

UNIVERSITÄT
BAYREUTH

ARTS AND AESTHETICS RS-ACC WORKSHOP, MOI UNIVERSITY

THEME

ART AESTHETICS AND CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS IN
KENYA DURING THE PANDEMIC

Thursday 11th Nov - Friday 12th Nov 2021
Sirikwa Hotel, Eldoret - Kenya

**Programme &
Book of Abstracts**



Prof Isaac Kosgey
Vice-Chancellor, Moi University



Prof. Dr. Peter Simatei
Director,
African Cluster Centre Moi University



Prof. T. Michael Mboya
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Prof. Mary Wahome
Dean,
SASS, Moi University



Prof C. J. Odhiambo
RS Arts and Aesthetics Spokesperson

Moi University African Cluster Centre - Profile

This workshop is just one of the many planned research activities of the Moi African Cluster Centre of Excellence in African studies for the year 2021. The Moi University African Cluster Centre (Moi-ACC) is housed in the School of Arts and Social Sciences (SASS) of Moi University. The overriding objectives of the Moi University School of Arts and Social Sciences are to offer interdisciplinary teaching and research in the broad field of African studies and to act as the center where all other Africa-focused scholarship in Moi University coalesce. Within the context of these objectives, and building on the very strong tradition of exploring and interrogating diverse ways of knowing Africa that has developed in the School in the three and a half decades of its existence, the Moi-ACC is envisioned as a hub of outstanding inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary research and conversations that contribute to the greater understanding of Africa in ways that enable the addressing of significant issues affecting the continent. At Moi-ACC research is carried out under the following sections: Affiliations, Arts and Aesthetics, Mobilities, Moralities, Knowledges and Learning. The research projects that are currently on-going in these sections are: Regional integration in Eastern and Southern Africa: An appraisal of the frameworks for interactive markets, effective governance and human rights protection; East African Asian Writing and the Emergence of a Diasporic Subjectivity; Framing Identities from Human Agency Mobility on the Kenya-Uganda Highway; Changing Life Projects: African Identities, Moralities and Wellbeing; Pots, Fire and Gourds: A (Re)presentation of African Knowledge Systems; and Mediated and Mediatization of Islamic Knowledge in Kenya: Educational Institutions, Media Technologies and Performative Aesthetics.

Prof. Dr. Peter Simatei

Director,

Moi African Cluster Centre.

Remarks from Arts and Aesthetics RS Spokesperson

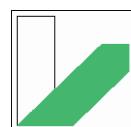
The ways in which culture occurs, how it is practiced, and the ways in which art enacts itself in relation to culture, humans, and society are now irreversibly impacted by COVID-19. The pandemic has directly affected the world of culture and its expressive forms as we broadly understand them. Enabled by advances in technology, cultural productions reacted quickly and effectively to changes taking place in the social space, adapting to the current situation. Artistic productions which emerged in this context, which could be viewed as “pandemic” art, retain the ability to stimulate and strengthen experiences and emotions of the audience, affecting and effecting its group sensitivity. It turns out that the relationship between art and contemporary communication techniques and technologies is of great interactive and integrative significance in the social dimension, shaping the culture-forming aspect of “pandemic” art. Such art forms both conform to and are part of this overall development, but they also stand out from it in very striking ways. In order to understand these ways, there is need to examine the status and function of such cultural productions cutting through processes of subjectification and organization, how they mobilize and reinvent new aesthetics, and how this reinvention, in turn, condition and co-create forms of life as lived and experienced during the pandemic.

In response to the above scenario, we propose a two-day workshop on Art Aesthetics and Cultural Productions to be held at Sirikwa Hotel, Eldoret, between 11th- 12th November 2021. The workshop will explore Art aesthetics in creative arts during pandemics, the reception of “pandemic” art and how art imagines pandemics in a broad and wide sense including historical pandemics such as Ebola and among many others. We believe that “pandemic” art brings together human-technical creativity, aesthetic amplification, and humour to generate a cultural mechanism powerful enough to disrupt some of the domineering and stratifying tendencies of digital media, culture, and society. A good example, heretofore left on the margins of aesthetic and

historical considerations, is the integrative function of art. We believe that, as a result of the current pandemic, this function is experiencing a renaissance. The integrative possibilities of art are gaining new, primary importance today, as keys to the survival of local, national, and supranational communities. Thus, the workshop will be anchored on interdisciplinary and intersectional reflections on aesthetic transformations of art in Kenya in the ongoing epidemiological crisis.

The theme “Art Aesthetics and Cultural Productions in Kenya during the Pandemic”, speaks directly to the overarching agenda of the Multiple Cluster Centre of Art and Aesthetics in African studies. Specifically, the workshop will privilege the Research Section's theme on critical engagement with aesthetics in Art. Again, the workshop proceeds from the understanding that cultural productions are self-unfolding mechanisms through which cultural life may advance to produce fascinating aesthetic objects and that these creative art forms occupy a special place in emerging aesthetics.

Prof C. J. Odhiambo, PhD
Spokesperson,
Arts and Aesthetics RS.



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PROGRAMME

DAY 1		
8:30 –9:00	Registration	
	Session 1 Odhiambo	Chair: Christopher
9:00-9:10	Introductory Remarks & Climate Setting	Charles Kebaya
9:15: –10.00	Keynote Address	Prof I. N. Kimengi
10:00 –10:45	Keynote Address: Arts Lived to Tell The Tale?	Zukiswa Wanner
10:45 –11:00	Health Break	
	Session 2 Wesonga	Chair: Robert
11:00 –11:20	Masking Death: Humor in the Covid-19 Language of the Luo in Kenya	Christopher Odhiambo & Rose Opondo
11:20 –11:40	Playing with Death in Covid-19 Times at The Kenya National Theatre with Xavier Nato' Blackout and Adong Judith' Subira	Fred Mbogo Technical University of Kenya
11:40-12:00	Theatre on the Line Or Theatre Online; Re-imagining The Alternatives to live shows in the age of the Corona pandemic using experiences of two Kenyan theatre companies	Shikuku Emmanuel Tsikhungu
12:00-12:20	Transformations of Art Aesthetic Experiences during the Pandemic in Kenya	Rosemary Murundu Moi University
12:20 –12:35	Q & A	
	Session 3 Mbogo	Chair: Fred
12:35–12:55	The Function of Humour in Subverting the Pandemic	Robert Wesonga Kabianga Univeristy
12:55 –13:15	Online Pandemic Humour: Uncertainty, Virality and Subversion in Kenyan Social Media Covid-19 Discourse	Oduor Obura, Zetech University & James Ogone Jooust
13:15-13:35	Laughter and Seriousness in Pandemic Art: The Case of Kalenjin Artistry	Charles Rono Moi University
13:35 –13:50	Q & A	
13.50-14.30	Health Break	
	SESSION 4	Chair: Jacqueline Ojiambo
14:30 –14:50	The place of popular artforms in the time of Covid-19 pandemic	Violet Barasa, Kabarak University
14:50 –15:10	Re-visiting public cartoon depictions of the Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya: aesthetics, reception, and the virtual space(s)	Caroline Mose Technical University of Kenya
15:10 –15:30	Artistic Expressionism and visual aesthetics of editorial cartoons in response to COVID-19 pandemic	Josephine Wanangwe Moi University

15:30-15:50	Of Art Aesthetics and the Pedagogy of Healing in COVID-19 Poetry in Kenya: A dynamic Network Aesthetic.	Charles Kebaya Machakos University
15:50 –16:00	Q & A	
	SESSION 5 Obura	Chair: Oduor
16:00 – 16:20	Aesthetics of Covid-19 Animations in Kenya: A case of selected animations films	Raphael Ogutu, Nazerene University
16:20 –16:40	Keeping the Kenyan film industry alive: Current trends of filmmaking in the age of COVID- 19 pandemic	Susan Gitimu, Kenyatta University
16:40 –17:00	Storytelling in Short Kenyan Films on the Covid-19 Pandemic	Jackie Ojiambo Islamic University of Kenya
17:00 –17:20	Emergent Technologies, New Audiences and the Evolution of Performing Arts in Desperate Times	Caroline Sambai Moi University
17:20-17:40	Q&A	
17:40 –18:00	Performance on COVID/FILM	
18:00 –	Health Break	

DAY 2

	Session 6 Mose	Chair: Caroline
09:00 –09:20	Affliction and Frightened Laughter in Henry Sagero' Song "ovid"	Felix Orina, Kibabii University
09:20 –09:40	Genre Intersectionality in Nyatiti Performance in the Waved Interstices of Corona Pandemic	Obala Musumba, Bomet University College
09:40 –10:00	Artistic Representations of COVID-19 Pandemic in Popular Music in Kenya	Gloria Mokaya Machakos University
10:00-10:20	'Covid poetry' Art and Performance in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic	Jackie Kosgei University of Witwatersrand
10:20-10:40	Implications of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Art Aesthetics in Kenyan Secondary: A Case Study of Local Public Schools in Uasin Gishu County	Bobin Leita Moi University
10:40-11:00	Q & A	
11:00-11.30	Health Break	
11:30-12:00	Plenary –ay forward Closing Remarks	Participants & Conveners
12:00-1:00	Health Break	
14:00 –15:30	Mentoring Session	

Zukiswa Wanner

Independent Artist

Arts Lived to Tell The Tale?

The keynote will look at the history of Kenya and recent tragedy but how that never prepared us for the pandemic. It will look at how artists had to make adjustments. How those who were employed as "artists' support services" as curators sound engineers, caterers at events and to host events were adversely affected. It will also look at the few successes and whether there is anything for other artists to learn from them beyond the fact that they are middle class and had access to data. What are some of the possible ideas for a way forward for the arts that get little support from political institutions?

Bobin Lieta O. & Charles K. Rono

Moi University

Implications of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Art Aesthetics in Kenyan Secondary: A Case Study of Local Public Schools in Uasin Gishu County

Teacher-student interaction through artistic performances, mainly embodied through Kenya Drama Festival Setting, was harshly affected by Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) scourge. These aesthetic renditions have been crucial in shaping, moulding and supplementing the core curriculum activities administered to the students. In addition, it is critical and possible to understand others' motives and choices through artistic performance which enhances the virtues of empathy and tolerance in the students. Passionate drama students are able to relate the fictitious performed characters and reality so that through their communication and empathy, it is easy to understand the ideas in the past and contemporary events as well as linking drama and subjects such as History and English. It is against these parameters that the students have displaced their energy into doing unruly activities during the whole period of the pandemic instead of applying that energy into reinforcing the rest of the school curriculum. To guide this study, a sample of eight public schools in Uasin Gishu County determined the resilience of 'drama students 'and others to the retrogressive learning and teaching activities during the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic. By use of questionnaires, the study also sets out to examine the effects of the drama performance suspension during the COVID-19 period, the take of the educational instructors on this suspension, and finally, the extent with which the production of art and aesthetics in the contemporary society could be a supplement to the episodes that Kenya Drama Festivals would have rendered. Other instruments used to generate data included, informal interviews and observation of classroom and field practices of students in a free association manner. These findings are important to the teacher

educators, curriculum developers, The Kenya National Drama Festival fraternity, policy makers and fellow researchers who will have to consider educational policy recommendations concerning the influence of the aesthetic experiences and the transformations attached therein.

Charles K. Rono

Moi University - Kenya

Laughter and Seriousness in Pandemic Art: The Case of Kalenjin Artistry

This paper reads the simultaneous and contradictory conceptions of Corona Disease (COVID-2019) in Kenya by focusing on how Kalenjin contemporary performative artefacts make fun on the seriousness of the corona virus pandemic. It examines evocations and appropriations of poetic expressions of social media comedians Arap Uria and Propesa, of Changei FM comedians Olchore and Olielo as well as poetic dispensations of both secular and gospel songs among others in their artistic representation of pandemic scourge in relation to information released by the Ministry of Health and other stake holders. It seeks to discover how the said artists deploy references to the deadly virus outside of the Ministry of Health's context to address some of socio-economic and political problems such as corruption, infidelity, police brutality, sin, etc. It reads these artistic renditions against the background of the more accepted official government messages to demonstrate the evolution of popular understanding and the need to consider everyday, marginal, and liminal sources in understanding corona virus scourge in a context where perspectives of ordinary people are excluded from official communications.

Josephine Miriam Wanangwe

Moi University - Kenya

Artistic Expressionism and Visual Aesthetics of Editorial Cartoons in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Although social distancing rules used as a safety measure to control the spread of corona virus disease (COVID-19) disrupted live performance of artistic events and heritage tours, artists have been very instrumental in ensuring cultural productions continue undistracted. This essay presents an overview of how visual arts provide a hybrid model that integrates traditional informational materials with virtual art exhibitions enabled by technology. A formalism critical perspective is adopted to critically examine editorial cartoons pertaining to COVID-19 drawn by *Bwana Mdogo* and distributed through a web-based platform - *The Elephant*. Special attention is placed on how the artist uses visual elements to present metaphorical ideas, emotions, and societal lived experiences that are associated with the health epidemic. While this specific art is termed as “pandemic” art, the paper argues that due to its portrayals that are based on societal experiences and information that is constructed in culturally-relevant languages, it broadens awareness of the impact of a global crisis within a cultural context and acts as an effective guide for future response planning in health crises. The findings reveal that art receptors could experience new and actual realities of a global health crisis including the vulnerabilities, abandonment, socio-economic hardships, political reflections and ingenuity, and inexhaustible food deficiencies. The article concludes that rooted in native cultures, languages, knowledge, and routines in local communities, “pandemic” art redefines the means of information circulation and symbolizes cultural heritage sustenance in the “infodemic” age while bridging the gap created by the lack of face-to face mode of art consumption. The visual representations serve to

define problems within communities in Kenya, interpret the cause of the problems, and suggest policy interventions in times of health crisis. The paper recommends further exploration of visual metaphors targeted at confronting COVID-19.

Rosemary Okayo Murundu

Moi University - Kenya

Transformations of Art Aesthetic Experiences during the Pandemic in Kenya

Despite extensive evidence confirming the closure of the cultural and entertainment spaces due to the pandemic protocols, artists have innovatively devised other ways of keeping art alive to inject life into the near desperate lives of people at the pandemic period in Kenya. This paper discusses the extent to which Kenyan aesthetic experiences have gone through critical visibility of transformations beyond its cultural imaginaries since the beginning of covid-19 pandemic. It takes cognisance of the significance of art in human existence. As a social being that is part of the created nature, man is bound to the rhythmic musicality of nature whose sensibility is perfected through art. The *Colorado business committee for art* (2020) in their campaign for art support in the period of covid-19 claimed that Arts create wellness in our daily lives by helping us process our lives individually, and allowing us to come together collectively. Though in pandemic Kenya the observation and adherence to pandemic rules prohibit the collective coming together that is a key characteristic of the functionality of cultural art, it still allows communication from afar which generates positivity, appreciation of life and giving hope beyond covid-19. The paper therefore argues that for the continuity of art in pandemic Kenya, transformations of aesthetic experiences are critical. The visibility of these transformations in whichever form; murals, virtual executions or any other are of utmost significance in spreading the messages of hope while keeping art alive. In conclusion, the paper reiterates the import of digital platform as an avenue for aesthetic experiences and suggests enactments of policies that will not only ensure the upholding of the interventional functionality of art into pandemic environments, but also cushion artists from the production disadvantages they are likely to suffer during the pandemics.

Caroline Sambai

Moi University - Kenya

Emergent Technologies, New Audiences and the Evolution of Performing Arts in Desperate Times

Social connections and interactions are integral to human existence. The Covid-19 situation has destabilized these connections impacting lives of the individual and society differently. Beyond the social and economic impact felt through loss of livelihoods, it has generally resulted in increased health hazards ultimately forcing people to find alternative ways to adapt to the situation. This article is interested in ways in which the Covid-19 situation impacted performing arts necessitating a rethinking of how performing arts reimagine performances leading to the realignment and restructuring of relationships between performers and audiences following the shift from using physical spaces of consuming arts to digital platforms. It is interested in how emergent technologies have facilitated the creation of new kinds of relationships while also giving audiences new ways of experiencing performances.

Fredrick Mbogo

Technical University of Kenya

Playing with Death in Covid-19 Times at The Kenya National Theatre with Xavier Nato's *Blackout* and Adong Judith's *Subira*

This paper is interested in how Xavier Nato's play *Blackout* and Adong Judith's musical play *Subira* attend to the question of death at a time when covid-19 is seemingly causing despondency and fear. At the time of staging the performances at The Kenya National Theatre in July and August, the delta variant of the Corona Virus which has been said to be spreading faster, and which is said to be deadlier, has added to the frustration of those seeking “normalcy” especially within the cultural productions sectors where businesses have faced massive losses, and closure. Yet, while *Blackout* and *Subira*'s storylines are driven by the anxieties surrounding death, their treatment of tragedy is at times playful, humorous, and with aspects of beauty, what with circumstances where bodies are treated as playthings, or as sculptural artifacts which can be sang to, struck at, or engaged in discourse with. In both performances, bodies have been given status' that are godly, at certain points, or fearsome beasts, sometimes, or even vulnerable beings. This paper argues that these performances, in the context of covid-19 are not merely storytelling devices, but are in fact rituals of mourning, in the fashion of Soyinka's (1976) idea of drama in his *Myth, Literature and the African World*. But as postulated by Lajul W. (2013) in his *African Philosophy: Critical Dimensions*, the ontology of what might be deemed “African Aesthetics” suggests a certain aspect of the utile in play, yet at a time in which productions such as *Blackout* and *Subira* are staged in exclusive venues such as at The Kenya National Theatre to ticket paying audiences, this paper is interested in the play of mourning and how sometimes it has been privatized – so that another critical mass of mourners is locked out in terms of class. To

what extent then can the storytelling of this nature, which appears to suggest the carnivalesque sense of the ceremony of mourning, be deemed a valid tool for a bereaved people?

Caroline Mose

Technical University of Kenya

Re-visiting Public Cartoon Depictions of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Kenya: Aesthetics, Reception, and the Virtual Space(s)

In late 2019, going into early 2020, a virus that we have come to know as COVID-19 spread throughout the world, leaving severe illness and fatalities in its wake. The world as we knew it shut down, with restrictions on movement being enforced worldwide. Here in Kenya, a system of curfews and restricted movement were enforced, and have become our daily reality to-date. A result of these restrictions was a withdrawal, as it were, of people from active physical lives, into a virtual world, where working from home and performing life online has become norm. This included, in large part, the withdrawal of artists into these virtual spaces as well, where a difference in reception of aesthetics of art became evident. I am interested in exploring the public cartoons of artists such as Gado and others, which in large part were part of the public sphere through newspapers and other written media, and part of the performance of power, information, and discourse, and how these cartoons morphed into online spaces such as social media. I am more interested in how these cartoons were received and digested, in the light of emergent discourses such as the orientalist origin of the COVID-19 pathogen, supposed anti-vaxxer conspiracy theories, as well as the politicization of the pandemic through use of Kenyan public coffer to advance certain narratives and solutions surrounding the pandemic. Some of the questions I pose include how the pandemic became the center of, and source of, artistic performances of discourse through these cartoons (many of which are accompanied by suggestive captions), and how this discourse is received and circulated online, which is also a public. Such discourses and performances include the spiritual, the political, and the social.

Charles Kebaya

Machakos University

Of Art Aesthetics and the Pedagogy of Healing in COVID-19 Poetry in Kenya: A dynamic Network Aesthetic

This article is an articulation of lockdown poetry that flourished during the age of the novel Coronavirus Pandemic in Kenya. It interrogates the nexus between art aesthetics and the therapeutic values of COVID-19 poems in Kenya. Drawing on the critical method and the actor-network theory by Bruno Latour, selected poems will be analysed as an image of a network of material and non-material connections as the poets sought to build human connections with one another and establish a human network in society during the lockdown thereby showing the aesthetics of art embedded in the poems. It also explores the potential of pandemic poetry in addressing public anxiety, healing stress and excessive fear occasioned by the epidemiological crisis in the country. By approaching poetry through actor-network against the fatality of the disease, this article shows that while people were forced to shelter in place and follow the tough COVID-19 restrictions, they turned to poetry for self-recollection and introspection as it provided them with an escape from their panic and anxiety.

Gloria Kemunto Mokaya

Machakos University

Artistic Representations of COVID-19 Pandemic in Popular Music in Kenya

Espousing critical approaches to the arts in pandemics in Africa by Gregory Barz and Judah M. Cohen (2011), this article focuses on art aesthetics as portrayed in Popular Music on COVID-19 Pandemic in Kenya. During the lockdown that characterized the world over, people from all walks of life shared all sorts of artistic experiences such as singing or playing music through their house windows as a way of keeping “together” while being apart. This is enough evidence that in times of greater uncertainty such as pandemics, music plays a pivotal role in not only archiving but also sharing perceptual, aesthetic, and emotional experiences. Drawing on popular musical compositions on COVID-19 by Kenyan popular musicians, this article explores artistic and stylistic features deployed in the selected popular songs. Additionally, it interrogates socio-cultural forming aspects of “pandemic” art and reflects on the metamorphosis of the roles of art and the artist during pandemics in Kenya.

Oduor Obura & James Ogone

Zetech University

Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology

Online Pandemic Humour: Uncertainty, Virality and Subversion in Kenyan Social Media Covid-19 Discourse

Globally, discourse on the impact of Covid-19 has tended to give prominence to the medical and economic dimensions of the pandemic. While the socio-cultural manifestations of the pandemic have generally been acknowledged, these deserve a more contextual framing in recognition of unique local ways of knowing and meaning making. In eastern Africa, restrictions imposed on people's movements and physical interactions illustrate the extent to which the Covid-19 pandemic has redefined contemporary social life. However, the social media has weighed in significantly to bridge the social interaction gap hence enabling the public to cope with the present unprecedented realities. To this end, artistic interventions that recalibrate the experiences of the people, their everyday interaction as well as the psychological burden of the pandemic have gained currency. In this article, we pay specific attention to humour as a prevalent feature of Covid-19 discourse within the Kenyan online space. We argue that through humour in its various forms, people use the online space for expressing their resilience and subverting the authority of the pandemic as well as the government. We seek to demonstrate how viral humour in the social media reconfigures Covid-19 discourse in Africa in departure from the singular narrative of vulnerability and gloom in the face of medical uncertainty. We hold that the efficacy of hilarity has been key to the modification of the course of Covid-19 in Kenya. Inspired by Nyamnjoh's (2017) frontier conviviality, we argue that humour in the online sphere works at the edges of social remediation of experiences in two ways: the creation of an artistic response to medical challenges and the creation of publics beyond the narrow political definitions of the borders used to lock down populations during the

pandemic. A perception of Kenyans' online pandemic humour through the prism of conviviality is expected to underscore the element of agency in the process of negotiating relevance in contemporary modernity.

Raphael N. Ogutu

Africa Nazarene University

Aesthetics of Covid-19 Animations in Kenya: A Case of Selected Animations Films

Semiotics is about how people encode and decode the information they receive, in this case how viewers make meaning of animation films that they watch during Covid-19 pandemic. Oxford English Dictionary defines aesthetics as “taste, or of the perception of the beautiful or sublime.” Aesthetics deals more with issues surrounding the creation, interpretation, and ultimate appreciation of works of art. Consequently Covid-19 animation films in Kenya involves how the experience of such material is mediated between the individual sensitivity of the beholder and the way the experience of it is shaped through presentation by cultural conventions. This study is an analysis of how animator combines the elements of art using principles in animation films to communicate to their target audience. The research method is qualitative or subjective interpretation focusing on textual analysis of the sampled animation films. The sampling technique is purposive and in line with data saturation strategy, which allows the researchers to determine when new information is no longer being gleaned from data collection and analysis. This study is about association or connotation and signification or meaning gaps between what viewers ought to see, with what film animators can offer about how they structure and show their Covid-19 animation film content in Kenya. Animation films' can only make sense and meaning to their spectators, when all the elements (visual and audio) clearly communicate their representations to the audience. Therefore all animation film forms require the understanding or reading the relevant conventions or codes. These conventions vary from period to period and from culture to culture, and to understand these artworks or pictures from elsewhere requires one to learn relevant conventions.

Jacqueline Ojiambo

Islamic University of Kenya

Storytelling in Short Kenyan Films on the Covid-19 Pandemic

This paper is interested in the age of coronavirus created on the screen, what it reveals about the filmmakers, the films and our culture/s in general. As the pandemic rages on, filmmakers have attempted to make sense of Covid-19 through their expressions on the screen. Though the films have provided much needed entertainment and relief from the pressure that the scourge has created, they also provides information. Doherty and Giordano correctly observe that in times like these people take up movies “in ways similar to those reasons for which they turn to the news: a desire and search for deeper understanding and some sense of security from things unknown” (Doherty and Giordano 1). Thus, we cannot underrate the value of these films. The films I have selected are from entries in the 2020 “My Kenya My Story” mobile phone film competition. The competition was for short films produced exclusively using mobile phones. The Kenya Film Commission run the contest, and the 2020 edition theme was “COVID -19 on staying at Home and Social Distancing”. I will apply Richard Raskin's conceptual short-film framework to the selected films. Raskin proposes working with pairs of properties that complete or balance each other (n.p). The parameters are as follows: character-focus vs character-interaction, causality vs choice, consistency vs surprise, image vs sound, character vs object and décor, simplicity vs depth, economy vs wholeness. He argues that when there is an Interplay between any set of two parameters, the film becomes enriched and on the other hand, when they are out of balance, the film is more inferior. I will demonstrate how some of the parameters can be used to illuminate the story design and esthetic qualities of the films. Looking at the current literature review, we see that there is a knowledge gap regarding the study of short films in Kenya cinema as a

knowledge gap regarding the study of short films in Kenya cinema as a communication medium. The Kenya Film Commission's annual mobile phone competition, "My Kenya My Story," has helped in recent years to bring this kind of film into focus. This paper reveals that careful scrutiny of selected short films can contribute usefully to on-going research on the cognition and aesthetic appreciation of cinematic images. In applying Raskin's conceptual short-film model to five short fiction films from Kenya, I investigate the storytelling strategies employed in these films. The paper also demonstrates how the films depict some of the ways the novel coronavirus shaped Kenyans' lives.

Susan Gitimu

Kenyatta University

Keeping the Kenyan Film Industry Alive: Current Trends of Filmmaking in the Age of COVID- 19 Pandemic

This paper explores the current trends of filmmaking in Kenya in the age of COVID-19. The Kenyan film industry witnessed the devastating effects of COVID-19 global pandemic; halting film production, closing cinemas and institutions of higher education teaching film. This created uncertainty in the film industry rendering the future of filmmaking at stake. To keep the film industry alive, filmmakers had to adjust and device to different ways of approaching film production, distribution, exhibition and teaching. This paper explores the current trends of filmmaking in Kenya in the age of COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of these trends on the film industry.

Shikuku Emmanuel Tsikhungu

Kenyatta University

Theatre on the Line or Theatre Online; Re-imagining the Alternatives to Live Shows in the Age of the Corona Pandemic using Experiences of two Kenyan Theatre Companies

At the height of the third wave of the corona virus, the president of the Republic of Kenya announced measures that were aimed at taming rapid transmission of the virus. The raft of measures that were announced included restriction on public gatherings as well as restrictions on movement after 7pm. These orders were given on Saturday 27th March 2021 and were to take effect starting midnight of the same day. The announcement was an ambush to the public since it was done at about 1pm yet it was to take effect at the end of the day. Among those caught off-guard were theatre production companies in Nairobi that had publicized and announced and even advertised performance shows. These included Liquid Arts Entertainment who had lined up performance of the play *Tapeli* written and directed by Peter Tosh and was to run from that Saturday 26th at 7pm to Monday 28th March 2021. Apex Glint Media had also prepared a production of their play *the wizard's song* directed by Smollo Andrew scheduled for performance between 3rd and 4th April 2021 at the Kenya National Theatre, Ukumbi Mdogo hall. Since public gatherings had been banned (more or less), essentially meaning that live performances could not happen and yet audiences had bought tickets and therefore signed a binding contract with the theatre production companies, a method had to be found in which the audience interacts with the performance. That's how the two groups resorted to online/virtual performance/screening of the productions. This paper proposes to study the experiences of these two companies in transferring live performance from the stage to online thereby seeking to erupt a

discourse on theatre arts performance in the age of the pandemic. It further seeks to plug into the debates on the alternatives of performance in the new normal. Specifically it will seek to answer the following questions;

1. How practical is it for companies to employ virtual performances as alternative to live shows in theatre execution?
2. What had/has to change to accommodate the online audience
3. How is the audience placed in an online performance?
4. What had/has to change on the acting and directing methods when thinking of online performance?

Data will be collected mainly via interviewing the directors of the performances, actors and the stage managers. More data will be collected through archival, library and online research. The study further proposes to use Achille Mbembe's perspective on the future of African cultural and creative industries. In his article titled African In the New Century, Mbembe (2016) applauds the technological advances as the next frontiers of cultural and creative renaissance in African while remaining alive to pitfalls that lie on the road towards this renaissance. This study will borrow from this discourse to reimagine the alternatives that the theatre practice in Kenya may or may not have if and when technology is leashed to serve performance. The study hopes to add to the voices and the body of discourses on the resilience and alternatives available to theatre arts in the era of Covid 19 pandemic.

Felix Ayioka Orina

Kibabii University

Affliction and Frightened Laughter in Henry Sagero's Song “Covid”

Laughter in the face of affliction and looming death can be an outrageous act bordering on taboo. Indeed, any attempt to make light of a matter as grave as Covid-19, a pandemic that has occasioned endemic fright and a global existential crisis of a magnitude never witnessed before, can only confirm one's callousness or, at best, be evidence enough the concerned party has lost it and is displaying signs of severe mental distress. Fear, anxiety, distress, panic and terror would be the more typical reaction, yet a cursory look at art produced in the aftermath of Covid-19 reveals a tendency towards the comical. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine, in general, the aesthetic value of humorous representations in scary circumstances and, in particular, humour in popular compositions on Covid-19 with specific reference to a song titled “Covid” by Henry Sagero of Bonyakoni Kirwanda Band—a popular music artist from Kisii County, Kenya. The focus will be on establishing the link between the artist's perception of the existing threat, his conception and deployment of humorous images and, ultimately, the audience's participation (or reaction thereof) in the ensuing humorous enterprise. With the purposively sampled song, the study pursues a descriptive and analytical approach aimed at revealing how artistic responses and choices within the phenomenon of popular art have not only been influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic but also the extent to which they contribute to collective societal resilience and survival. Theoretically, the study is grounded in semiotic and psychoanalytic tenets that enable us to view pandemic art as part of a larger cultural continuum aimed at safeguarding social tranquillity and meaningful existence.

Wesonga Robert

University of Kabianga

The Function of Humour in Subverting the Pandemic

This chapter is inspired by the need to interrogate the meaning and cathartic function of what we may now refer to as pandemic humour. That the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has been disruptive cannot be gainsaid. The arrival of the virus threw all facets of living – including art – into disarray. Because of the measures instituted by World Health Organisation, governments and relevant institutions around the world, people could not partake of art normally as actors and audience as theatres and other performance spaces remained closed. This, however, opened a new avenue for creatives to provide and find entertainment during the dreary months. Consequently, the emergence of pandemic humour has been witnessed around the world, and its role in helping humanity to confront the effects of the pandemic is a significant phenomenon requiring scholarly inquiry. This paper seeks to investigate the meaning and significance of pandemic humour that became prevalent in the days following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper shall make sense of the meaning and cathartic function of jokes and memes through the lenses of three classical theories of humour as advanced by Double (1991) and Morreall (2009, 1987). The theories shall include: superiority theory, incongruity theory and relief theory.

Obala Musumba

Bomet University College

Genre Intersectionality in Nyatiti Performance in the Waved Interstices of Corona Pandemic

In this proposed paper, I read the intersectionality of Nyadero K'Nyadero's Nyatiti performance with praise performance known in Dholuo as *pakruok*. *Pakruok* is a genre of Luo performance that navigates multifaceted spaces in a prototypical Luo orature ranging from variegated musical performances such as *ahiriri*, *tung'*, *ohangla*, *nyatiti* and others. It is also popular in wrestling matches, beer-drinking parties among other aesthetical arenas. The disruptive encounter of African cultural performance with the Corona pandemic has mediated a paradigmatic shift in performance. The pandemic has negotiated an alterity in the nature of audience, time, and spaces of performance to the extent that the artist has had to invoke his/her aesthetical instincts that are not only unprecedented but also self-preserving. The narrow windows of flattened curves between the unpredictable yet rhythmic waves (read as first wave, second wave etc) of attacks have been the interstices that have provided opportunities for more innovative and re-imagined performances. In this proposed paper, I will analyse Nyadero K'Nyadero's *Nyatiti* performance held on two successive days during the interlude in Corona pandemic attacks between the second and the third wave in December 2020. Though the two performances are conducted by the same artist, the elements of performance are significantly varied from the layering of social standing of the members of the audiences, to the commissioning of the performance. I will anchor my critical analysis on the lens of orature, which in its definition enables us to view orality as a complete system of performance drawing a nexus between particular notions of space and time. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's elucidation of the principles of African orature will be applied in this study to understand the aesthetic

intertwinement of the two genres of Luo traditional performance interweaving around the motif the dynamics of the new COVID -19 pandemic.

Violet Barasa

Kabarak University

The Place of Popular Artforms in the time of Covid-19 Pandemic

The present paper focuses on the versatile nature of popular cultural productions during corona virus pandemic. Of import in the paper is the shifting nature in terms of function of artforms to address the impacts of Corona and other realities in Kenya. To do this, the paper analyzes Kidum's song and how the same is used in advancing the Corona virus pandemic. I note that the fight of Corona virus globally has embraced a multisectoral approach which takes on board any stakeholders and measures that can control the spread of the virus. For instance, healthcare practitioners fight the corona virus pandemic from the medical field point of view by use of drugs and passing sanitation measures such as washing hands among others. However, I note that beyond medical approaches in the fight of corona virus, artists especially popular cultural artists have proved to be fundamental in playing a variety of functions in relation to the pandemic and Kenyan society at large. I note that cultural products have not only limited their function to corona virus but also address other issues that bedevil Kenya as a country exacerbated by the corona virus pandemic. In this regard, the artists' creation of COVID-19 artistic pieces symbolizes their attempt to go beyond the medical judgement of health promotion by including other facets of a society. The question that arises from this scenario is: What is it that is intrinsic to popular arts that make them appropriate avenues different functions to the masses?

Jacky Kosgei

University of the Witwatersrand

'Covid Poetry': Art and Performance in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Oral poems, *mashairi*, form a central part of the everyday culture among Kenyan coastal communities. *Mashairi* are mostly published in Swahili weekly newspapers and broadcast on Swahili radio programmes. They also form a crucial part of social, religious, and political events on the coast. 'Covid poetry' breaks ties with *mashairi* and *ushairi* (poetry composition and performance) in the traditional sense of these words. Although *Mashairi* have fixed prosodic features, new terminologies to describe the 'novel' Corona Virus have emerged, as an analysis of selected 'Covid poems' will show. These poems are drawn from different regions of Kwale, Mombasa and Kilifi counties, and will render visible how differently people in different places on the Kenyan coast have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, calling attention to the role *Mashairi* play in relaying people's unique experiences. I also pay attention to how the Covid-19 pandemic has shaped, influenced, and affected Swahili oral poetry, particularly its performance. Traditionally, oral poetry is sung in front of an audience. Following prohibitions on physical gathering to curb the spread of Covid-19, however, new spaces and new media of performance have emerged. In looking at this I also explore new communities of artists and audiences born of the pandemic. I intersperse my analysis of these 'Covid poems' with an interview I had with Bahati Ngazi, a Radio presenter and artist. Bahati is notably the forerunner of 'Covid music', having produced the first song on Covid-19 nationally, "Tujikinga na Corona".

Rose Opondo

Moi University

Masking Death: Humor in the Covid-19 Language of the Luo in Kenya

Fabiś and Klimczuk (2017) describe death as 'a state of the total disappearance of life and 'dying is a process of decay of the vital system, which ends with clinical death'. Death, especially which comes through disease, is often a hard subject that the human mind wishes to bury deep in the unconscious. With the declaration of the Covid-19 disease as a global pandemic early 2020, the world was thrown literally into a frenzy of activities ranging from survival to coping.

In Kenya, the situation was no different and the communal fear was palpable in the anguish and daily statistics of the infected, the dead and the lucky to survive streaming in on a daily basis. For survival, there was urgent need for various defense mechanisms against the crippling fear of death. Sigmund Freud, one of the early proponents of defense mechanism proposes that a defense mechanism is an unconscious psychological mechanism that reduces anxiety arising from unacceptable or potentially harmful stimuli. Thoughts of disease and death are potentially harmful stimuli because of their fatality in the human psyche. Further, Lengfelder (2013) notes that “in psychoanalytic theory, defense mechanisms are psychological strategies brought into play by the unconscious mind to manipulate, deny, or distort reality in order to defend against feelings of anxiety and unacceptable impulses and to maintain one's self-schema” One of the most prevalent collective defense mechanism is humour.

This paper looks at an aspect of social interactions with death through the performance of humour in the everyday orality of the Luo of Kenya. The performance of the everyday is textualized here to display the

aesthetics of language through coinage, jokes and puns. These seem to function as humorous responses to an otherwise dire situation. This research posits that the everyday conversations around the Covid-19 pandemic in this community forms a corpus of heightened use of language with notable distortions, adaptations, coinages and expansions of words and phrases that provide textual landscapes, for the study of the interweaving of humour for specific functions other than ordinary communication.. The act of speaking, which according to Michel de Certeau 'operates within the field of a linguistic system; affects an appropriation, or reappropriation of a language by its speakers; it establishes a present relative to a time and place; and it posits a contract with other (the interlocutor) in a network of places and relations (Certeau, 1984). Everyday discourse creates publics around phenomena through what Herbemas (1984) refers to as communicative action. Inherent from the onset of the uncertainties surrounding the pandemic, there was a discernible refusal by majority of the members of this community to be bowed by the novel coronavirus. From the feminizing of the disease as 'Acory Nyar China', literally translated as 'the petite Cory from China' to the symbolic naming of aspects of the Covid-19 protocols and verbal jokes on the same, there is an inherent deliberate attempt to literally laugh in the face of death. Use of humour is a classic phenomenon among the Luo in Kenya who have shown the knack for taking away the edge from dire situations through puns and other creative references.

Humour, often in the form of jokes, is held to be 'a contrast of ideas', sense in nonsense', bewilderment and illumination. Vischer (1879) defines joking as the ability to bind into a unity, with surprising rapidity, several ideas which are in fact alien to one another both in their internal content and in the nexus to which they belong. A joke is the arbitrary connecting or linking, usually by means of a verbal association, of two ideas which in some way contrast with each other'. The core of humour is words and words find their immediate and often fluid expression in oral discourse. Rizutto (2015) notes that for Freud

‘words are a plastic material with which one can do all kinds of things. There are words which, when used in certain connections, have lost their original full meaning, but which regain it in other connections’. Freud looks at speech as a vital key to the unconscious. The shift in the meaning assigned to the Covid-19 coinages that both alienate them from their 'original' meaning and reference these meanings. These will be important in unlocking the deep-seated unconscious responses to overt stimuli.

Art creates community through the communication of shared aesthetics. However, other than communication of emotions through external agencies, artistic expressions offer spaces for reflection, deflection and inflection that are necessary for survival. In a Freudian sense, a clearly discernible artistic defense mechanism would then heighten a sense of security in community, in turn forming a coping mechanism. This coping mechanisms spill into the sociological outlook of communities and eventually seem to affect both individual and collective behavior. This study will undertake a multidisciplinary approach in looking at the performance of everyday in responding to realities of disease and death and the resultant observed behavior in coping with the uncertainties and ensuring survival for both individuals and whole communities. The performance of everyday life within the context of creative language can be textualized for interrogation of communal psyche in response to emerging phenomena. The importance of art in the human well-being cannot thus be ignored.

This research is interested in the use of words artistically in everyday communication within the context of defense mechanisms. The collected phrases and words in use to refer to Covid-19 and its attendant protocols and shifts in lifestyles will be analyzed for psychoanalytic content as intended coping mechanisms. The study will also be alive to the fact that the everyday language is in flux so emerging coinages will also be incorporated.

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