present in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry as observed in Nana Asaase's performance at Goethe Institute.

Asaase sings the praises of the various day names of women and as he gets to the turn of women who were born on a Thursday, he says:

I do not know why she is called Yaa

Thursday – Yaa

Yaa mepa wo kyɛw bra kakra (Yaa, please come)

Ao! Yaa meretwen wo... (Yaa, I am waiting for you)

Yaa gyina ha (Yaa, stand here)

Aha yiaa (This very place)

Everybody can see Yaa...

Asaase at this point in the performance talks to a lady that he invites to stand before him on stage. It is realized that he departs from the normal praise singing that he started with “Adwoa, Abena and Akua” to addressing the lady who is present at the scene of performance among the audience and by inviting her to join him onstage before he talks about her. Nana Asaase does not

sing the praises of “Yaa” until the lady joins him on stage. As he waits for her, he takes some rest and repositions himself well in readiness to continue with the performance.

This digression, apart from giving the artist some time to reorganize himself in order to continue the performance, also brings more action and life into the performance. In this performance, most of the audience turns to look at the lady as she approaches the stage. Asaase praises her and the audience sees a physical being before them who is praised unlike the abstract beings that were praised by Asaase earlier. This digression therefore adds more excitement to the performance.

Chief Moomen also performs at the remembrance day of Dr. Hilla Limann and he presents a poem on a herd’s boy who loves reading. The extract below at the end of the poem illustrates another use of digression in contemporary spoken word poetry.

Today we celebrate

A statesman

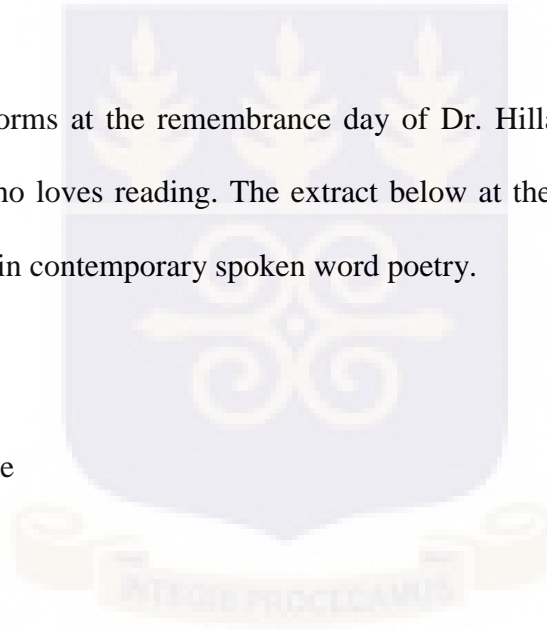
A man who lived his life in the service of his country

Who rose through the ranks

To the highest office of the land...

We revive the name and legacy of a forgotten hero

A pioneer



A visionary

A consummate servant of the civil

A scholar

A diplomat

A statesman

Today

We honour

Dr. Hilla Limann

Moomen uses the above lines to move away from the boy who enjoys the world of books to draw the audience's attention to Dr. Hilla Limann whose memory is being celebrated. It is important to note that this digression is a skillful one since it occurs at the end of the poem to end the performance. The audience is moved away from the boy to a Doctor and left there. The artist however makes sure that he relates Dr. Hilla Limann to the boy so that the audience will not get confused. The audience is therefore left to keep thinking about Dr. Hilla Limann in relation to the boy in order to appreciate the full impact of the performance.

It cannot be denied that digression could easily ruin a performance if not properly done but the audience needs to be entertained as well as made to go home with some education. This is where various skills of the artist including the use of digression come in.

Imagery

African traditional oral poetry as well as contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry has the basic element of words. It is the words that are produced through the mouth that constitute a major part of the performance. The choice of the artist's words contribute so much to what he communicates to his audience and the right choice of words helps to have the desired effect on an audience.

Okpewho (1992:98) identifies imagery as a strong quality of African traditional oral literature where words are employed "to paint mental pictures that appeal to our feeling and our understanding." He further indicates that:

A narrator or a singer may describe a scene or an event with little reference to anything else but with such a powerful choice of words that we are deeply touched either with admiration or with shock. Okpewho (1992:98).

The traditional oral poet is thus noted for his ability to choose words carefully to bring out the right imagery so as to successfully impress his audience. Chief Moomen for instance makes use of imagery in his performance at Dr. Limann's Remembrance Day. He opens the performance with the following words:

At the break of dawn

When the cry of the muezzin

Pierces through the silence of the night...

These lines create the image of a "dawn" which is broken. A dawn which comes about forcefully because of the stress and troubles that might come along with the day. One can picture such a "dawn" where people have to wake up from their sleep abruptly because they have work to do

but not because they have had enough sleep. Then all of a sudden, the shout of the “muezzin,” calling out people for prayers “pierces through the silence of the night.” The image is created of a very quiet and serene night where there is no disturbance. However, this “silence” is disturbed by the muezzin’s “cry” such that it reaches the heart of everyone by piercing through the quietness they enjoy. These together present the idea of a troubled morning.

The next five lines also employ words that present the image of what is actually meant.

Ali will rouse himself from his straw mat

In his mud hut

And head to the kraal

To lead his father’s cattle out to graze

The vast expanse of the savanna

It is observed that “rouse himself” creates the picture of Ali who gets up from bed voluntarily without being asked to. He wakes up because he has work to do, to lead his father’s cattle to graze. The cattle are not Ali’s but he does not wait to be awakened by his father. This image of a humble son is created by the choice of words in the lines. In addition, details are given by the artist about Ali through the use of such words as “straw mat” and “mud hut.” The traditional setting of the poem is brought out clearly and the image of Ali getting up from his hut is seen. The audience therefore has the opportunity to see the rural dwelling and the large number of cattle Ali’s father has.

The last line takes the audience on a trip to the savanna to see the unending land on which Ali takes the cattle to graze. The image of the big size of savanna land is beautifully captured by

Chief Moomen in the words “the vast expanse of the savanna.” The audience then sees the unending stretch of land where the cattle are led to graze.

Chief Moomen further adds color to the details in the poem which puts the whole poem in lively bits before the audience in their minds eye. He talks about the “luscious outskirts of the village” and states that it is “where the grass is green and the rising sun is mellow.” Through the power of these words, he is able to paint a vivid picture of the abundance of food to feed the cattle. In addition to that, the sun is seen as soft and “mellow” in the richness of the village outskirts. A member of the audience who has never been to the savanna regions of the country can clearly see the beauty of the savanna through the artist’s choice of words. The person gets the opportunity to experience the gentle sun against the green grass while the animals graze in comfort. Through imagery, the contemporary spoken word artist is able to take the audience along throughout his performance as his poetry unfolds.

Ideophones

One important stylistic device of African traditional oral performance is the ideophone. Okpewho (1992:92) defines the ideophone as an “idea-in-sound.” In other words, the use of sound to refer to an object, an idea or the nature of an occurrence or act is what qualifies as an ideophone. The ideophone therefore is the use of sound to present vivid information. This device adds detail and beauty to an act or occurrence in any form of oral performance. This traditional device is observed in one of Chief Moomen’s performances. In the studio of Metro TV, Chief Moomen performs with Chaka and recites these lines before he ends the first stanza:

We burst into laughter

Raise our calabash into the air

Stamp our feet unto the earth until the dust rises

And chokes our nostrils

And we sneeze, “hiecheeww”

The sound “hiecheeww” presents the act of sneezing without any second thought. The artist mimics sneezing to add beauty to the performance and give it a sensual effect. The sound further makes this part of the performance more dramatic as the reality of the effect of the dust which rises into the nostrils is physically demonstrated by the artist. Although this device is not used frequently in the spoken word performances, its presence in this performance signifies a direct link to African traditional oral performance.

The Use of Proverbs and Cultural items

One important point which cannot be overlooked in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry is the use of proverbs and cultural items. The cultural items could be physical as in costume and props or the items could be mentioned in the poem. The use of such items in contemporary times indicates how contemporary spoken word poetry draws on traditional oral poetry. Nana Asaase for instance wears rich kente with traditional sandal to match. He straps a sheathed knife around his waist, wears beads, and holds a calabash or a piece of leather during his performances.

During Nana Asaase’s performance at Citi FM’s MOGO 13, he switches from English language to his native language, Akan. This suggests his attachment to the traditional oral poets who usually present their works in their native languages as well as to his traditional culture. His use

of Akan points to the fact that he is not detached from his roots and people. It is not just the language that Nana Asaase uses but employs proverbs from his native language.

Okpewho (1992:226) defines a proverb as “a piece of folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm.” He adds that the charm in the proverb “conveys the touch of literary or poetic beauty in the expression.” Okpewho again suggests that proverbs may have come about as a result of the “genius of an individual oral artist.” He also observes that proverbs are used in a formal performance such as storytelling. Asaase employs this very traditional form of poetic beauty in his performance. This suggests his reliance on the traditional oral art as a contemporary spoken word artist to make his performance interesting.

He employs Akan proverbs in the following lines:

Adehyeɛ te se mmo no te si badwam a,

Okyerɛma, yenkɔɛ

Twene enim ɖa hɔ a, yen mmo nkyen

This literally translates as: “when royals like you take the floor,” “drummer, let’s start,” “We cannot ignore the face of the drum and play its sides.”

The third line carries a proverb which means, when there is an important issue at hand; one must not beat about the bush. Nana Asaase does not see the essence of talking plenty when there are pressing issues to address through his poetry. The use of the proverb reminds the audience that Asaase is not just presenting poetry but desires to talk about a particular issue in this performance hence his decision not to “beat the sides of the drum but beat the hide on the drum itself.”

He uses another instance of Akan proverbs in these lines:

Mpanin bɛka mpaninsɛm,

Mmɔfra bɛka anansesɛm

This translates as: “the elderly will say words of wisdom; children will tell Ananse stories.” The difference between old age and youth in relation to wisdom is stated in this proverb. What this means is that the elderly have gone through many experiences and will no longer speak or act like children. On the other hand, children are now going through life’s lessons so they can only speak or act as such. In effect, Nana Asaase has come to perform like the traditional oral poets but since he is still learning he would do his best as a “child” to give out Ananse stories which also carry valuable lessons. The use of proverbs here reveals the wit that is associated with oral poets since proverbs make their language rich.

It could be said that that Asaase proves to be one who has accepted his cultural heritage and is proud of it since he does not only make use of existing proverbs but coins his own proverbs in the same witty pattern as the ones he has learnt. At his performance during the Music of Ghanaian Origin festival, he says:

The elders raise their beard to the dew to lose the pigment of youth

But if you meet an elder who has not got a beard

Mind you, he is at the peak of all of life’s experiences

This proverb appears to be Nana Asaase's own creation which follows the traditional pattern of carrying great information in few lines. In short, an elder who does not have beard is still an elder.

In his PENSA performance, he says:

They say uneasy lies the head that wears the crown...

Again let me add

Uneasy lies the mouth that pronounces one king

It is observed here as well that he creates his own proverb so he attributes it to himself by saying "again let me add." He is thus adding to the already existing proverb which he mentions earlier that "they say uneasy lies the head that wears the crown." Indeed this gives credence to Yankah and Peek's assertion that "the individual who demonstrates a knowledge of proverbs distinguishes himself as the inheritor of his ancestor's cumulative wisdom, as well as a master of the poetic dimension of the language." Yankah and Peek (2004:374-375)

Apart from the use of proverbs, contemporary spoken word poets mention traditional items in their poems to establish a relationship with their cultural tradition as well as their poems since there are no adequate substitutes for some traditional African items in English. An oral artist who is able to connect with his cultural heritage is able to fuse his knowledge into his performance to make it more authentic rather than talking about things which run contrary to the traditional settings of their performances. According to Kabira and Mutahi (1988:42), "a good narrator (oral artist) is one who is familiar with the cultural wealth and uses it in his rendering of the narratives." They add that:

The artist does not only entertain and educate but also records and transmits the cultural heritage e.g. material culture, traditions, history etc. Such an artist would, even when telling narratives to a contemporary audience be able to refer to material artifacts such as spears, arrows... that were traditionally used. In this manner the narrator makes the narrative rich and interesting to his/her audience as well.

Chief Moomen's performance on Metro TV is an example. In this performance, Moomen mentions various traditional items in his performance and apart from giving the audience pleasure, he teaches them about these things as well. He mentions the baobab tree which is very common in the Northern parts of Ghana. He talks about the "pito," a traditional beer which is brewed from millet, sorghum and maize and is enjoyed mainly in the Northern Region of Ghana. He further mentions the "calabash," a traditional cup made from the gourd which is used to drink the pito "deep in memory of gods, families and unborn children." He goes on to mention traditional names such as Fulera, Alidu, Adama, Laru, Sanda and Shaka. The hut is also identified in the performance and it is the traditional houses of the people of Northern Ghana. This reveals his connection to his cultural background and he uses it successfully in the performance to entertain as well as to inform the audience.

Chief Moomen talks about a "pot of water" which Fulera carries on her head. The pot here refers to the clay pot which is a traditional container for fetching and storage of water. He goes on to mention the gourd which is used to store drinks such as the pito before serving in public. He mentions the xylophone, drums and umbene (traditional guitar) which are all used during traditional and cultural performances in the Northern Regions of Ghana.

Apart from the traditional objects, Moomen mentions various food items which form a part of the cultural heritage of Northern Ghana. He talks about the “two zaafi with pounded yam with yawayawa and ayoyo soup alongside vougagyir” which “wives come bearing.” To show that he takes pride in his traditional food, he says “after eating our food...” The use of “our” suggests a sense of belongingness and points out that the food belongs to the artist and his land. Indeed the fact that they “stretch their feet” and “pick their teeth and belch” suggests how delicious the meals are. The contemporary Ghanaian spoken word artist’s mention of cultural and traditional materials in his performance shows his connection to the traditional oral art and makes his performance rich and “African.” It also educates the audience, especially those who are not familiar with the culture of Northern Ghana, on some of these cultural artifacts and materials.

One cultural element to take note of in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry is the mention of a god of songs. During the PENZA performance, Nana Asaase hints that he has a god of songs who deserves to be praised. In traditional oral poetry especially among the Ewes, there is sometimes the presence of “a god of songs” which is referred to in Ewe as “hadzivodu.” (God of songs) Anyidoho (1983:246). Sometimes these gods are invoked during the performance of poetry in order to seek protection and support during the performance. After the drums at the beginning of the PENZA performance Asaase recites the following lines to reveal that he has his personal god of songs:

Nana Asaase

Ɔmamakorɔ Gyebi wɔfase

Foot stool bearer of Ɔdomankoma Nyankopon, ɔbɔadiɛ the creator

Writer king who sips communion wine from calabash

I have not come to pour libation

I only came to raise a song of love

To my god of songs...

He repeats these same lines at the end of the performance before leaving the stage. The repetition puts emphasis on the respect that he has for the spirit or god that helps him get good poetry and gives him strength and skill to put up performances. The idea of the god of songs is borrowed from traditional oral poetry and a typical example of this could be seen in Komi Ekpe, one of the traditional oral poets from Ewe land in Ghana who “has a god of songs, *hadzivodu*, from whom he claims to receive poetic inspiration.” Awoonor (1974:8). Traditional oral poets such as diviners and priests are also known to sing the praises of various deities that help them in their careers. This form of poetry could be read in the performance of Asaase as he sings to honor his god of songs. It also points to the remediation of African traditional oral poetry in contemporary spoken word poetry.

One must note however that the artist is a creative individual who must be considered as such. Indeed Anyidoho (1983:247) clarifies this point by stating that;

The question of mystical sources of poetic composition should not necessarily diminish our estimation of the personal creativity of the oral poet. If a person is an accomplished artist and craftsman, his society gives him due respect and recognition.

Nana Asaase is one of the renowned spoken word artists of his time and his creativity has seen him perform with experienced poets such as Kofi Anyidoho. He also performs at various state

functions. His reference to a god of songs should therefore not take away his skill and creative part as a unique individual poet but must be seen as a skilled poet in his own right with or without a god of songs.

It is observed that in this performance, Asaase does not forget to introduce himself as the nephew of the prominent Gyebi. He proceeds to identify his position as the one who carries the foot stool of “*Ɔdomankoma*.” “*Ɔdomankoma*” is one of the names given to God in Akan. This suggests the royalty that the poet attaches to himself. He quickly adds that he “sips communion wine from calabash.” It is understood here that communion wine is not a traditional drink in Africa but the poet claims he drinks it from calabash which is a traditional item used for drinking. Again, the “communion wine” suggests contemporary times while the “calabash” signifies African traditions. African tradition, elements of oral poetry (calabash) are brought into the performance in contemporary times (communion wine).

Quite apart from establishing that Nana Asaase has a god of songs, the extracted lines above could be taken as his way of introducing himself as a spoken word artist. This introduction could be linked to the bards who are African traditional oral poets. These bards usually introduce themselves before reciting the epics and tales of their people. Edris Makward (1990:23) identifies Mamadou Kouyate as an authentic Mandingo griot who introduces himself before performing for his audience. He is observed as stating his name first. He then mentions that he is the son of Bintou. He finally boasts about how they are the masters of the word and how they preserve the deeds of dead kings.

It is realized that griots introduce themselves with pride and boastfulness. This is seen in Nana Asaase’s introduction of himself to his audience as part of his performance. He first and foremost

identifies himself as Nana Asaase, the nephew of the prominent Gyebi. He goes on to show pride in his art as the one who has come to sing the praise of his god of songs. He also boasts that he is the foot stool bearer of the creator and the one who achieves the impossible by drinking communion wine from the calabash. The contemporary spoken word artist in Ghana adopts this characteristic of the African traditional bard in his performance. Nana Asaase therefore remediates the art of the bard in contemporary times.

4.3.3. Conclusion

Oral and written literatures have one thing in common, which is the use of words. However, the oral artist has the extra burden of facing his audience in order to deliver his words. During performance, the artist may have new ideas or may forget some lines but would still have to impress his audience. The oral artist therefore has some stylistic tools at his disposal to help him overcome any of such difficulties during performance. These stylistic qualities make oral performance unique compared to written literature since they provide both aesthetic and functional values which make the performance more interesting. Such stylistic qualities as repetition, parallelism, digression among others form part of African traditional oral performance and these qualities are identified in contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry. It is interesting then to note that contemporary spoken word poetry is based on traditional oral poetry.

CHAPTER FIVE

OVERVIEW

Chapters one to four discussed various aspects of traditional African oral poetry and contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry. The discussions in the previous chapters are summarized in this chapter. This chapter also offers some recommendations for further studies on contemporary Ghanaian spoken word.

5.1. Conclusion

This thesis has given a definition of contemporary spoken word poetry with particular attention to how the art is done. It has also linked contemporary spoken word poetry to traditional African oral poetry and added that contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry draws so much on traditional African oral poetry and in effect remediates it. This study has further indicated that contemporary spoken word in Ghana is popular with the youth since most of the artists are young men and women. This forms one of the reasons for the rising popularity of the art in Ghana.

Also, the study has critically examined literature on both traditional African oral literature and contemporary spoken word poetry. Various scholarly works and books on African oral poetry were discussed with attention on its distinguishing features and the importance of studying it. Scholarly works on contemporary spoken word poetry were examined and its brief history in Ghana looked at. It was realized that what is seen as contemporary spoken word poetry in Ghana actually started in the 1970s with pioneers like Atukwei Okai, Kofi Anyidoho, Kobina Eyi Acquah among others and not in the early 2000s as most people assume.

In addition, this thesis has identified some platforms and events where contemporary spoken word poetry is practiced in Ghana. It has also identified some popular contemporary spoken word artists in Ghana and focused on two of them for the study.

More importantly, this study has identified some features of traditional African poetry which form a core part of contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry. These features include the use of gestures and paralinguistic devices, drums, music, the relationship between the artist and audience during performance, stylistic qualities, the use of traditional costume and props among others. This has been possible because selected performances were analyzed instead of relying on the written works of the artists. These form the basis of the assertion that contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry relies heavily on African oral tradition.

This thesis as well has briefly looked at the thematic concerns of the contemporary spoken word artists used for the study.

This study seeks to draw scholarly attention to contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry so that it is considered for study and moved from the “streets” into the classroom. It is fair to conclude that contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry has used traditional African poetry as its foundation and is therefore in line with the Ewe saying that “ka xoxoawo nue wo gbea yeyeawo dɔ” (it is on to old ropes that new ones are woven) which Anyidoho (2013) emphasizes. He states that “our dialogue with The Future must begin with “The Back Without Which There Is No Front.” Contemporary spoken word poetry in Ghana could not have made its mark without having traditional poetry as its backbone. Indeed, contemporary Ghanaian spoken word artists have returned to the past in this present time to weave their art on to the ropes of their ancestral poetry.

5.2. Recommendations

This section provides some suggestions that could help get the best out of contemporary spoken word poetry as well as make it possible to explore other areas of the art for further study.

5.2.1. Contemporary Spoken Word Poetry as a Tool for Projecting African Values

As observed from the study, contemporary spoken word poetry is mainly associated with both old and is not a strange form of art to t and young. It is also not a strange form of art to African culture. It is realized from the study that the contemporary spoken word artists rely heavily on African ancestral poetry which makes their poetry a remediation of traditional African oral poetry. In addition, the contemporary spoken word artists employ various traditional and cultural elements such as costume and props, drums and gong, and the use of proverbs and Ghanaian languages among others. These prove that the artists are not detached from their cultural heritage and engaging them and their poems on a serious level could serve as a means of strengthening and projecting African cultural heritage and values. In effect, contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poems and performances could be used as a means of reaching and encouraging the youth to better appreciate their cultural heritage since they form majority of the artists and audience. The advantage of this is that the notion of considering African culture and tradition as not relevant in contemporary times would be erased when children and youth watch their age groups hold on to culture and tradition in their performances. Contemporary spoken word artists would then become ambassadors for projecting African cultural values. Furthermore, spoken word artists should be encouraged to learn African history and fuse it more into their poems and performances so that their audiences could learn it from them. Contemporary spoken word would then get more value than it is now.

5.2.2. Studying Spoken Word Poetry in Classrooms

As noted earlier, Asihene (2017) indicates that most of the literature on contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry is outside the academia and can be found on individual blogs and on social media. The possible reason is that contemporary spoken word in Ghana is not considered as an art that needs attention for serious academic work. This lack of interest in the art further relegates it to the street and most people put out any piece of rhyming lines and refer to it as spoken word.

It is therefore important to consider the study of contemporary spoken word in Ghanaian classrooms since the art is becoming more popular over the days and some of the artists put out very important messages through their performances. Based on the fact that contemporary spoken word poetry has a lot of traditional oral poetry elements, its study in the classroom would help to make the study of traditional oral poetry easy since students would be exposed to traditional oral poetry through contemporary spoken word poetry.

One importance of studying contemporary spoken word poetry in the classrooms is that there would be serious academic works on it and scholars would specialize in it. In effect, more research would be done on contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry and the artists themselves would get to read such research works in order to better understand their art. Also, the research work would be made available for people to read so that they could see the importance of the art. Through this, anytime spoken word poetry is mentioned, more value would be attached to it.

In addition, there could be seminars, workshops and meetings for the spoken word artists and scholars as well as students where the art would meet literary criticism and discussions. Through

this, the art would be seen for its worth and importance since various aspects of the art which are relevant to society would be brought out for discussion.

Another benefit of studying spoken word poetry in the classroom is that published poets and pioneers of contemporary spoken word in Ghana could be invited to mentor and interact with spoken word artists and students so that they could master the various techniques in spoken word poetry. This would make the art more appealing since the artists would learn from the experience of their pioneers to put up great performances. With such interactions between artists, experienced poets, scholars and students, some spoken word performances and poems could be considered for examinations in schools.

5.2.3. Spoken Word Poetry as a means to whip up Interest of Children in Poetry

Contemporary spoken word in Ghana as observed in the study is mainly associated with the youth. In this regard, children would easily feel attached to the artists since the artists are not way older than the children. When spoken word is well harnessed and coordinated, it would serve as a means of whipping up the interest of children in the art and in poetry as a whole. Children could then be introduced to poetry at an early stage in order to groom prospective poets. During library or free periods on the time table of basic schools, school children could be made to watch videos of spoken word performances so as to make them appreciate it. Spoken word artists in communities could also perform for children on holidays through which children content would dominate. Various topics in subjects areas could be put into performances especially history and discussed with children. Also, various poetic devices could be identified in the poems that are performed and explained to children so that they could get a better understanding of the basics of literature. This would make them grow with interest and love for literature and for that matter poetry.

Research could be done extensively on such elements as music, culture, language among others by musicologists, anthropologists, historians, linguists and other scholars to bring out a deeper analysis and understanding of contemporary Ghanaian spoken word poetry.



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APPENDIX A

NANA ASAASE'S POEMS

POEM 1

And so the king salutes the drums

As they call his royal names

I will dig to the left

And dig to the right

I will jump

And I will turn

As they call the names of the wood that provided the base for the drums

Of osonu and duiker who provided the skin

For the drums to birth our songs by the fireside

Only a foolish son points to his father's house with the left finger

And a foolish daughter thinks herself old enough to teach her own mother

Africa! How?

Agoo! Agoo! Agoo!

Welcome to Ghana

The center of Earth

The market of nine moons

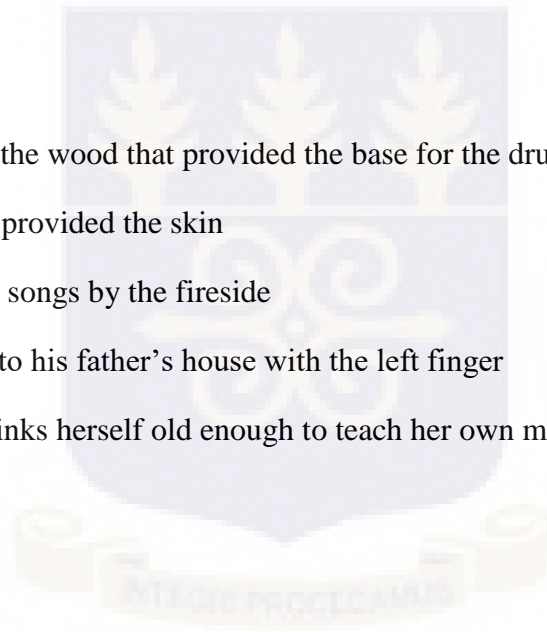
The crossroads of dreams where it all began

Land of the greatest African

Let me take you to the fireside

Where our identities were born

Ogya ee ogya



Ogya ee ogya

Ogya ee ogya oo

Ogya ee ogya

Edikan, ahɔɔden na mmom bie w'ani

(Strength first, but open your eyes)

Na wɛn w'aso

(And cock your ears)

Adehyeɛ te sɛ mmo no te si badwam a,

(When royals like you take the floor,)

Okyerɛma yɛnkɔɛ:

(Drummer, let us start)

Twene anim ɔa hɔ a, yɛn mmɔ nkyɛn

(We cannot ignore the face of the drum and play its sides)

Highlife song:

Mo deɛ ne me, nti ɛyɛ a korɔkorɔ me,

(I belong to so cosset me)

Ghanafuo, mo deɛ a ne me nti ɛyɛ a mmonkorɔkorɔ me

(Ghanaians, I belong to so cosset me)

Mo deɛ a ne me nti ɛyɛ a mmonkorɔkorɔ me,

(I belong to so cosset me)

Ghana, mo deɛ a ne me nti ɛyɛ a mmonkorɔkorɔ me

(Ghana, I belong to so cosset me)

Obi nni m'akyi nti ɛyɛ a, korɔkorɔ me

(No one comes after me so cosset me)

Wonni obi ka me ho Ghana ee korakorɔ me

(You have no one apart from me, Ghana cosset me)

Fa w'akoma mame oo

(Give your heart to me)

Fa w'akoma mame

(Give your heart to me)

The elders raise their beard to the dew to lose the pigment of youth

But if you meet an elder who has not got a beard

Mind you, he is at the peak of all of life's experiences

Back to the roots

Where it all began

From the hollows of ancestral drums

Music of Ghanaian origin

Merekyerɛ mo anidie ne kasa

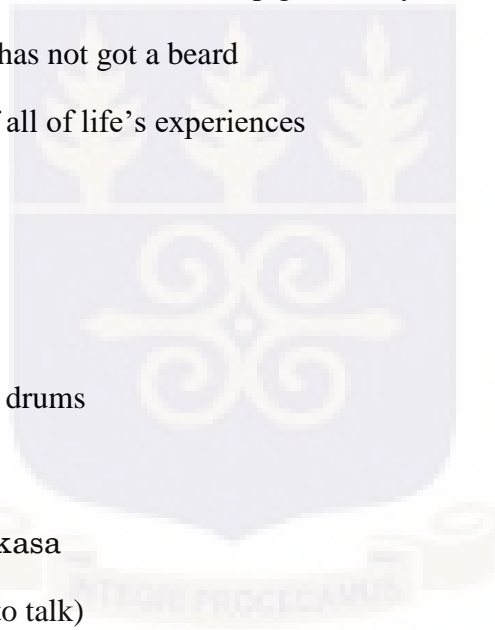
(I teach you respect and how to talk)

Nana Asaase, ɔmamakorɔ Gyebi wɔfase

(Nana Asaase, Nephew of the prominent Gyebi)

M'ano atɔ

(I am done)



POEM 2

(Drumming)

Ghana muntie(Ghana Listen)

Ekristofuo muntie(Christians Listen)

PENSA muntie(PENSA Listen)

I am the seed child of the creator in heaven

Planted in the virgin wombs of Asaase

The keeper of fertility

Watered with the dew from the inner sanctum of osuro

I am that hot metal hammered on the anvils of time

Quenched in the froth of a sea song

I am that gossip carried by four winds over the seven seas

Nana Asaase

Foot stool bearer of Odomankoma Nyankopon, ɔbɔadiɛ the creator

Writer king who sips communion wine from the calabash

I have not come to pour libation

I only came to raise a song of love

To my god of songs

Ɔkyerɛma, Ɔdomankoma kyerɛma,(Drummer, God's drummer)

Ɔdomankoma kyerɛma,(The age old drummer)

Tie ma nto atiefuo sɛ,(Let my listeners know that)

M'amenka no borɔfo(Let me say it in English)

There are few things,

Nothing can beat expressing God in your mother tongue

A man can only be as true as his mother tongue

Let me not waste your ears with words

I put this one together for *ɔmama Yesu Kristo*

My god of songs

Adewuro Kofi! Ma wo homene soε(Kofi the gong player, act now)

Sings

Menhu nea menyε no oo(I do not know how to praise him satisfactorily)

Menhu nea menyε no oo(I do not know how to praise him satisfactorily)

Menhu nea menyε no oo(I do not know how to praise him satisfactorily)

Menhu nea menyε no oo(I do not know how to praise him satisfactorily)

Aw Yesu Nyankopɔn ne baa a(Oh! Jesus, the son of God)

Menhu nea menyε no oo(I do not know how to praise him satisfactorily)

Aw Yesu Nyankopɔn ne baa a(Oh! Jesus, the son of God)

Menhu nea menyε no oo(I do not know how to praise him satisfactorily)

Meyε Akuapemni ba, (I am from Akuapem)

Mefri Adukrom(I come from Adukrom)

Adewuro Kofi! Toa ne worεyε no so(continue what you were doing)

Me nana kyee me tenase(My grandfather sat me down)

Ɛna ɔkyerε me sε(And he told me that)

Mpanin bεka mpaninsεm, (The old will tell history)

Mmɔfra bεto anansesεm(Children will tell folktales)

Na εduru hɔ a y'ato no sei(When we get here, we will it like this)

Ɔkyerɛma, ɔkyerɛma(Drummer, drummer)

Ɔdomankoma kyerɛma(Old age drummer)

Kwaɛɛ a agye wo no (The forest you sought refuge in)

Yɛnnfrɛ no kwaɛɛ na(Do not be contemptuous of it)

Ɛmmɛɛ bi na y'ayera(Some time ago we were lost)

Nka y'asɛɛ(We were useless)

Na yɛrɛkɔku yɛn(And we were going to be killed)

Yɛ dɛ kɔ duruu ɔhenɛpɔn anim(We appeared before the royal king)

Ɔbisa sɛɛ(He asked that)

Ɔbisa sɛɛ(He asked that)

Ɔbisa sɛɛ(He asked that)

Mmo mu hwan na ɔnyɛɛ bɔne dɔ?(Who amongst you has never committed sin)

Mmonto bɔɔ mɔ no(Throw a stone at him)

Ɔnyi ne sekaa nfiri ne bɔha mu(He should bring his sword out from its sheath)

Ɛnɛ sɛ yɛgyina ha a,(As we are gathered here today)

Ɔmama Yesu Kristo(The prominent Jesus Christ)

Ɔboafuo a ɔsɔɛ ɔbrɛfoɔ(The helper who lessens people's burden)

Na ɔma no brɛsuo(And gives them water of relief)

Ɔno na w'ayɛ yɛn saa(He has made us so)

Mpanin bɛka mpaninsɛm,(The old will tell history)

Mmɔfra bɛto anansɛsɛm(Children will tell folktales)

Ɔkyerɛma,(Drummer)

Nana abrewatia(The old lady)

Ɔkaa asem bi kyerɛɛ me(She told me something)

M'ame nka no borɔfo(Let me say it in English)

Osee! (She said)

The crown becomes a burden when the king enters his favorite chamber

When I enter into scripture, it says:

The lord inhabits the song of his saints

And lives in their praises

And so when we enter into the fullness of our tongues

There is nothing like the mother tongue

Nothing like expressing God in the mother tongue

Yesu Kristo, menhu nea menyε wo(Jesus Christ, I do not know how to praise you)

If I had all the time in the world,

If I had all the time for the rest of this evening

I might spend about three hours just talking about how he found me

How he saved me

But one thing I want you to know is this:

They say uneasy lies the head that wears the crown

Let me add

Uneasy lies the seat that sits on the throne

Again let me add

Uneasy lies the mouth that pronounces one king

Raise your right hand with me

Ka sε:(Say)

Yesu, Yesu, Yesu(Jesus ×3)

Ɛnε anwumε yi(This evening)

Wote yεn ka a(If you hear from us)

Wote yεn ne a(If you hear our voices)

Wohwε mfifire εresam yεn yi a(If you look at how we are sweating)

Na eyɛ yɛn PENZA, Alumni (It is we...)

Yɛn a yɛwɔ hɔ(Those of us at present)

Ne yɛn a yɛrɛbɛba(Those yet to be born)

Yɛma yɛn ne so kyɛrɛ wo a(We raise our voices before you)

Ɔkyɛrɛma sɔ me muɛ(Drummer help me)

Drumming

Medase, medase, medase, medase(Thank you ×4)

Mamema wo nkra bi(Deliver this message for me)

Sɛ wokyea wo ho fri ha na worekɔ a,(If you are leaving here)

Ebi a na w'hyia Yesu(You may meet Jesus)

Sɛ wanhyia no nso a(If you do not meet him)

Ɛnɛ anadwo yi worekɔda a(If you are going to sleep tonight)

Wobɛsane wɔ wo nkotodwe anim(You will go before your knees)

Wobɔ ne din na ɔbisa sɛ ɛdeɛn asem me ba?(If you mention his name and he asks you for the reason)

Na w'akyrɛrɛ ne sɛ wohyiaa Nana Asaase(Tell him you met Nana Asaase)

Ɔmamakorɔ Gyebi wɔfase(Nephew of the prominent Gyebi)

Writer king who sips communion from the calabash

I did not come to pour libation

I only came to raise a song of love to Jesus

My god of songs

Medase(Thanks)

Drumming to fade

Poem 3

Agoo! Agoo! Agoo!

Gives comments on the poem to be performed

Save your drink and pass it round the circle of men

Save your drink

And pass it round in this communion of ourselves

But well, you might like to tip a little for the end

For the ancestors would use a drink

For all the great ideas they shared before they left

But I dare tell you

Let the ghosts of yesteryears and yet to come

Stay away for we call this songs

To carve this dance floor in sand

With nibble dance and not bare floors

Our gods might have travelled across the fence

To learn from their neighbors overseas

And so let us pour libation:

When I call it, you say “wie”

This is to the gods, may their curses rot their teeth

May their neglect of duty be their shame

May they fall in hole with shame and disgrace for their love for schnapps and whisky

May they,

When they return

Find out that their seats have been taken in public places

And when they care to be humans

May they always produce poly this thing

But you see, next time when you pour libation,

Let us learn to save some for ourselves

For it is only the living who can drink

We are proud to say
That we live at the center of the Earth
And so the gods might have gone
To study from their neighbors across the fence
By the time they return
We would have done what they were supposed to do

Poem 3

Sings

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa

Mefɛ me dɔfo pa

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa

Gye me so Adwoa

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa

Abenfo Abena

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa

Ahoɔfɛ Akua



Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa

Ene Yaa Sika

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa

Forceful Afia

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa

Ama Nyamekye

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa

Delicate Akosua

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa dɛdɛndeyi

Seniwa

Me dɔfo pa(My love)

If you hear me call your name

Do not be alarmed

Be at peace

For I am only wondering

How you could be one of a woman of what you are

I think I now know why you are called Adwoa

Adwoa,

Adwoa, they say you are meek and calm

Like the gentle ripples caused by the stew cooked by smooth pepper



Adwoa,

You are calm like the source in a mackerel tin

Wo ho dwo te se tinapa ho nsuo (You are calm like the sauce in a mackerel tin)

Like the cool waters of Wli

Like the dew that falls on foliage and whets the appetite of the grateful ruminant

Ɔsee m'ame nto me bo na menhwahwa wo

Wo deɛ woba mu a na m'amee

Adwoa, when you are in the midst

I am always satisfied

Ɔba a wo ho dwoɔ

You who is most calm – Adwoa

Pempenaa

Pempenaa

Pempenaa

sings

Sii sii sii

Sii nana koo

Tata bonku

Bonkutu bonkutu bonkutu grɛɛ

Eii maame ee

Eii papa ee

Yiri bombom

Abena, Ah!

Aben a meɔ a amansan nyinaa te (This is the whistle everybody hears when I blow into)

Patience is a virtue and this is a test of time

Nso aben a meɔ a amansan nyinaa te (the whistle everybody hears when I blow into)



I love your smile obenfoɔ

Akua, Wednesday born

Akua, you remind me of Akuaba

Akua ba – Akua’s daughter

Symbol of fertility

Gyama ɛno nti na wo mma ho ye fɛ saa no w’ahunnu?(Is that why your children are beautiful?)

That is why your children are so beautiful, Akua

I will ask Kweku Papa to tell me more when next I see him

I do not know why she is called Yaa

Thursday – Yaa

Sings seniwa dedende yi

I know Yaa is proud

I know Yaa is majestic

Yaa is pronounced

Yaa is outspoken

Wohwɛ no n’ano ate(You can see that she is articulate)

Yaa is brave

Obaa Yaa Asantewa Abrefi kɔtɔ

Obaa kokɔdurufɔɔ(A brave woman)

Ono deɛ ɔwoso ne ho pɛ ɛwɔ sɛ yennyinaa ye dɛn(When she shakes her body, all becomes silent)

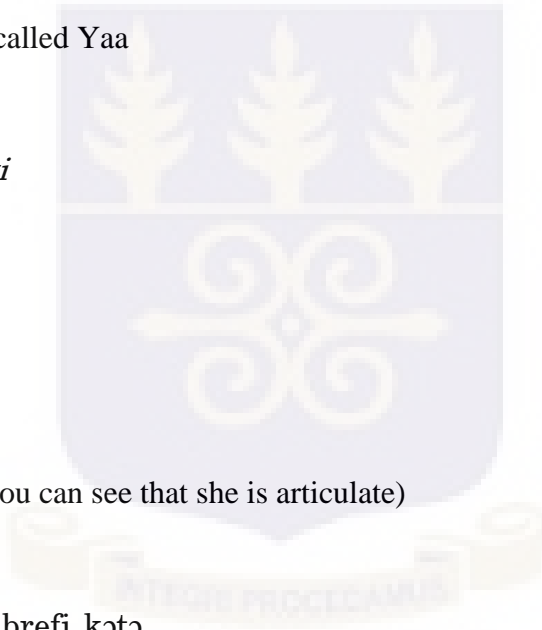
Yaa where are you?

My flamboyant being

You add too much color to this world

Herh! Yaa Sika wo ho ye fɛ w’ate(Yaa Sika you are beautiful)

Nti ɛye a dandɛn wo ho kakra (So turn around)



Afia – Friday

Afia – forceful Afia

Afia – you do not know defeat

Afia, Your jealousy over me is elastic

Ne ho twea

You are hot when necessary

And you are cold to meet necessity

Hard working motherly Afia

Afia you pamper me to this point

You see I am sweating

Afia, wogyegye me so ma me ho yera me dodo(Afia, you pamper me so much)

Ɛma mepɛ sɛ mete mfifire(That I sweat)

I hope to understand you better

When I get to know why you are called Afia

Ama – Saturday born

Saturday – Ama, Ama

Nyamekɛ

My gift from obɔdɛɛ on the day he rested

Ama Adɔma, me ne wobedɔ sɛsɛ(You and I will take an oath)

Ama, fluid gaze, nimble dancer, woman of few words

Priceless jewel that adorns my crown

Cotton bed on which my heart lies

Ama

Your eyes pierce gently to the core, I could not tell a lie

M'akɛdɛɛ(My gift)

Me Nana Asaase medɔ w'ate(I Nana Asaase love you)

I am most careful to be gentle when I call you this – Akosua

Sunday – Akosua – kosua – egg

One but many

Delicate but strong

Secretive, faithful, protective egg

Seemingly hard to get but I found your soft spot

Akosua,

Thank you for the tough time you gave me

I love weighing you

Akosua – nkosua – egg – virgin source of strength

Accompaniment to my bread

Mother who gives advice to her children before they are born

M'ani nkosua – my eye balls – Ayeekoo

Nti me \wp fopa(So my love)

When you hear me call your names

Do not be alarmed

Be at peace

I am only wondering and thanking

$\text{\textcircled{O}}\text{\textcircled{b}}\text{\textcircled{a}}\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{\textcircled{s}}\text{\textcircled{ }kronkron}\text{\textcircled{ }Nana}\text{\textcircled{ }Nyankop\text{\textcircled{ }n}}\text{\textcircled{ }Odomankoma}$ the creator

For giving me all of you for a wife

In one lifetime

The only hole in my heart

Sings seniwa dedende

APPENDIX B

CHIEF MOOMEN'S POEMS

POEM 1

Beyond the cattle trail

At the break of dawn

When the cry of the muezzin

Pierces through the silence of the night

Ali will rouse himself from his straw mat

In his mud hut

And head to the kraal

To lead his father's cattle out to graze

The vast expanse of the savanna

There in the luscious outskirts of the village

Where the grass is green and the rising sun is mellow

The lazy looking animals would indulge themselves in the foliage

And Ali will find a spot under a tree to pass his time

And it is here

That all the magic happens

Ali was a boy in a small village with not many people

His father had several sons who couldn't all go to school at the same time

Because someone had to take care of the cattle

So when one son was at school

The other was at home

But for Ali it never mattered

Because he carried his school wherever he went

Sitting under that shade while his cattle grazes gracefully at a distance

He will pick out a book
He loved to read
To travel in time and space
And see
And feel
And touch
A world different from his own
He stood on the desert sands and watched
As the pyramids rose to defy the skyline
And proclaim the glory of the Pharaohs
He stood in the senate
As Cicero proclaimed the might of an empire
He listened to the parables of Jesus of Judea
He travelled with Buddha throughout India
He heard the call of Confucius in China
He travelled with Mohammed of Arabia from Mecca to Madina
And then
Through the middle ages he journeyed
And witnessed King John sign the Magna Carta with a reluctant hand
As his knights embarked upon the crusade
To capture the holy lands
In Florence at the height of the renaissance
Under the patronage of the Medici
He witnessed Da Vinci paint the Mona Lisa
Unto the door of Wittenberg
He stood as Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses in Britannia
On stage at the globe theatre

He saw the genius of master Shakespeare unravel

All the world is a stage

And all the men and women merely players

And then through Africa he travelled

Through the old kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, Songhai

Through the ivory cities of Mogadishu, Mombasa, Zanzibar

Through the stony walls of great Zimbabwe

Back in Timbuktu

He heard the griot sing the praise song of Mansa Musa

Mansa Musa ee

Mansa Musa oo

Mansa Musa

And then he journeyed on

And saw the Ottomans change Constantinople to Istanbul

He stood in awe

As the Taj Mahal rose to the glory of Mumtaz Mahal

He heard the praise song of Kublai Khan and Genghis Khan

As he travelled along the silk routes with Marco Polo

Before the main Empress drove away the Mongols

And made the great walls of China even greater

In Japan's bustling city of Kiyoto

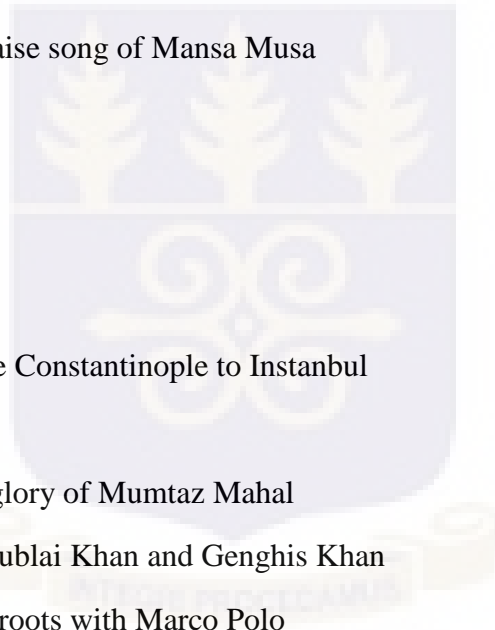
He saw the samurais with their two blades

The Asians with their alluring gaze

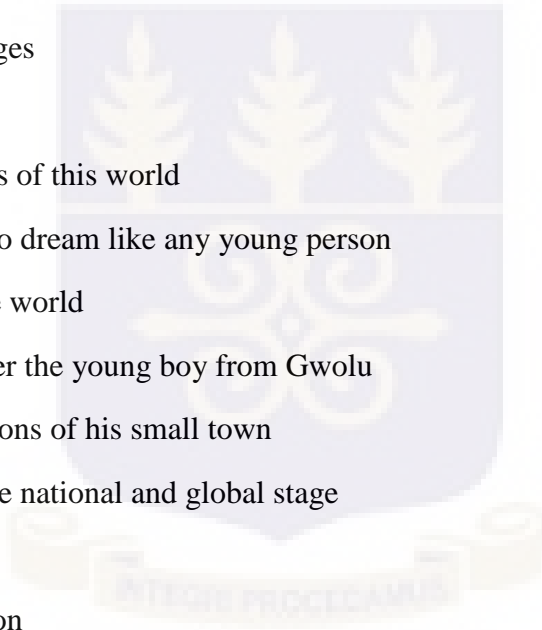
As the actors in their kimonos dance

Beyond the cattle trail

How is it that a young boy



In some far away village herding his cattle
Can know so much about the world
Can appreciate the beauty
And diversity
And complexity
Of the human experience
Simple
Through the power of the page
Sitting under that shade
Flipping through those pages
Opened his mind
To the endless possibilities of this world
And gave him the power to dream like any young person
In any urban suburb of the world
And so today we remember the young boy from Gwolu
Who traversed the limitations of his small town
And became an icon on the national and global stage
We remember
The young boy who held on
To the eliminating pursuit of knowledge
Who empowered himself
To empower his people and his nation
Today we celebrate
A statesman
A man who lived his life in the service of his country
Who rose through the ranks
To the highest office of the land



And despite his sojourn thereof

He showed us the possibility of honour and integrity in office

Today

We remember

Today

We honour

Today

We celebrate

Today

We revive the name and legacy of a forgotten hero

A pioneer

A visionary

A consummate servant of the civil

A scholar

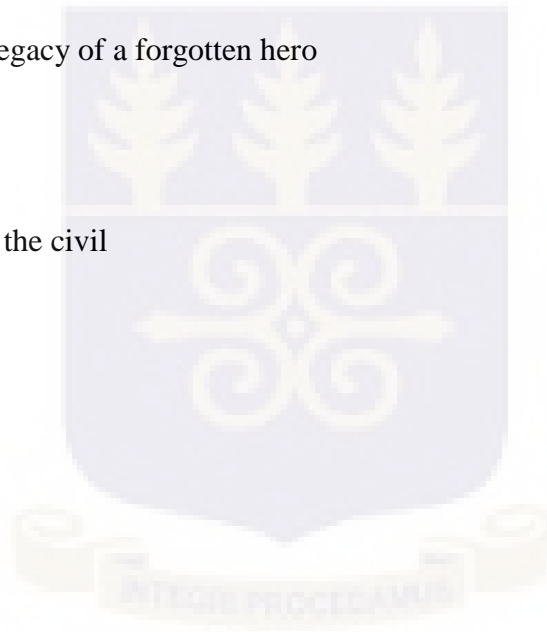
A diplomat

A statesman

Today

We honour

Dr. Hilla Limann



POEM 2

When the harvest is over

We hover around the Baobab tree

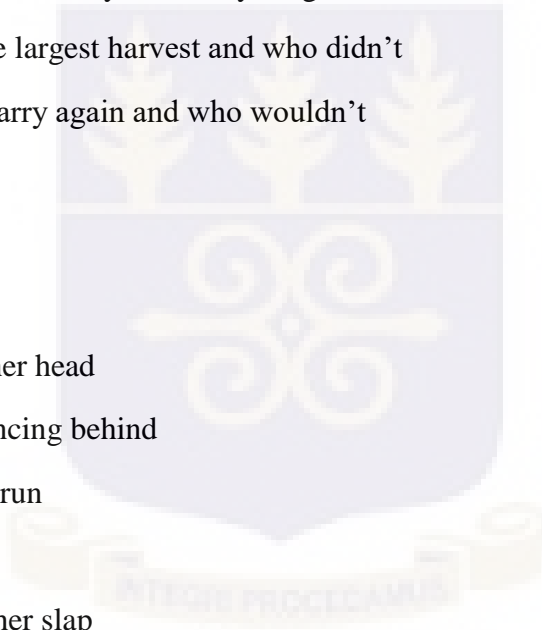
Until the gourds of pito arrive

We sit

And pick

And fill our calabashes
And we drink deep
In honour of the ancestors
Deep in honour of the gods
Deep in honour of our families
And deep in honour of our unborn children
After drinking this deep
We are deeply drunk
So our mouths begin to blabber any and everything
We talk about who had the largest harvest and who didn't
We talk about who will marry again and who wouldn't
We made future plans
And settled disputes
When Fulera passes by
With her pot of water on her head
And her huge buttocks dancing behind
Alidu the foolish one will run
And have hands to tap
Fulera will turn and have her slap
We burst out into a laughter
Raise our calabash into the air
Stamp our feet unto the earth until the dust rises
And chokes our nostrils
And we sneeze – “hetseew”

When the gourds become empty
We send for more pito



And when Adama has drunk deep enough

He offers to slaughter a goat

We give him the cheers

“Adama oo! Adama!”

And he offers to slaughter two

We give him more cheers

“Adama oo! Adama!”

And he offers to slaughter three

So the fire is lit

The goats are slaughtered and roasted

Sanda picks up his xylophone

Laru takes up his drums

Shaka takes up his umbene

And together we sing

And dance

And laugh

Until the tears gleam in our eyes

The sun is reluctant to settle

The moon is eager to rise

And when it does

Our wives come bearing tuo zafi with pounded yam

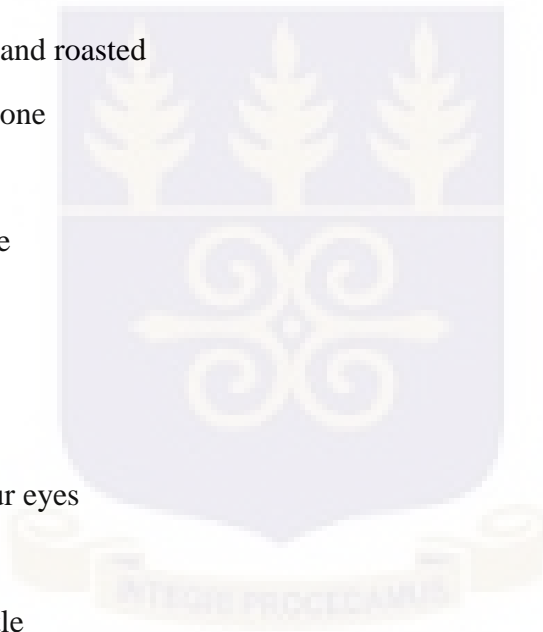
With yawayawa and ayoyo soup

Alongside vougagyir

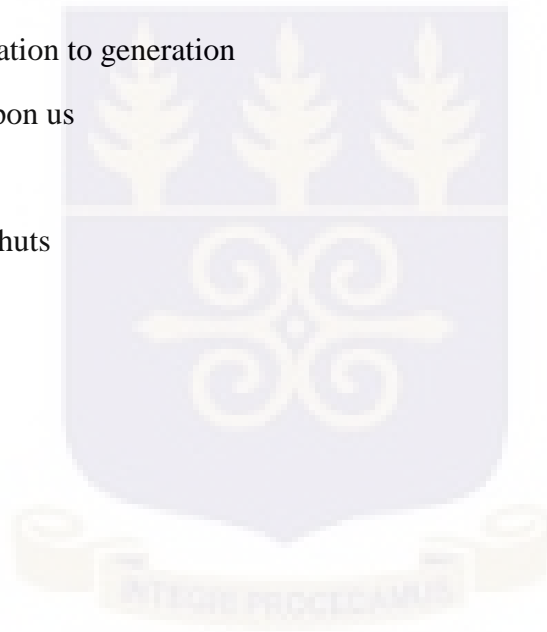
After eating our food

We stretch our feet

Pick our teeth



And belch
As we run our palm across our bellies
The wind breezes across our bodies
The children gather in troupes
The women come around
Together we sit and watch the stars dance in the sky
And listen to the birds sing into our very souls
As we count our dreams
Sometimes Baba comes to tell us the stories
Handed down from generation to generation
So sleep begins to steal upon us
So family by family
We drag ourselves to our huts
Until the next harvest



POEM 3

Voices
Do you hear the voices?
Do you hear the voices of the people
When we gathered at the village square
Under the smiling moon
To sing the songs
Tell stories
And dance to the melodies of our culture?

Do you hear the voices?
But that was before the West winds
Filled the sails of the hungry ships
And docked them on our shores
And the voices changed.
Do you hear the cries of our women
As they were dragged through
The thorny sands down into the endless dungeons
Where the monstrous walls defiled their minds
And the holy gentlemen stole their honour?
Do you hear
The bitter cry of the men
As they meant to tear the chains
That bound their arms and feet?
Do you
Hear the regretful sobs
Of the people as they were led
Through the doors of no return
Into the land of untold hardships?
Do you hear the crack of the whip
On the back of Kunta Kinte
Burnt by the unforgiving sun
As he bends to dig the foundations of today's sky scrapers?
But alas
Do you hear
When the whip master is gone to his god
How the people gather like they used to do

And sing

And dance

And tell stories like they used to do?

Alas

The whip touched their backs

But not their spirits.

Do you hear

The spirits of the people

Boiling

Do you hear the people say:

“Enough is enough?”

Do you hear the voice

Of a Garvey

Of a Padmore

Of a Du Bois?

Do you hear

An Nkrumah

On that fateful 57 night declaring to the world:

“At long last, the battle has ended

And Ghana, your beloved country

Is free forever?”

Do you hear

How Africa took up that call?

Do you hear the voice

Of a Tofawa Balewa

Of a Patrice Lumumba

Of a Julius Nyerere



Of a Jomo Kenyata?

Do you hear thousands of voices marching upon Lincoln Memorial

To hear a king speak of his dream?

Do you hear

Mandela screaming from his prison walls:

“Amanhla!”

And do you hear the young South African girls singing:

“Nkosi sikeleli Africa?”

Do you hear

A Bob Marley calling for Africa unite?

Do you hear

A Fela Anikulapo singing revolutionary chants into your hearts:

“If you call a woman African woman she no go ‘gree

She go say eee

She go say

I be lady o”

So virgins of the land

Hear the voices that you might be inspired

To make your voice heard

Sing your part in the melody of the nation

That others after you might sing of you

As you sing of those before you

Because in the end,

“Zion train is coming our way”

Chuck chack, chuck chack, chuck chack

Voices

