

## Technauriture as Contemporary Oral Literature: A Case of Bishop Chomba's 'Isa Umone Efyo Lungu Acita' Song

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### ABSTRACT

The article uses Bishop Chomba's *Isa Umone* song to argue that oral literature exists in contemporary society albeit in the form of technauriture – the result of the interplay between orality, literacy, and technology. Bishop Chomba breaks into a spontaneous panegyric when asked to call upon the then Zambian President Edgar Lungu during the commissioning of the Arcades fly-over bridge in 2020. Anchored by Mostert and Kaschula's (2011) idea of technauriture, we deconstruct the dichotomised assumption that oral literature does not exist in present day society because it belongs to the past which ceases to exist once other media such as writing and technology emerge. On the contrary, we take a qualitative, case study approach to use the purposively sampled song, *Isa Umone* and highlight aspects of oral literary characteristics drawn from the initial performance of the song. Furthermore, we explore various online versions of the song as a way of establishing the workings of technauriture. Our findings reveal that technauriture acts in such a way that rather than being the death of oral literature, technology now facilitates the means by which orality survives and is perpetuated when spatial and temporal coverage are not limited to human custodians. Particularly, the associated threat of extinction should they die with the knowledge or oral art they possess. Furthermore, the paper demonstrates how technology provides the paradigm through which aspects of lecto-orality, remediation, repurposing and rerealisation provide new ways in which orality harnesses new technologies assuring its continued existence.

**Keywords:** Technauriture, oral literature, technology, lecto-orality, remediation, song

### INTRODUCTION

In the present article, we use Bishop Chomba's composition, *Isa Umone efyo Lungu Acita* to argue that oral literature still exists today albeit in the form of technauriture. In so doing we deconstruct the pre-existing dichotomous tension between orality versus writing (Siluonde,

2020) on one hand and writing versus electronic technology on the other hand. This highlights complex ways in which orality interacts with technology. Technauriture is a term coined by Kaschula and Mostert (2011) to engage "with the interplay of orality, the written word, and electronic technology, and its contextualization" (Merolla, 2014, p. 84). The idea being that the three interact with

each other in a way that precludes suggestions of mutual exclusivity where the presence of one means the absence of the rest. As such the article debunks these views using Bishop Chomba's spontaneous song which he breaks into during the official opening of Arcades bridge and its dispersal through electronic technology to different media. This is to illustrate how rather than choking or replacing orality, technauriture facilitates the existence of oral literature in modern society. Of particular interest is identifying different versions of the song that exist online; discussing aspects of lecto-orality in the songs identified and then examining the song in relation to remediation. Hence, rather than assuming oral literature does not exist, this conversation allows us to envision ways in which techauriture facilitates oral literature in contemporary society.

This study is especially relevant at a time when oral literature is thought to be a *manque*, unworthy of study, and belonging to the past (Finnegan, 2012). This is because as written and technologised forms of art have continued to emerge, oral literature has received less and less attention. This is especially obvious when in the context of the rural/urban dichotomy, the latter is associated with the rural and primitive culture that urban immigrants abandon as they adopt more advanced art forms (written and technologised) (Piot, 2001; Kalusa, 2022). This is true about African orature in general and Zambian orature in particular, where it is assumed that the shrinking rural population due to rapid urbanization corresponds with an ever-shrinking space on which oral literature can be performed and appreciated. Notwithstanding the above, this article aims to explore the assertion that despite, society becoming more and more urbanized, literate and technologised oral literature is still a part of the everyday activities of modern-day society. That is why Siluonde (2023, p. 147) defines contemporary oral literature as: "oral literature emerging from the everyday activities of everyday society". The only exception as Ogone (2015, p. 483) opines is that "the influence of globalisation and its attendant modern technologies has reconfigured how orality functions in the contemporary African

context." Hence, rather than look at these reconfigurations as a sign of desolation of oral literature, it is important to establish whether the emerging art forms can be considered as oral literature – technauriture. Oral literature has in modern times been dismissed as non-existent simply because it has many times not been studied for its own sake but through the lens of anthropologists, sociologists, linguists and evolutionists whose focus is skewed towards other fields (Ong, 2002). For instance, evolutionists locate oral literature in the assumptions of a linear one-directional event or movement from primitivity-orality to literacy and later electronic technology (Ong, 2002). That is a linear progression from orality to literacy and from literacy to electronic technology where the two pairs are viewed as binary opposites where the emergence and presence of one means the absence and oblivion of the other. In this scenario, oral literature (as opposed to literacy and electronic technology) is essentially viewed as belonging to some distant past and being synonymous with primitivity (Siluonde, 2020). Similarly, Kaschula (2001, p. 1) notes that "as the written word evolved, the oral word became devalued and pushed to the fringes." This is because literacy was associated with advancement, while oracy was assumedly associated with backwardness and primitivity. This situation makes it especially difficult to imagine the presence of oral literature in modern society to the point where any presence is considered frozen or remnant of the past. Yet, through a study of Chomba's oral composition or rendition, we observe ways in which oral literature continues to exist and evolve in dynamic ways as electronic technology reinvents and revolutionises the oral word.

Not only that but, many postcolonial scholars (Finnegan, 2012; Ashcroft, 2004; Siluonde, 2020) argue that Africa, as well as other former colonies and third world countries still possesses rich orality aspects of their cultures. This is unlike what was perceived by colonial-era anthropologists who were recruited to ascertain that indigenous peoples and their cultures in Africa and Asia were at a lower stage of evolutionary improvement. That is, in comparison to magnificent Western technologically

advanced peoples (Musila, 2008). Early missionary linguists too were astonished by the complication of unwritten indigenous languages spoken by only a few thousand followers, a complexity which stood in sharp disparity to the seemingly unelaborate material culture such as tools, weapons, houses, and clothing that these societies had (Ong, 2002; Finnegan, 2012). On the contrary and what we wish to establish through analysis of Chomba's *Isa Umone song*, oral literature is a part of contemporary society, expect that electronic technology has provided the platform on which it can reverse the demise of oral traditions and the knowledge systems embodied in such spoken contexts.

To date, songs are one of the most common forms of oral literature because of their strong mnemonic properties. In primary oral societies oral literary art forms were the easiest way in which culture and tradition could be passed on from one generation to another (Ong, 2002). Yet even more so for songs which Siluonde (2020, p. 27) argues "provide communal memory but also aid a story-teller's memory during a performance." This is because a song more than other oral art forms structurally qualifies for the need to think in "mnemonic patterns, in repetitions or antithesis, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulaic expressions (Ong, 2002, p. 34)." A quality that is required for the successful retainment and passage of material from one generation to another by word of mouth. That is why even in the midst of other emerging technologies today songs persist in being custodians and vehicles for the transmission of culture.

As such it is pertinent to note that oral literature continues to persist in the face of other technologies owing to the fact that it continues to be a citadel of human society knowledge systems and identity. That is why despite urbanization and increased literacy and technologisation oral literature (tradition) remains a pertinent intrinsic human cultural mosaic even for understanding the complexity of human cognition (Guerin, Labor, & Morgan, 2005) and demystifying society (Siluonde, 2023). In Zambia, oral art forms and specifically songs

continue to play significant roles during traditional marriage ceremonies among the Bemba for instance (Lumbwe, 2009), traditional marriage teachings and initiation rites such as *Chisungu* which Mbewe et al (2023) purport, continue to exist in complex interaction with society today. Ng'andu (2009) further demonstrates how inshimi (music story-telling) among the Bemba's can be used in music education today. Faced with the paradox of the continuity of oral literature in the face of real threats such as death of custodians of the oral material, a shrinking rural space on one hand and at the same time the undeniable importance of oral literature to African society, it becomes more relevant to imagine how technology provides a platform through which oral literature whether unconsciously or consciously is perpetuated. By merging the three, orality-literacy and technology transcend all evolutionist and other threats (Ogone, 2015). Technauriture now provides a paradigm through which we can study and experience oral literature in the 21st century to mean multi-mediated oral genres.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The term technauriture on which this study is anchored is based on the seminal work by Kaschula and Mostert (2009; 2011) where they coin the term to accommodate the interplay between orality and other technologies. The absence of technauriture would result in a lack of a nominal and systematic address form to describe possible forms of oral literature that exist today. Instances such as Chomba's spontaneous *Isa Umone song* and its dissemination via electronic technology would indeed pass as remnants of the past and unworthy of categorization as a distinct contemporary oral art form. On the contrary, as observed in the etymology of technauriture, '*techn*' (technology), '*auri*' (speaking and listening) and '*ture*' (literature/literacy) Kaschula and Mostert (2011) suggest technology, aurature and literacy working together at the same time. As Kaschula and Mostert (2011, p. 3) hypothesize:

technauriture as an attempt to capture the 'three-way dialectic between primary orality, literacy and technology', moving the debate beyond what has essentially been a

dichotomous tension between the oral and written word, to a discourse that includes the implications of technology as a general and alternative category.

This addresses the tensions that have always been fed as earlier discussed by evolutionary, presence/ absence, rural/urban, oral/literate dichotomies. Here the urban space (with its attendant technologies) is preferred because it is modern or present therefore more desirable than the rural space, absent of modernity but marred with its primitive oral culture. What Mostert and Kaschula (2011) suggest here is not a situation where one technology must pass away for another to emerge. Rather, they demonstrate how electronic technology provides the means by which different technologies (oral, written and electronic) continue to interact at the same time without any of them being obliterated. It is for this reason that we use *Isa Umone* to demonstrate the nature of the survival envisioned by technauriture. Hence, in the present exposition, *Isa Umone* is used to investigate how the term technauriture is used widely to include all technologies that can be brought to bear down on the issues of orality as orality.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Those who recognize the role that technology plays in revolutionising oral literature have taken intentional strides at harnessing technology as a means of storing and preserving oral art forms. This is one way in which contemporary artists and researchers have been able to eliminate the threat of losing oral art through the death of custodians of the orature. Unlike the unintentional way in which *Isa Umone* finds itself being disseminated and incidentally stored on different media, it is not uncommon for social media, for instance, to be used to share and preserve oral literary works in digital forms. An international enquiry reveals collections such as The University of Leiden's Verba African Series (2009) available on DVD, dealing with storytelling in Zanzibar and Ghana as well as ELLAF oral documentation initiative based in France (Kaschula R. , Technauriture as an Educational Tool in South Africa, 2016). The

latter project goes as far as providing an online encyclopedia devoted to the dissemination of African oral literature. Another contemporary example is a review of the work done by Thram (2014) linked to the International Library of African Music (ILAM) in South Africa. As Kaschula (2016) illustrates this library houses traditional African music that has been collected throughout Africa by the Tracey Family since the 1950s. This music is digitized using special equipment (digital heritage manager) and it is preserved and disseminated through modern technology. Similarly, researchers such as Okpewho (1992) and Cancel (2013) have attempted to capture the performative aspects of oral literature by digitizing the performances and making them accessible on the internet. Notwithstanding, the potential for technology to store oral art forms discussed here, such stored material tends to inadvertently freeze oral art such that when later accessed the oral art is now only viewed as remnants of the past. Yet what the present paper does with *Isa Umone* is to explore how electronic technology can be used as a medium of transmitting oral art from one generation to another in real everyday time as would characteristically be the case where oral art was transmitted from one generation to another by word of mouth – albeit this time via electronic technology.

One further perceives of radio, television, various kinds of sound tapes and electronic reenactments of oral performances as instances in which technauriture has transformed both the space and media of oral performance. One observes what Ong (2002) delineates as secondary orality where oral art is intentionally taken from its place of original composition and performance and later performed on various media platforms. A point of illustration in Zambia is, Julius Chongo's *Nthano* radio program of the 1970's or story time sessions on television broadcasts (Wendland, 2004). Furthermore, Cancel (2013) and Kaschula (2016) explicate how oral narratives find themselves on different media, because they are now being used in teaching contemporary issues. "In the educational milieu oral literature or Technauriture is also being used in an innovative way (through the use of DVDs) to teach people about HIV-AIDS, agriculture,

family planning and so on” (Kaschula R. , 2016). The question still remains as to whether the spontaneous, on the spot composition of primary orality exists today. A question which we address by exploring *Isa Umone* as a contemporary oral art piece disseminated by technauriture.

Put in another way, Ogone (2015) refers to the working of technauriture as remediation. A situation where it is still oral art but as mentioned above, transmission is not restricted to word of mouth but electronic technology and other media – albeit performed orally. “Remediation is defined as the ‘representation of one medium in another” (Ogone, 2015, p. 484). More succinctly and relevant to this discussion is how the scholar, in his work on Kenyan films in indigenous languages, demonstrates how strategies of remediation, such as subtitling, re-oralisation, repurposing, and immediacy, contribute to the reactivation of orality. By suggesting that electronic technology by being the media through which contemporary orality is produced and transferred becomes the means through which orality is re/presented by and through technology. Of great interest to our discussion is reoralisation which presupposes that other media such as writing and technology provides the means through which oral literature transcends the faux limits of collusion studies by being converted from orality to other media and finally back to oral performance as a reoralised entity. Through *Isa Umone*, it is thought-provoking to explore this dimension of orality whereby in terms of dissemination and the presence of emerging technologies, the dissemination is such that it goes through other media along its path before later emerging as orality. Such instances of reoralisation as a result of the interaction of contemporary oral art forms with other technologies challenges the idea of linear movement from orality to other technologies whose emergence obliterates orality.

Specifically, Jack Goody (Launay, 2013) in his study of religious myths and rituals uses the term lecto-orality to describe the type of reoralisation that involves the transfer or back-and-forth movement of oral material from the oral medium to written medium and

vice versa. This is in full cognisance that Goody’s focus is more on how works that were first written down are memorised and then later presented orally (religious chants and so on). Yet, in line with technauriture, lecto-orality elucidates the liminality or blurred lines between written and oral literature and the consequent ease with which written literature transitions to the oral in societies where the oral and literate coexist. In addition, Merolla (2014) intimates that similar views anchor Milman Parry and Albert Lord’s new approach to the study of Homeric epics by demonstrating how lecto-orality is at the centre of the composition techniques of contemporary oral poets in Macedonia. That is, by suggesting that one way in which oral artists were able to recite huge chunks of oral material is by composing material which they wrote down, learned by heart for later performances(reoralisation). Both Goody and the Homeric verse examples problematises the fixed preceding and proceeding status ascribed to oral literature and writing respectively where the presence of written art forms means the absence of orality. In explaining the extent of Goody’s lecto-orality Launay (2013, p. 3) observes that the importance of the ‘lecto-oral’”, is arguably the most interesting and provocative. Here, he suggests that writing not only transforms but in important instances promotes the oral transmission of knowledge. Learning “by heart”. So, rather than depend on human memory only, material that was originally oral or written down can now be written down or memorised and later performed orally – as lectorality. Moreso, the blurred lines as a result of the back-and-forth transmission from one medium to another can only be explained using the idea of technauriture where the two technologies, writing and oral interact in such a way that non supersedes the other.

Hence, rather than view emerging technologies such as writing and electronic technology as threats, through the idea of technaurature (in its many forms such as remediation or lectorality) one observes how oral literature can still be said to exist in contemporary society. That is because, to date oral literature like the story, in the form of the oral narrative, has for instance always been a communalising genre in the

traditional African setup. According to Opondo (2014) oral narration functions as a tool that brings together not only the artist and the particular audience but also the whole community within which the recitals are performed. Postcolonial, modernity and global situations have greatly influenced the traditional similarity structures in Africa and kinship fostering tools like the African oral narrative have not been out of danger. Yet technauriture provides a paradigm through which oral narratives can be perpetuated, especially at the level of dissemination. For instance, the introduction of oral storytelling onto the proscenium stage in the Kenyan Schools and Colleges Drama Festivals (KSCDF) (Kaschula R. , 2016) has led to extending the performance of this genre to significant levels. This move has not only recalled attention to oral narratives but also has modernised the performance and functional aspects of oral storytelling. It can further be noted that various aspects of the oral story genre have changed, from the multi-ethnic audience to the elaborate narrative structures and the unpredictable orientations of the oral singers in Kenyan schools and colleges. All these changes must not be viewed as the end of oral art but rather the workings of technauriture whereby different technologies such as writing have an influence on the “elaborate narrative structures” that we see today.

In fact, despite the invisible lines drawn between oral and written literature for instance, Kaschula’s (2004) initial studies of South Africa’s Xhosa poets, who improvise poems both orally and on paper, argued that oral and written poems do not radically differ in content or style. Some poets transform on the political content of their poems when writing; literate composition also allows for punctuation and rhyming, structure, the elimination of redundancies as well as verbatim memorisation. Kaschula (2016) undertakes that writing sanctions poetry to be created in a more detached manner, but that the relations between orality and literacy is dependent on distinct performers and their location on the oral-literate field.

As such, this chapter uses technauriture to demonstrate how the interplay between the three – orality, literacy and technology have

transformed the composition, dissemination of oral literature. This means it has not died as other technologies emerged but instead, other technologies have been the vehicle through which it has been perpetuated. Most importantly, as will be demonstrated with the *Isa Umone* political song, spontaneous oral compositions, similar to primary orality still exist except that dissemination now extends to other media. Not only do they exist but as Siluonde (2023) opines of the oral narratives surrounding Mulungushi university, they still play an important role in how people interpret the world around them, making them more than relevant in today’s African society.

## METHODOLOGY

The research utilized a qualitative, case study design where Bishop Chomba’s political oral composition, *Isa Umone* was purposively selected because it contains oral literary qualities – that make it most suitable for a research set on demonstrating the existence-of oral art in contemporary society and how its survival and transmission is dependent on its interaction with other technologies – as technauriture. As such the purposive sampling was extended to different versions of the songs sampled from various media platforms. Bishop Chomba’s oral composition together with the other three versions from other media were transcribed and translated into English. The emerging texts from the videos were then analysed thematically based on the topic and objectives.

## FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

During the commissioning of Arcades Flyover Bridge in Lusaka, Zambia on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and before calling on the President, Edgar Chagwa Lungu (ECL) to make his speech, Bishop Eddie Chomba the then PS water and sanitation breaks into a spontaneous panegyric hymn:

*Somone, So mone,  
Come and See, Come and See  
Somone efyo Lungu acita,  
Come and See what Lungu has done  
Somone efyo PF acita.  
Come and see what PF<sup>i</sup> has done*

Bishop Chomba's *Isa Umone* song can firstly be considered a contemporary form of oral literature because of the oral literary characteristics noted from the initial performance during the handover ceremony of the arcades fly over bridge. Specifically, and most important to note is that the performance places both the oral performer and audience in the same place. This aligns perfectly with the oral literary tendency to collapse "performance in actualization, transmission, and composition" (Finnegan, 2012) into one during a performance. Here, and right in front of the audience, an oral performer, thinks up something, which they compose and perform right in front of their audience. One would indeed suggest that this is what happens when Bishop Chomba who is called to call upon the President, instead breaks out into an unplanned and unexpected song. In such a case, actualisation as is the case with transmission are immediate owing to the presence of the audience. This is unlike writing where actualisation only takes place when the work reaches the reader away from the place of composition.

The oral literary nature of Bishop Chomba's song is made more elaborate by 'extra- and paralinguistic features' (Finnegan, 2012) that characterise the performance. From the analysed video of the performance, we note the dignified and aloof way in which he sings the song. According to Finnegan (2012), a song of this nature would require that. Similarly, the movement of his eyes back and forth between ECL and the rest of the audience is significant in the efficacy of the message his song carries. To the president, it is an assurance of the confidence the Permanent secretary and Member of Parliament has in him. In addition, it is an indirect panegyric to the President and his party, PF for the good they are purported to have done. Furthermore, the eyes move from the audience and then to ECL emphasising and gesticulating towards the object of the praise – ECL. All this would not be possible in a performance where the performer and audience were not in the same place. As such, the performance aspect makes it possible for the singer to directly address the subject through non-verbal cues that only an

oral performance can afford and this compliments the oral medium.

The fact that the song, first composed and performed orally, later ends up on various social media platforms, introduces a second layer of orality. A layer which goes unnoticed if the introduction of technology when the performance is first captured by media houses such as Zambia National Broadcasting Services and others is taken as the point of death for the oral performance. That is, based on the discourse of linearity and binarity which as earlier discussed assumes that the emergence of one media presupposes the death of a prior one (the oral performance) (Siluonde, 2020). Yet the fact that the song, through electronic technology – first via videos taken during the actual performance is dispersed on multiple media platforms becomes the means by which its life span is prolonged. In this way demonstrating how orality, literacy and electronic technology are mediated by technology – technauriture. This can further be viewed as a case of secondary orality, the primary one being the version composed and performed by Bishop Chomba at the actual handover ceremony. The second, third, fourth and so on (depending on how many more times the performance is proliferated) can still be considered an oral art piece performed by the same performer but now available to additional varied audiences online.

Technology further modifies oral literature by introducing a three-way loop in its transmission or dissemination. That is, rather than only the transmission from one person to another by word of mouth, in cases such as the song being discussed, transmission is person (first performance of *Isa Umone* – technology (various social media platforms) to person (audiences that access it via social media as need may be. As already noted, during the first level performance or primary performance transmission is from human to human since as already noted both audience and performer are present. This means that in the absence of the performer, electronic technology now becomes the bridge between the performer and the secondary audience on social media. So, while the performance with its oral

literary character remains the same, the transmission now also changes as a result of the introduction of technology. That is, not human-to-human as in the original performance but now through electronic technology as the intermediary between the oral performance and the audience that receives it via other media. Notwithstanding, technology does not replace orality but simply introduces another level of disseminating oral literature.

After the first performance of *Isa Umone*, the song is disseminated through television as captured by ZNBC for instance, and further transmitted and then disseminated to other social media platforms such as Zambian landscape and others through electronic media. This captures the very essence of technauriture and as Kaschula (2016, p. 352) opines: “The term Technauriture essentially provides a theoretical paradigm for the interface between oral performances, the capturing of performance as well as the dissemination of oral performance through the medium of new technologies.” So, although the performance is performed orally when Chomba performs the song live, the fact that it is captured using electronic technology and later disseminated through different media including television and social media accommodates the very essence of technauriture. As soon as the performance is captured on camera during the performance electronic technology provides a platform for its dissemination. Put succinctly, as soon as ZNBC and others first capture the song and televise it, electronic technology makes it available for other media houses and individuals, that provide such a platform. It is for this reason that *Isa Umone* ends up on numerous social media platforms with infinite possible reach but at the same time no clear trace of who first made it available on social media. In this way technology provides the means by which the song is disseminated through different media platforms but still, according to Ong’s (2002) idea of secondary orality, still an oral art form. Therefore, the initial capturing of the song when it is first performed builds a bridge between technology and the primary performance itself, while at the same time providing a conduit or medium of transmission to other media. It must be

noted that on whatever media it will be the transmission is still oral despite evolving medium of transmission.

Dissemination through electronic technology to more people than those present at the initial performance of the song increases the spatial coverage of the oral art. This is an essential component to ensuring the survival of oral literature at a time when as discussed earlier the assumption is that the oral art forms no longer exist owing to a shrinking countryside in the face of urbanisation and technologisation. Yet what one observes in the fact that *Isa Umone* ends up on social media is that there are now more people viewing the performance online than what was originally intended with the original audience. In this way, technology facilitates and enhances the reach of oral literature by reaching audiences that were never in the original audience. Especially that, one of the weaknesses of oral literature is that because of its dependency on oral transmission and physical distances between people, coverage is often limited to only the people present during a performance. On the contrary, one witnesses an unlimited technologically induced dispersal and spatial coverage of the song because social media is accessed from diverse locations and individuals.

As a result of the diverse spatial and temporal coverage of the song, the variability often related to varying oral performers now shifts more to the audience. This is because, unlike the case of primary orality and transmission, the variability is not only about differences in performance by different oral performers but also variability related to diverse reception owing to the infinite numbers of people who have access to the video online. When Chomba first performs the song, it is to a small audience as captured in the video of the oral performance. We further assume that this initial audience shares common interests related to supporting and celebrating the fly over bridge made possible by the government. Yet the moment the video spreads to other people who were never the original target audience, the emerging reactions potentially change owing to the fact that the performance was never meant for them in the first place. That is why Finnegan



(2012), emphasises how in oral performances the audience plays a major role not only in the delivery of an oral piece but also the production and creation of meaning.

This can be noted in the interpretations emerging online from the social media version of *Isa Umone*. One social media user comments as follows: “The way he [Chomba] has removed the Lord and replaced it with lungu, he's confirming that lungu is his god, these people they don't fear God” (Zambian Landscape, 2020). This reaction is from someone who accesses the video of the performance online without the full context of the original performance. Viewed away from the initial context in which the song was performed, the interpretation from this commentator would be that Chomba makes a demi-god out of Edgar Chagwa Lungu. Yet for someone who was present during the initial performance, the replacement of Lesa (God) with Lungu may not seem inappropriate because the song is calling on people to see what Lungu and PF have done (the fly over bridge being commissioned). The variation in audience response as a result of varying context and spatial audience position illuminates an oral literary characteristic. The difference that technology now brings is that, while the initial audience dictated the oral artists performance (content, language, presentation style) as is the case in oral literature, when technology is introduced through technauriture, the audience plays no role in the actual performance (except the post-performance) because of the infinite spread and access related to social media dissemination and resulting distance between the performer and the audience.

Broadcasting the performance on different media does not only increase spatial coverage but also increases the chances of the song being repurposed. This is because social media platforms on which it is broadcast are places where diverse religious, political and social people and material interact freely. Everyone is free to use the material they access as they deem fit. As Ogone (2015, p. 491) notes Repurposing is one of the ways that modern day harnesses oral literature using technology. He opines that in fact “Intertextuality is an everyday reality in many Kenyan oral traditions, as is the case

among the Luo.” So, while influence from oral literary material has been noted in how indigenous oral narrative material has been appropriated to teach about HIV or maternal health, technology (social media) with its vast audience now exposes oral material to infinite and diverse possibilities. Evidence from both the video of Bishop Chomba's performance and reactions to it on some social media platforms indicate that the performer, in this case Bishop Chomba initially repurposed the song – from religious to political song. This view is drawn from comments on the Zambian landscape (2020) videos such as “Turning God's melody into a political song mulekwatako umwenso,” “I thought only God is supposed to be sung in that song” points to the religious origin of the song. Prompted by such comments, a search for similar religious songs, reveals a number of songs with similar lyrics and melody, the earliest being on YouTube by the Nigerian Agatha Moses. Although sang in English and Igbo the song has strong intertextual resemblance to other Bemba versions and Bishop Chomba's version online. Bishop Chomba now prompted by the occasion, celebrating the flyover bridge uses the song in political circles. Even more appropriate is that the lyrics are related to the fact that it was the fashion of the party [PF] to point at what they had done, according to their Sonta/ Sontology motto<sup>ii</sup>. Bishop Chomba may have gotten the song from Zambian church circles being a clergyman on one hand, but also from the Zambian versions available online or Agatha Moses' version. Yet for the very reason that through technology – cassette and later YouTube Agatha Moses' version makes it further than the Nigerian shores evidences how technology increases spatial coverage and chances of repurposing. This is as a result of the introduction of a more diverse and limitless audience on social media.

In addition, Chomba's version of the song is a good example of author or performance variability akin to oral literature albeit in contemporary or technauriture form. As would be the case in some instances of oral literary performances, Bishop Chomba has not only repurposed the song but the content and form as well. In a similar way to other Zambian versions of Agatha Moses' song,

Chomba changes the language from English to Bemba in addition to adding and changing some of the words to suit his audience and purpose. In stressing the intertextual nature of oral literature, Ogone (2015, p. 491) that no matter how different oral texts may be “This means that texts characteristically refer to other pre-existing texts, although in subtle ways”. Similarly, one observes a number of subtle changes that Chomba makes to the Agatha Moses song. Linguistically and as a result of translation, the song moves from being a general invitation ‘*come and see what the Lord has done*’ to the second person singular *Isa* (*Umone*) (You come) in Bemba. In addition, and as indicated from the social media comments discussed above, ‘*Come and See what the Lord has done*’ (*Isa Umone eflyo Lesa acita*), becomes *Isa Umone eflyo Lungu acita*’ (Come and see what Lungu has done) and ‘*Isa Umone eflyo PF acita*’ (Come and see what PF has done). *Lors/Lesa* is replaced by *Lungu* and *PF* demonstrating how the repurposing we observe is not just about the change from church to political song but a change in wording as well.

This suggests that as a result of variability and the repurposing discussed above, oral literature as Siluonde (2020) suggests with the movement or use of oral narrative mnemonics in novels is not a slavish imitation. Rather, it involves appropriation as it moves both diachronically and synchronically as observed in the changes in Chomba’s song. That is, as it travels through time from Agatha Moses version to his performance but also from the location where it is first performed to different spatial locations facilitated by various social media platforms. Actually, the fact that the oral performance, despite the similarities across various versions of the same performance suggests the idea of communal ownership – no one claiming personal authorship or ownership. This resonates with Barthes’ (2001) poststructuralist idea of the death of the author, whereby owing to promiscuous intertextuality, an author dies to their production once it is disseminated. When one compares the changes wrought on Agatha Moses’ version of *Come and See* by Chomba and other online versions of the song one notes this freedom to pick up material and use it as one pleases without

the obligation to pay allegiance to a supposed author. Yet, at the same time, the fact that technology spatially unites Nigeria and Zambia, allowing both the access and means by which a Nigerian song is brought to bear down by varying context and language exposes a different kind of oral literary variability brought about by technology interacting with orality – technauriture.

We purport that both the synchronic and diachronic picture one observes regarding Chomba’s *Isa Umone* illustrates how oral literature through the facilitation of technauriture continues to play a part in the everyday activities in society (Opondo, 2014). This suggests that oral literature must not be misconstrued to be something that denotes the past whose existence today is by means of being passed on as a frozen entity. On the contrary as the song demonstrates contemporary orality must be viewed as contextual, a response to the present context and the everyday as it dictates. That is why in commenting on the contribution of Okot p’Bitek’s oral literature to a community’s active engagement in processes of social repair Gauvin (2013, p. 1) observes that “oral traditional practices are performed within everyday social interactions and activities.” This means that whether in the form of secondary orality as would be the case with *Isa Umone* on social media, contemporary oral literature is rarely premeditated but the response and a part of everyday activities and conversations. This is observed in the myths, proverbs, parables and riddles that are a part of funerals marriage ceremonies or even the inclination towards superstition as a way of understanding our societies and communities. Whatever the case, *Isa Umone* is not different from the myths surrounding Mulungushi Rock of authority or the proverb, myth, parable or riddle thrown into a conversation around the fireside. The song is a spontaneous commentary of the work done by the PF, denoted by the fly-over bridge being commissioned. The obtaining narrative therefore influences the choice and selection of the wording in the song making it different from other versions of the same song.

The interaction and movement we witness in the song demonstrates a much more complex and liminal interaction between orality, literacy and technology (technauriture). This

is because, the movement of the song deconstructs the idea of linear evolutionary development from orality to literacy and then technologised society and its attendant primitivity to civilised and more civilised narrative respectively. That is, the song moves from tape (Agathe Moses) then orally to the Zambian church (evidenced by the social media reactions), back to being written down and renditioned by other singers (Online version by Zambian gospel singer Hope) that have done the song and then back to orality in form of Bishop Chomba's song (as performed during commissioning of the Arcades Bridge). What one witnesses is the three technologies (orality, writing and technology) interacting in such a way that material moves from one medium to another and even back again to the same. Explained from the perspective of lecto-orality one notes how the how the back-and-forth movements here result not in a linear movement from orality to writing/ video technology and back to orality but a situation where orality is enhanced by other technologies. This results in orality emerging in a liminal space where it is difficult to distinguish between oral and written or whether something originated in orality and was written down or vice versa. The suggestion here is that once something is performed one of the possible routes of storage is writing but whether learnt by heart as something is first performed, the chances are that it can still be later performed after being learnt by heart and later performed orally. This can be said of Dr Chomba who could have listened to the song (via technology), memorised it and later performed it (whether after writing down his version first or composing and performing on the spot). Whatever the case, for someone interacting with the online versions for the first time, it would not be clear to decipher an original. From the discussion, even the Agatha Moses version may easily be the offshoot of an earlier version. This is because, once performed, with technology involved, human beings are not the only medium for oral literary transmission. Rather, the routes of transmission are many: writing down, simply memorizing as in primary oral cultures, disseminating via technology are all possibilities.

What technauriture does is it provides the malleability required for oral art to travel across different media while still being able to survive in contemporary society. Ogone (2015) refers to this as Remediation in its many possible forms where lecto-orality if taken to task can be considered a form of reoralisation whereby the movement of Agatha Moses song from technology, to the Zambian churches, to other renditions by Zambian gospel singers and back to orality in the form of Chomba's spontaneous version of *Isa Umone*. The role of remediation here is to show how technauriture takes on many possibilities and how it opens up oral literature to many possibilities at the hands of electronic technology. In Kenyan vernacular videos "re-oralisation, which is a means of recovering the 'extra- and paralinguistic features' effaced by the recording process; it involves 're-oralising and reintroducing a kind of context and live performance that brings back some of the psychodynamics of orality'" (Khamis 2005: 215, 216–217). As earlier discussed, such nonverbal cues are noted in the manner in which Chomba keeps looking in the direction of the addressee, president Lungu as he sings. The audience is present and the response from the president is immediate but also determine the kind of performance delivered. Hence, while technologies of writing and audio recording, for example, are reputed to freeze orality and strip it of the performance value wherein its potency lies, all is not lost since local knowledge cultures still exploit remediation to recover some oral elements of performance. Through this act of appropriation, foreign technologies of recording and writing are effectively domesticated by being made to serve local intentions. The result of this intricate process is a new technologised kind of orality"- technauriture. Although, Ogone's (2015) idea of remediation is based on intentional attempts, Bishop Chomba's *Isa Umone* is an example of unconscious reoralisation made possible by technology because of how he first heard the song. While at the same time the noted Extra and paralinguistic features bring back some of the psychodynamics of orality.

The continued survival of oral literature in contemporary society brought about by the

complex interaction among various media – technauriture which combines, orality, literacy and technology. As a result of the dispersal, via technology we observe with *Isa Umone*, oral literature is no longer under threat as a result of its survival not being in the custody of a few people whose death means the death of the art too. Ogone (2015:1) elucidates that

African oral traditions somehow manage to remain alive, albeit in new mediated forms, hence partaking in the modernity discourse without the danger of total annihilation. New media technologies are thus domesticated into local contexts, rather than merely uncritically received.

So just because they are now in mediated form doesn't mean they no longer exist. Instead, they must be studied in the context of such mediated technologies. In fact, rather than always look at new technologies as threats to harmony, we must find ways in which these can and are domesticated into local contexts rather than uncritically or slavishly accepted. This applies to the other extreme argument where the presence of oral literature is based on the idea of frozen entities that are slavishly passed down from one generation to the other. This inadvertently propagates the evolutionist idea of an African society and art that is static, frozen and always either playing catchup (Musila, 2008) or behind the more technologised, dynamic and ever innovative and evolving western society.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we set out to use Chomba's *Isa Umone* song to argue that oral literature exists in contemporary society with electronic technology being the main instrument through which this existence and perpetuation is guaranteed. We explored the initial performance of *Isa Umone* song as a way of highlighting its oral literary character, after which we observed online versions of the performance to explore various ways in which electronic media interacts with oral literature (the song) – technauriture. In addition, we discussed the dispersal of the song across various media using lecto-orality

and remediation as specific instances of technauriture. In our findings, we were able to establish that the initial performance of *Isa Umone* by Dr. Chomba during the opening of the Arcades Fly over bridge in 2020 can be considered a contemporary form of primary oral literature. This is because it has oral literary characteristics such as the collapse of composition, actualization and the audience in one place in addition to paralinguistic features and other non-verbal cues. This is exemplified for instance in the manner in which Dr. Chomba is able to directly address the object of his praise, President Edgar Lungu through eye contact.

We further established that through the dispersal to various electronic media electronic technology modifies the transfer of oral literature from word of mouth to technauriture – the interplay between orality and electronic technology. This means that another dimension of storage, variability and transmission is opened up when the initial performance of the song is spread to infinite locations, opened up to infinite locations and interpretations after it is captured on Video by ZNBC and other media houses. We observed for instance how some online viewers of the performance consider the replacement of 'God' by 'Lungu' as blasphemy owing to the fact that the online audience varies from the initial audience of the live performance of the song. As such we argued that electronic technology opens up orality to audience variability as a result of the video being available to infinite viewers online. In addition, we used specific instances of technauriture such as lecto-orality and remediation to demonstrate how as a result of different technologies (oral, written and electronic) coming together, the routes and modification to the song are many without clear trace of originality. For instance, a search online revealed that Dr. Chomba's version of the song could have been a rendition of the Nigerian version by Agatha Moses or very well adapted from the Zambian church since he is clergy. Yet at the end of the day, it is not clear what route the song took to get to Dr. Chomba's repurposed version during his performance. However, the interaction observed among the various technologies was such that instead of electronic media signifying death of the oral

performance, it became the means by which oral literature is perpetuated. Therefore, it is this interplay which we opine is a contemporary form of oral literature – technauriture.

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<sup>i</sup> Patriotic Front, the party that ruled Zambia from 2011 to 2021

<sup>ii</sup> A slogan related to the PF government campaign strategy to focus on what the part had done between 2011 and 2021

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