

Channelling East African Poetic Futures Through Diasporic Experiences



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Abstract

*Warsan Shire, a British national born of Somali parents in Kenya, and Nayyirah Waheed an African poet in the United States, through their poetry collections, *Teaching my Mother How to Give Birth* (2011) and *Salt* (2013), respectively, address the issues of mobility, cultural appropriation and commodification, issues of gender, ethnic and racial conflicts, amongst others, by creating a hybrid space of poetry production and consumption. This paper aims to study how the poets address experiences through their created personas by incorporating forms of new media in their poetic style. It observes that both writers trace their origins to East Africa, an aspect of their heritage that presents itself in their work as they trace migrant experiences from the African region to Europe and North America. This will also form the ideas presented in the paper interrogating the East African intellectual and cultural histories which inform the current and future production of poetry.*

Keywords: Warsan Shire, Nayyirah Waheed, diasporic poetry, cultural appropriation and Identity.

Introduction

The East African coast line's proximity to Arabia, India, and the Far East has a rich history of contact with traders and "explorers" from these lands and beyond. This has led to changes in the physical, cultural and economic interactions among the communities inhabiting these spaces. The resulting expansion of the East African history richly interwoven with personal and migrant histories is the focus of this article. It looks at intraregional mobilities and migrant encounters, within the East African context.

Africa's geographical space, and its' history, is richly interwoven with both, personal and communal experiences. These personal and communal histories, additionally, encompass testimonies of "free and forced, voluntary and forced slavery migrational histories and experiences (c.f. Jayasuriya and Pankhurst 7).

Why are you here? Is a question that individuals who find themselves in a refugee situation often have to grapple with. These intraregional mobilities and migrant encounters are captured in diverse and creative ways in poetry. This paper interrogates the historical and social context that writers, in particular poets, have employed to tackle this issue. It examines Warsan Shire's *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, and Nayyirah Waheed's, *Salt*.

Globalisation has rendered the world a "small village" where cultures and people meet and interact. In spite of the rhetoric of the world existing as a village, there remains large numbers of individuals who are in crisis as a result of forced migration. The paper will analyse how intra and inter regional mobilities and migrant encounters create an enabling space for re-shaping of new identities and acquisition of territorial spaces for immigrants. This is key in understanding what shapes the migration experiences of Africans; their identity within the continent and in the diaspora.

Political turmoil and instability in parts of the world has seen a steady increase in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons. A large number of these refugees come from Africa seeking asylum in Western nations where often times they are denied subject hood and forced back to their countries. In situations where some have been accorded asylum, the tone of the leaders is fast changing to a negative one. Most recently the dynamics of interaction and migration led to Donald Trump, the then President of the United States tweeting that “why don’t they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came” (Tweet from @realDonaldTrump, July 14, 2019). This tweet was directed at four democrat congresswomen of colour namely Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar and Ayanna Pressley who have been critical of his administration’s policies. Two days following this tweet at a Trump rally in North Carolina, the crowd started a chant directed at Representative Ilhan Omar of Minnesota who was born in Somalia. The tweet earlier sent by the president formed the chant line with the crowd repeatedly saying “send her back”. In response to a question posed by a reporter, the president did not disavow the chant and instead praised the crowd. This reflects growing negative sentiments that migrants have to deal with in their “new homes”. They are put to task with queries such as why are you here? Why did you leave your country to come here? How did you find yourself here? These are mingled with suggestions for them to go back where they came from.

The voices/ persona in the poetry collections forming the focal point of this discussion and that of the speaker as the writer, becomes a recollection of the past as well as that of the present and the future both from a literal and literary perspective. This is by their transcending the historical time of existence recollecting their own personal and collective experiences, and bringing them to the present for the reader. By thus voicing their experiences, the personae and the poets situate themselves in the shared experiences that emerge by listening to other African Diasporic

voices. The poets elucidate trajectories of immigrant and migrant voices which offer multidimensional and multicultural experiences of connections that exist in the East African geographical space, its literary space, historical space and how they exist in the understanding of intra-regional mobilities and migrant encounters.

Through the adoption of Shailja Patel's term, *Migritude*, which is also the title of her novel, the paper aims to understand how the personae attempts through aesthetics and poetry; to live, celebrate the outsider status, tell their untold experiences and stories, through the use of language and by drawing on memories and associations within the idea of the migrant and the attitudes, as part of their subject formation and documentation. Our aim therefore is to examine and understand the poets, the voices and their experiences, as East African migrant subjects and identities living in the Diaspora or in between the process of continual mobilities of becoming and reaffirming their multiple identities.

The politics around identity and subjectification has proved to be problematic for individuals, communities or countries. Nayyirah Waheed does not disclose her identity leading her readers to speculate on her country of origin she instead chooses to identify herself with the land that she is based in. Warsan Shire, on the other hand, identifies herself as a Somali born in Kenya whose family moved to the United Kingdom when she was one year old. Both poets use their poetry as a way of asserting agency for the female as they locate their experiences and those of others in the diaspora. Both works can be described as a mixture of East African storytelling, quasi-autobiographical memoirs, testimonial and confessional poetry, documentary, and fragmentary family genealogy. They use their poetry as a way of asserting agency for migrant subjects with a focus on female corporeality.

East African Mobilities, Migrant Encounters and Diasporic Identities

East Africa is rich in histories of mobilities and migrant encounters that were made possible through the existence of the natural harbour at the coast of Somalia, Tanzania all the way to Madagascar and the Southern part of Africa. This together with the trade routes in the sea facilitated trade along the East African coast, Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Much of the trade involved ivory and slaves which opened up the East African coast and its hinterland to outsiders. Slaves from Africa were sold in the Middle East and Asia. Colonial occupation of Africa further led to the enlisting of men to fight as courier corps and soldiers during the Second World War in Burma. This is but a brief look at the start of migrant encounters in East Africa.

The poetry under consideration builds on this movement using the image of the ocean as a connective space. Shire and Waheed's characters navigate water spaces which are violent and transformative at the same time. The Indian Ocean coast of East Africa is the starting point for the characters forced and voluntary migration. As they move into the world they arrive at the Mediterranean ocean where they try to build their lives amidst fierce opposition. There are allusions to the Black Atlantic which sets the stage for the trauma of oceanic movement prevalent in their poetry. Jennifer Leetsch (2019) in an essay argues that "these productive overlapping opens up new avenues of enquiry in which exists troubled but enabling sites of multiple exchanges" (80) and possibilities of "passage and movement" however dangerous they may be" (84).

The East African geographic space thus acts as an opus of re-formulating the differences and similarities that exist in migrants' experiences by becoming a channel of/for movement for those whom are understood as expatriates, explorers and traders; and for those who identify as refugees, migrants and diaspora. We note that as female poets living in the diaspora

with roots from East Africa, they paint the sea as a space to contest and create newer identities. They reflect on intraregional mobilities within the East African region, where mobilities and encounters of Africans are also based on migrant encounters.

These mobilities depict the loss and search of one's identity within the act of movement in various territorial spaces. The individual becomes a refugee in another land and territory as they move from their country seeking asylum. They also are aware of the harsh reality that they face rejection along the way. This denial and rejection can be seen in the poem "Circumstances" from Waheed's *Salt*.

where
you are.
is not
who
you are.
___ circumstances (29).

The traditional understanding of a person's identity is one that has always been hinged on the temporal-spatial occupation of that time and implied as static and unchanging. This can be understood through the term *Zeitgeist* which is the concept of the spirit of time or the spirit of the age,. Goethe posits that "everything happens for a reason, and it happens because the spirit of the age permits it to be. The formation of the constituent facts and later their reawakening are in fact the consequences of the spirit of the age" (Boring, 1955, 102). It is thus this understanding of the spirit of time/age that has always been appropriated in the labelling and identification of people and has continually been used to do so to date. However, this is not the case with the persona-: for him/her, identity is not hinged on the positionalities or/neither the circumstances that one is in. The persona's understanding of identity is thus demystified based on the issue of the spirit of age.

The voices; that of the personae and of Waheed, captures and performs their lived experiences not just through the act of writing but also as a way of reliving them in the moment. This brings about the recollection of the forgotten memory and provides an archive of their experiences which they survived to tell. The voices act as bridges of time and places that existed between the past ordeals and the present time. They also act as a link between geographical spaces that transcend the element of immobility to a different space altogether.

Shire presents a different angle to this voice in her poem “Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)” where she says,

“... when I meet others like me I recognise the longing, the missing, the memory of something on their faces. No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. I’ve been carrying the old anthem in my mouth for so long that there’s no space for another song, another tongue or another language...” (24).

The persona in this poem talks about home and memory juxtaposed with the idea of displacement and forgetting. The conversation that happens at the deportation centre is about a country that is facing civil war and the circumstances that made them flee from a place they call home. Home is compared to the mouth of a shark, an imagery that depicts danger and death. The persona gives us the reasons and circumstances that force them to flee, whereby leaving home is a forced endeavour of being dragged past “burning torsos are erected on poles like flags” (Shire 24). As people who are labelled and identified as refugees, the persona negates this by stating that the bodies of other people facing the same circumstances either inter or intraregional mobilities become sites of home away from home. This is depicted through the interactions of meeting other people, refugees from the same country as the persona or from different ones.

Regardless of being in a different country altogether, they each become the personification of home: - a space that is immovable, but through them one that is both movable from their mobility from the physical space that they once belonged to. Additionally, through their longing, their loneliness and their missing and memory of home, a country; they become embodiments and splintered representations of those spaces far from home which are brought forth from a distant past to the fore present. These spaces just like the bodies too are broken and splintered, one, in the factions of boundaries, and the other, in the trauma that happens to them as person, however, they all are in an autonomous existence through individual bodies. These bodies become thus sites and archives of the spaces but are not in entirety, rather in a multiple of memories and recollections defined by the spaces they inhabit.

Performances of belonging and identity are hinged onto the pendulum of intra-mobilities and diasporic encounters, which are paradoxical in nature and at opposite ends. They depict experiences of trauma and hope; of static and mobilities, of lose and reclamations, of rejection and belonging; of displacement and home, of life and death and much more. The performance of the voices recollecting their own experiences become a way of active agency and bridges of reconnections between geographical physical spaces and mental ones; of reconnection of historical time: - the historical past within their own indecisive future that is embedded within the present, giving it a sense of recurrent timeless-ness and a continuity and fluidity characteristic of time re-enacted through their memory and through the medium of language.

Language recollection and re-enactment by the personae enables them to remap their own experiences, re-live those of others and for them to own their old space, home that they left. The persona says that "... I've been carrying the old anthem in my mouth" depicts a tethering to a culture and a lifestyle, that even though they do not belong to anymore, it is embodied

and belongs within them, both in memory and in their conscious means of communication. This in addition becomes an act of celebratory, yet at the same time, a resistant model from being lost and assimilated from the self, from the land and culture they were uprooted from and from the community they belong to. Through language the persona tells us of belonging within a space that only s/he can create and exist harmoniously even within the horrifying experience of (im)mobility and displacement, of immigrating or migrant encounters.

The poet's and the persona's experiences enables the reader through the act of reading to become active sojourners, to become momentarily, a displaced immigrant, from the confines and boundaries of the physical space they inhabit, to that of the mental space they re-live the experiences of (the persona and the poet) what they read. Ironically, through encountering and re-enactment of otherness with the reader, the persona is additionally enabled to inhabit other tongues, newer spaces, to belong complementary of the readers' ability to understand what the persona is saying, relive their experiences and re-enact their acts. The reader and the persona's existence within the same psychic space, activates intraregional migrational mobile bodies activated and move through the transmutation of thought even though they are in different "static physical spaces" for but a brief moment. But even in that brief moment, the status quo is destabilized.

Gendering Black Migrant Experiences

Shire and Waheed utilise poetry as a creative tool and medium to talk about diasporic experiences, refugees and displacement. They expound on the making and unmaking of water through the trajectories of raced and gendered and refugee bodies in movement and stasis across ocean spaces. Through their movements, these refugee bodies enact new spatial and political materialities, and inscribe embodied counter-geographies and relations (Kapur, 2003; Hyndman, 2004).

Diaspora according to Jesse Shipley involves territorial connections and disjunctures that engender acts of imagination and affect that are linked to territory, yet are not bound by it. He continues to say that

“it is the relationship to a homeland distinct from the country of residence that constitutes diaspora. Diaspora can be understood as a form of extraterritoriality in relation to the homeland. Diasporas, moreover, as dispersed communities, possess no common territory; they exist, not through occupying a particular place, but by transcending their disparate locations. Migrants, refugees, diasporas, and similar populations, moreover, live in ambiguous and simultaneous relationships with multiple territorial locations and communities” (2013).

From the above quotation, we can thus situate Waheed and Shire within the spaces of diasporic writing in which the relationship with the land of their birth East Africa is distinct from those that they live in U.S and Britain respectively. By thus drawing on migrant and diasporic writing we are reiterating what we had already discussed above on the issue of race and gender within the multiple concerns raised through the concerns of migrant encounters.

Waheed uses the title of her collection *Salt* as a metaphor of agency, movement through the sea or ocean (salty water space) to talk about issues of encounters, identities, experiences and so on. She says,

you broke the ocean in
half to be here.
only to meet nothing that wants you.
___ immigrant (2013, 5).

The voice articulates what the World Migration Report of 2018 testifies that the number of Internally Displaced persons stands at 24.2 million, most of which is associated with conflicts and violence in total alone (International

Organization for Migration (IOM) 38). The East African member states as a geographical space itself are faced with the problem of displacement, ethnic conflicts and violence, terrorism attacks and political upheavals to mention a few. For instance, Shire who is of Somali heritage born in Kenya is one amongst the millions Somali's who have migrated from Somalia to other parts of East Africa and the West seeking for asylum.

Migrants' encounters and dreams of seeking safer and newer spaces to belong, for economical empowerment, find safer social and cultural spaces that they would practise as far as their sexuality or religion or beliefs is concerned and for them to realize their full potentials as human beings. It is no wonder that the persona sees this as an act of "breaking" as one painful disentanglement of an identity, which is understood as the metaphor of the ocean; one, as a site of passage and movement, and the other, as a continuum of identity formation and reformation. The breaking of the ocean into two for the arrival of the immigrant depicts a shift and movement, both in physical-geographical spaces and temporal shift of the past to the now. The persona puts across the problem that emanates from encounters of the migrant with the sojourner.

Migration other than being a movement also projects the teleological issue of displacement and dislocation of both the traveller and at times the "local/native." This drifting and wandering both in movement, space and time reflects and characterises the understanding of the migrants' identity. The native, by re-echoing the feeling of dispossession that the asylum seeker finds within this new space, as an agency of the plight that surrounds immigrants. By and large, the persona's reflection of the situation of the immigrant, in addition, this pinpoints the long history revolving around migration and immigrants, whether forced or willing. The feeling of rejection by the natives comes in within the wake of what we call the globalisation age whereby civilisation and cultures are more open to understanding, yet the differences that exist within are not

celebrated. The dilemma is that one no longer fits or finds that space to belong in the country one fled from neither the other migrating to. This dilemma to belong and exist in an in between place is reflected in a people's ability to thus exist in a limbo, whereby the body belongs in the current space but the mind (the conscious and unconscious) exists in the nostalgia of a space they left leading to a double consciousness, split between leaving or staying. It is in this illusion of belonging of the immigrant that leads the persona to equate it with the act of "breaking the ocean in two". The sea as fluid space denotes a characteristic nature of mobility and flexibility one that is contrary to the persona's view. The emphasis of the created image of breaking the ocean denotes one of strife and hardship, since the act of breaking denotes the use of tremendous energy and force. The immigrants' act of breaking the ocean in two may seem as hyperbolic because the ocean is made up of water which is flexible under pressure exerted on it.

However, the metaphoric meaning of breaking the ocean in two that the persona talks about is understood in the hardship that the immigrant has to endure in the need and desire to migrate to a new space and belong:- here the immigrant's strife is comparable to the act of breaking the ocean into two. One would opt that the tremendous effort that the immigrant displays to overcome the hardships of crossing the obstacles of movement with the danger of losing one's life and belongings would at least find a more humane space- welcomed hospitably, by finding a connection with the space and people s/he flees to. What the immigrant instead finds is rejection by the people and the space itself in terms of the culture of the people, the climate of the land or even the laws that pertains to that land as an immigrant.

Intolerance of the spaces of convergence depicted through calls of separatism and independence is pitted against those of cohesion and dependence. Migrants and immigration have been understood and been labelled as being "illegals", "delinquents", "criminals", "outlaws",

“terrorists”. These identities are extended not just to the immigrants alone, but to anyone willing to help immigrants based on humanitarian reasons that are contrary to a sovereign’s law. Such a diabolic and contradictory identities of being both “criminals and heroes” was recently donned by Captain Carola Rackete of the Sea-Watch 3 for rescuing immigrants off the Libyan coast and docking at the Italian harbour of Lampedusa. This comes barely two years after another German humanitarian organisation vessel, Sea-watch, would have been close enough to rescue all the refugees on a raft, with the close proximity of the French, Portuguese and Italian Ships nearby that did not intervene. She was arrested for defying both the Italian government and military orders of not taking the refugees to Malta, Tunisia or anywhere else, and might face up to ten years in prison if found guilty. Such an act and the refugees have been identified “as outlaws and have been accused of people trafficking” (trans. Al Jazeera English, June 29, 2019). Matteo Salvini who was the Italian Interior minister said “we are not a country of fools, we have rules, laws, borders, so those who made a mistake will pay, I can guarantee that to the Italian people” (trans. Al Jazeera English, June 29, 2019).

Shire’s persona on the other hands gives us a different perspective, that of the immigrant as the addresser, different from Waheed’s, whom the persona is the native addressing the immigrant. In this way the persona gives us his/her first-hand experience as is reported in the second “stanza/part “of the poem “Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre).” Even though both voices are immigrants, their context are different in that Waheed’s immigrant is “the arrivals” quite different from the context of Shire’s persona who is at the Deportation Centre awaiting deportation. However, both continue to address and interrogate factors that lead to an identity crisis for the refugee. The first lines of the stanza say,

They ask me how did you get here? Can't you see it on my body? The Libyan desert red with immigrant bodies, the Gulf of Aden bloated, the city of Rome with no jacket. I hope the journey meant more than miles because all of my children are in the water (Shire 24)

The physical body provides the immigrants' record of experiences, acting as a living site of agency for other perished immigrants in this instance her children and testimonies of survival, hardship and movement of migration and lose. The situational irony is that it is at the deportation centre when the immigrant is about to be deported, that the officials interrogate by conversing with the immigrant, trying to understand how she got there. The immigrant's response is recourse of memory recollections of all the geographical spaces, both of land and sea that the migrants use to get to the final destinations which are filled with perils. The imagery of colour red, clothing-jacket and of bloated bodies highlighted on the geographical spaces of passage, both land and sea, depicts the peril and death. Additionally, these geographical spaces from Africa, East Africa and Europe act spaces of interconnections of individuals and cultures whereby survival and negotiations takes place, be it through language and culture transformations through involvement of many multiple cultures coming into a traumatic contact. It is this traumatic contact that makes the persona declare "I thought that sea was safer than the land" (25). As earlier stated, the sea as a passage additionally acts as a site of local and international voices whereby narratives and experiences of migrational subjects are acted out through survival testimonies and recollections.

The sea through the comparison of the speaker pinpoints the issue of identity formulation and reformation, whereby the land in it stasis essence depicts a stasis and fixity of identity that however changes through the act of the immigrants mobility-intraregional or international. The allegory of the sea and the land is one of terror whereby bodies remain unidentified

and perish; as they lack names and ethnic identification to be named as bodies which result to a loss of identity. Those surviving these terrors however carry with them scars and experiences of terror to additionally be identified as immigrants without a nation. Their existence is that of in between spaces and identities-: for instance, the migrant arriving the country seeking asylum is housed at the deportation centres or refugee camps, existing in a country and being situated at the deportation centre, a space existing between the entry point of a new country she hopes to get asylum, and the one that she left behind.

The East African history with the rest of Africa and the world within the politics of identity and immigrations, violence, terror and death is entangled and merged by bodies that move from one space to another. This history and sad reality has led to the poets writing and personas voicing personal experiences, effects of extreme violence meted on immigrants and a culture of terror, locally, intra-regional and also internationally, which through deliberate use of narratives of terror they have been able to generate a necropolitical culture and form of voice which in turn becomes a form of agency and weapon and a local strategy for territorial control (Ulrich Oslender 2007, 120). Through Waheed's breaking apart of the sea, and Shire's belief of the sea as safer, they have broken apart these spaces which are rendered as familiar to inhabit an unfamiliar and uninhabitable characteristics, which become additionally acts of memory of individual and collective identities that are lost and a reminder of terror signifier.

Additionally, Oslender says that the terror that the persona, the poets capture about the survivors experience, "becomes a communication strategy that aims beyond the killings themselves to send a message to the survivors" and also the future generations that may opt to try and seek asylum (2007, 120-121). Reports by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees show that "on a regular basis, thousands of

distressed Somalis and Ethiopians risk their lives to cross the Gulf of Aden in their quest for a better life. Most of them are killed in violent circumstances, stabbed, bashed, drowned, attacked by sharks, asphyxiated while in crowded smuggler boats plying the dangerous route between Puntland in Somalia and the beaches of Yemen.’ This is according to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights website. The poem “Conversations About Home (at The Deportation Centre)” not only shows the grim reality that immigrants face as they seek new homes but, additionally, acts as a warning for survivors and other individuals who seek for newer ways to migrate. According to the persona,

*I hear them say go home,
I hear them say fucking immigrants, fucking refugees.
Are they really this arrogant?
Do they not know that stability is like a lover with a sweet mouth
upon your body one second;
the next you are a tremor lying on the floor covered in rubble and
old currency waiting for its return... ’ (27).*

Shire’s understanding of stability is a backlash to the West and countries within the African settings at large and the East African community to single out, for instance Kenya, offering haven and playing host to refugees and immigrants which is funded through the Western aid donor funds. By thus being funded they are forced to pay homage to the ideology of the West, by following and aping their mode of conduct and laws as far as border controls are concerned. Doing this thus makes them not discriminate fellow African on the basis of their skin colour but rather they enact the discrimination based on colonial demarcations of imaginary physical lines, thus singling Africans on the basis of ethnic, territorial or gender lines.

Through the use of a simile, peace and stability is likened to a lover who uses sweet words as incentives and enticements to woo, deceives and seduce, and then later flees when things change abruptly. The you, which we read as the personification of a country and its citizens are left spent on the floor, covered in old currency and rubble is heightened and enhanced by the imagery chaos and brutality. We can also understand the situation of peace as that which is facilitated by the West and the incentives of monetary aid and funds that quickly disappear with eruptions of political instability, ethnic clashes and conflicts that later escalate to a full fledged war with a country. As a lover, the West uses monetary and other incentives to create a coalition and keep the countries as their devotees which the West quickly leaves when war breaks out, leaving the country all alone. The persona says, "...I was once like you, the apathy (indifference), the pity, the ungrateful placement and now my home is the mouth of a shark, now my home is the barrel of a gun, I'll see you on the other side" (Shire, 27). The persona in this instance is a country and its citizens, cautions other individuals and denizens from falling into the same trap of dependability, by recollecting the double standards and indifference that exist with the lover, the countries and its citizens. Additionally, how migrant encounters within the East African regions and other countries globally act indifferently by closing its borders to the refugees and the immigrants in need of humanitarian aid. The caution is that even as it enjoys its stability it should not be inhumane to the need of other human beings in need because peace is not long lasting as situations and circumstances do change.

Through the use of cuss like "fucking" language becomes a tool of immobilisation, of conquer, of possession and dispossession not only of dignity but also to hurt them. This is what is understood as "communicative disablement" whereby by strange language systems, illocutionary and perception immobilisation of women and the refugees happens by dispossession of the power, means and morale of

communication (Katherine Sariskakis 2012, 808). “Fucking” here not only connotes the offensive term of ruin to express anger, contempt or rejection but additionally, it points to the act of prostitution whereby it means having sexual intercourse with somebody (for material gains). The immigrants are seen as offspring of the mother who is paid, wooed and then rejected by the lover. The rejection is not just to the mother alone, but additionally to its offspring thus bastardizing the act of sex or copulation between the nation as the Mother and the lover (the West).

Disablement Spaces and Communicating (Im)Migrant, Diasporic Experiences

Poetry is going viral. Warsan Shire and Nayyirah Waheed belong to a community of poets who have grown their poetry around social media. Other well-known poets on social media include Yrsa Daley-Ward, Rupri Kaur and Amanda Lovelace. In an online interview Amanda Lovelace comments that the “poetic community that has grown around social media strives to produce an inclusive atmosphere while at the same time engaging with difficult topics” (2018). She further adds that “with her art she always aims to create a safe place where other queer people can see themselves reflected” (2018)

Poetry adapts to the continued development of social media communities and new technologies. The sustained use of technological developments by both poets as a medium for production facilitates collaboration and instantaneous response. A major theme that is integral to the social media poetry experience is global connection where diverse voices not limited by their geographical spaces convene.

Social media poetry has a specific aesthetic which often includes visual elements or unique ways of shaping and presenting poetic lines. These modes of presentation appeal to a wide audience beyond the poets who in

this instance have African roots to embrace the East and West where diasporic encounters take place.

Utilizing social media enables them connect to and communicate diasporic and migrant experiences and encounters. It additionally provides an avenue for enabling two distinctive modes of writing, one, electronically and the other print, to co-exist creating collaboration and a space for instantaneous response. In the same way that East African oral poetry confers spaces for the poet and the audience to respond, the internet convenes the same space though virtually, for a response.

Social media makes provision for common established memories of the past through a shared point of reference to all members of the community (Hobart and Schiffman 2000, 27). The “Electronic space is, perhaps ironically, a far more concrete space for social struggles than that of the national political system. It becomes a place where informal political actors can be part of the political scene in a way that is much more difficult in national institutional channels notes Saskia Sassen (2005, 82). Through social media and the text, Shire and Waheed transcend well-guarded physical bordered spaces to give access to the voices of many refugees and immigrants that are perceived by many as a minority community. In reading the text, physical boundaries that the reader exists in are transcended through their psychic processing whereby there exists just like the virtual space a bending of timeless and physical geographical spaces which are in continual reformations and reinterpretations.

As Karim asserts, diasporas ‘are seeking ways of ‘re-territorializing’ and ‘re-embedding’ their identities in other imaginings of space’ (2003, 9). Their activities complicate the notion of the internet as extraterritorial, by revealing the ways that cyberspace can be used not only as a fluid virtual space, but to de-territorialize, and also to re-territorialize, to transcend boundaries and to construct newer boundaries. These sites are created and

utilised by those in diaspora, at refugee camps and even as the deportation centres to serve as national space that extend the nation beyond its borders. At times these sites are used as national spaces that are autonomous outside the nation boundaries and sometimes the virtual nature of the sites of cyberspace becomes most important when they serve as spaces for the diaspora to gather. This transcendence of the space through cyberspace is additionally part of the futures that the poets are able to utilise as those tracing their roots from East Africa. The transcendence of the East African space specifically that of Somalia, is twofold by the poets: one through the mobility to the Diaspora, and the other through the cyberspace. Within these spaces (Diaspora and the cyber space) they voice their experiences and that of many diasporas from Somalia and other parts of the world thus an encounter of many voices and experiences are shared. They thus meet and form communities within these spaces that cater to their desire to belong owing to their stateless nature. This is what Lane DeNicola professes as the fundamental aspect of digital media as far as migration is concerned, that of being “disembodying, its placeless and subordination of physical proximity” (2012, 81).

Online sites established serve those (un)belonging in the diaspora to form a relationship to a space, to a new homeland though virtual. As the word ‘homeland’ indicates, diaspora involves a relationship to territory. National territorial boundaries have a physical location and perhaps even a material barrier; however, they also involve imaginaries that serve to construct and naturalize the inside and outside of the nation. The voice of the migrant therefore in whatever space it resides- within the refugee camps, deportation centres or in the diaspora, in East Africa, Europe or America, belongs to a community, situated where it is, everywhere virtually and nowhere with the perception of it as alien. As a point of encounter these spaces exist at the same time, within the country that they fled from or the country that they are and in the cyber-space, a space without borders. The cyber space that the poet and voices exists in, are not

bound under no boundary laws of the country they exist in, however, the state at times passes laws to infringe on the rights of cyber use within the space they are in. Social media ensures their poetry reaches a wider space instantaneously at the click of the send button, which is accessed by the followers who can then instantaneously respond or save to respond at a later date.

As much as finding a space for agency is concerned, English as a language can be perceived as a “communicative disablement” in lieu with other languages within the space of East African languages. This can be understood through the communicative spaces in terms of acceptance and physical spaces it is used and preferred for communication. English and Kiswahili are used as official languages within the East African community-: however, English enjoys more prevalence compared to Kiswahili and is often used in official business and in the urban dwellings more. English therefore as a language within the East Africa space continually grows to “increase the mediation of everything, impacting on the way we articulate cultures and societies on various levels which can be understood as something transmedial” (Vineet Kaul, 2012).

These transcendence and dynamic aspect of English to be harnessed by those who do not belong to the English-speaking spaces of England or America within the East African space therefore offers a space of negotiation and agency. As poets, they have used English and the genre of poetry to create a new site where issues of diasporic encounters, immigrant and migrational identities and refugee can be discussed and understood. The postmodern reinvention of the poems structure from strict English metred rhyme schemes structure to a conversational, prose-poetic form is utilized by Shire’s and a broken disjunctive structure in Waheed’s poetry. Desirably, the poets have opted to enable their art by disabling the identity of Englishness from their poetry despite using the English Language. The understanding of poems from the English perspective has led to a channelling and infusion of African perspective

and understanding of poetry which additionally is an embodiment of the migrants' experiences of displacement.

As a hybrid of both English and African perspective, the poets have been able to create a communicative space and enabler through the text and new media, which are characterised by "the practise of freedom" so as to impact and effect social change. These new spaces create a freshness of understanding of rather restrictive structure not only in the genre of poetry or the language but additionally create spaces that demand for a proactive rather than reactive understanding of the address of their desires as well of those of the immigrants. It thus calls for a need to accommodate a space for cultural and social changes and a transformation and adaptability understanding territories as far as communication and language is concerned.

The experimental use of language in communication in both the virtual space and the text by the poet does not necessarily conform to the convectional use and expectation of language of what constitutes a poem. This redefinition stresses not just the relationship between the geographical spaces of the West and that of the colonized subjects, rejecting the philosophy, the culture and the labels of them but moreover the language captures the experiences of dispossession, death, rejection and migration, reformation of identities and the performance of the poet to us the audience. The performance of Shire as a poet in using grammatical sentence in paragraphs to mark stanzas and Waheed's disjunctive mode of individual words broken down to make a stanza calls us the readers, to redefine what a poem is, which also stresses the redefinition of understanding migratory encounters between the immigrant and the host as far as policies is concerned.

The performance of the poems by the poets through the voicing of the persona can be understood through L. C. Hyden and Eleonor Antelius'

study of “Communicative disability and stories: Towards an embodied conception of narratives” whereby they analysed that stories are generally considered discursive or textual units which are characterized by their topical and temporal coherence. The stories that don’t live up to these norms of either topical or temporal coherence are generally considered as ‘failed’ stories (2010, 589). It is thereby understandably that these the two poets may be identified as strange and categorically fall out from being identified as English Poets even though their poetry exists in a temporal coherence of the spaces they inhabit. Even though they are researching on stories of persons with disabilities and illnesses, the existence of the voice whose is the individual addresser, whether a poet or a storyteller whose lived experiences are connected, known and understood through the “narrative.” As we have seen the narrative recollection of the persona of death, survival, dispossession of identity, their rejection and so on. Furthermore, they (poets) call for a change in the understanding of the poems as one that entails a discursive organisation in terms of coherence as far as speech and writing within the perimeters of English poetry is concerned.

Conclusion.

As African living in the Diaspora, they are able to infuse the African performative element of language found in spoken poetry through the presentation of their poetic structure. When we the readers read the poems and the persona’s “lived experiences, it is the voices that we hear “speaking” thus a different approach to the structure of the poems for the norm of written poem distinctive from that of spoken language.in an already constricted genre of English poetry of strict stanza and rhythm. This strict, normative within written stories are quite distinctive from the nature of spoken word since, “These norms and forms for written narratives are rarely used in the telling of oral, conversational narratives, where those aspects having to do with the necessity and importance of engaging the audience through the whole storytelling event and delivering

a point are much more important (Bauman, 1987). The paper argues that it is thus for this reason that diverse experiences are voiced and stories of mobility and blockage of access continue to evolve with the use of language, race, ethnicity, geographical space and identity. Black as an experience and a form of protest uses the English language to accentuate their mandate of authenticity away from the imperial, in charting the future of migrant poetic encounters.

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