THE CITY AS A POETIC OBJECT: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO MILWAUKEE AND ITS POETS

by

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ABSTRACT

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Poetry has historically been an important component of cities' culture, urban life, and history. There is a mutual influence of poetry and the city; while the city and the way its history unfolds shape poetic production patterns and poets' narratives, it is capable of illuminating diverse social and urban phenomena and shape diverse social groups' cultural practices and urban experience. While scholars from social science and humanistic disciplines have investigated the relationship between poetry and the city by looking at how cities are represented poetically and how cities shape the production, distribution, and consumption of poetry, I turn to a unique set of sources to understand how poets interact with and represent the city across a range of formats and time periods, from the Civil Rights era to the contemporary Covid-19 pandemic. I use poetry as a lens through which to see how the city gives voice to a multitude of individuals, and provides a rich portrait of the city and its narrators, as well as a detailed understanding of how these representations vary or remain constant across time and formats. Mindful of the capability of the study of the poetry field and its actors to unveil important aspects of social and urban life, I use the case of the Milwaukee poetry scene looking at three specific formats: newspaper, spoken word, and Instagram poetry. I draw on primary and secondary data sources employing diverse

ethnographic techniques. This research builds upon literature on cultural production and the city, the literary field, literary geography, and the relationship between cultural production/consumption and social inequalities.

DEDICATION

To Mónica and Francisco Javier,

eternal source of love

and inspiration,

and

Lauren,

the star who guided me

through the darkest night.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

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PREFACE

Discovering poetry has been one of the most important events in my life. It happened in Mexico City, my hometown, when I was around five years old. On a sunny and windy Sunday of October, like those that I have always missed since I moved out, my mom woke up with a great idea: taking me to a museum. She decided we should go to the Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo House Studio Museum[1], located in the south of the city. I vaguely remember that on our way on the subway my mom gave me a brief lecture on Diego and Frida's lives and works. Her lecture, delivered underground, closer to the remnants of the ancient Aztec city of Tenochtitlan (today Mexico City), made me very excited about visiting the museum; she still remembers how impressed I was when I saw that building for the first time. During the tour, within Diego's studio, I saw a set of pre-Colombian sculptures resting on a shelf that caught my attention; I think that my fascination for the history and mythology of Mesoamerican civilizations started in that moment. After the tour, when we got to the museum's exit, my mom noticed that there was a modeling clay sculpture workshop for children offered for visitors. She asked me if I wanted to make a sculpture there, and of course, I excitedly said yes. They gave me an apron, and asked my mom to write my name on a nametag so the instructors knew my name (I did not know how to write at the time). The instructor I was assigned to showed me multiple photos of figures that I could sculpt: an elephant, a skeleton, a monkey, a dog, an Aztec pyramid, an Aztec god, among others. I chose the Aztec god and the woman asked right away:

[1] This museum is now a twin house where Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo had their studios. The buildings were designed by architect Juan O'Gorman, considered the father of Mexican functionalism in 1932. Nowadays this museum exhibits Rivera's and Kahlo's studios almost intact (just the way they used them almost a hundred years ago). For more information see: https://inba.gob.mx/recinto/51 (in Spanish only).

— So, do you want to sculpt a Xochipilli[2], Antonio?

— Who is Xochipilli?—I asked her back

— He is the Aztec god of poetry—confused, I looked at my mom who was sitting next to me

— What is poetry, mom?

— Poetry is the language that gods, like him [Xochipilli], speak—she replied with a smile on her face

— Yes—the instructor added—poetry is also the language that flowers use to communicate with us—my mom and the woman looked at each other and smiled

I sculpted a terrible replica of Xochipilli that the instructor attached to a little square wood board and gave to my mom. Then we left.

On our way back on the subway, the sculpture started to melt—the Mexico City subway moves close to five million people every day, so it tends to be very crowded and warm, even during the weekends. When we got home, my mom went to the very modest library we had in the hallway of our little apartment and grabbed a book: *Grandes Poesías en Español* (Great Poems in Spanish) and showed me a page; she remembers that it was a poem by Spanish poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. Patiently, she explained to me the basic principles of poetry. She also read some verses that made sense for a young child of my age. I was immediately fascinated. Some weeks later, she brought home some books of poetry for children and would read them to me before going to bed, along with tales and short stories. Years later I started reading by myself. Around that time, I also decided to be

[2] In the Aztec mythology, Xochipilli was a deity associated with song, flowers, and lyrical poetry (see Renteria 2018).

a poet. I started writing my first poems. Since then, I have never stopped reading (and writing) poetry.

Many years later, when I started working on this dissertation project, in one of my visits to Mexico my mom gave me a present: a sculpture of Xochipilli she bought at the National Museum of Anthropology and History in Mexico City. That replica of Xochipilli has been my companion, a witness of this journey, a traveler who crossed the Rio Grande to explore a new universe of verses, of poetry, just like me; a traveler who moved from the ancient city of Tenochtitlan to Milwaukee, to an office in Bolton Hall, to listen to the verses of the poets of the Cream City, to live them, to try to make sense of them, just like me.

My first encounter with the poetry and poets of Milwaukee was as fascinating as my first contact with poetry in Mexico City many years ago. It was a revelation, a new discovery, it was like opening a door to the unknown, and literally, everything started after opening a door.

On a foggy and snowy night, wrapped in a long gray coat and wearing a blue fedora hat, a young man was waiting on the sidewalk for a door to be opened while smoking a cigarette. Holding in his hand a bunch of sheets of paper with drawings and texts written in pencil, the man started talking to a woman who was also waiting next to him:

— Is this your first time here?—she asked

— Yes, it is. I am very excited. I am here to free the monsters I have here—he pointed to the pieces of paper he was holding in his hands.

After five minutes or so, a long-haired man with his hands stained with paint opened the door of that bar in Riverwest; there were seven or so people (including me) waiting outside. “It’s great to see new faces around, I bet this’ll be a great night!”, he said smiling while

shaking the man's hand, and then mine. Once inside, Mr. Jerry, as people call him, started talking about himself and his work with some of the attendants.

> —They say that I am an artist, but I consider myself just as a 'Bohemian Milwaukeean' who loves poetry and uses his business [a bar] as a poetry laboratory…just as you see here—he pointed to one of his paintings on the wall—this is Rita Johnson, who was our featured poet two weeks ago, she is an amazing poet, I hope she comes tonight!
>
> —So, do you paint a portrait of every featured poet that performs here?—I asked
>
> —I do, I try to capture poets and their poems here [paintings], it is not only about what they write but what they leave here, in this place—Mr. Jerry smiled and walked towards the stage to get the microphone ready

Two hours, eleven poets, and around thirty poems later, Mr. Jerry walked to the stage, took the microphone, and said: «It's time to present another first-time reader, please welcome Trevon, who is going to read three of his poems [people applauded] ». Trevon read three magnificent poems; I clearly remember that one of them was a deep reflection of time using poetic elements related to the enormity of lake Michigan. Trevon freed his monsters, then we chatted for a little bit and left. He disappeared in the cold night, in the darkness. It was a very important night for me, after living in the city for several months, I had finally visited a sacred temple of poetry, where poets meet to speak the language of Xochililli, to communicate with flowers.

For the rest of the winter, I kept exploring the Milwaukee poetry scene, running into my new friend Trevon regularly, as well as other poets I met in different venues and poetry readings. When the summer arrived and the festival season started in the city, I attended a public poetry reading in Juneau Park, close to the Milwaukee Art Museum. With a

gorgeous view of Lake Michigan, seven local poets from different areas of the city performed their work that evening. After the reading, I met Melody, one of the performers with whom I had a long conversation about poetry (I remember we talked about Claude MacKay, one of my favorite poets, and prominent figure of the literary movement of the 1920s called "Harlem Renaissance"), and particularly the poetry of Milwaukee. She told me about a poetry community she belonged to in the North Side, where she lived, and shared with me her opinion about the local poetry scene: «it's very rich and diverse, as you can see, but there are always dark sides», she said. She told me that besides practicing spoken word poetry, she was also an Instapoet (she published poems on Instagram) and invited me to follow her account. She is now one of the most acclaimed emerging poets in the city; in the summer of 2021 she published her first book of poetry that has had resonance in different poetry circuits in the Midwest and other regions of the country. Meeting Melody opened my eyes. She showed me the multidimensional manifestation of poetry, and most importantly, through her words and descriptions of the local poetry scene, I could see how rich and diverse poetry was in Milwaukee.

I have talked about the first ingredient of this project, the subject, the protagonist: poetry. Now, I will talk about the second one, the tool that has allowed me to make sense of it, to explore it from a different perspective, to find what I was looking for within it: sociology. I do remember the exact moment when I decided to analyze poetry through the lens of sociology, to start my journey to become a sociologist of poetry and literature. During my early days as a master's student in Texas several years ago I read Peter Berger's (2011) *Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist: How to Explain the World Without Becoming a Bore*, with which I deeply identified (I was considering myself as an "accidental sociologist" for a set of reasons, but that is another story…). Apart from

learning a new facet of Berger's work, as well as the roots of his work and motivations, there was something in Berger's intellectual biography that caught my attention: he had posed sociological questions before becoming a sociologist, he was already an ethnographer without even knowing that he was going to be a sociologist. Of course, everybody can pose questions about social phenomena, but the difference in Berger's career was his ability and willingness to be present in the core of the phenomenon that he was trying to explain. He wrote about what he knew the most, what he observed the most (like most of my colleagues), but, what allowed him to develop such a fundamental work for our discipline? I think it his passion and deep interest for the universes and phenomena he studied. Thus, my takeaway from that reading in my early career as a sociologist can be summarized in the following phrase: «to succeed as a sociologist you must study phenomena that you are extremely passionate and interested about, and be willing to dig into the depths of that universe and then bury yourself within it» (at least it was my modest interpretation of what Berger was trying to express). At least at that point in life, there was only something that I knew and love enough to conduct research on: poetry. I did my master's thesis on the contemporary African American and Mexican American poetry in the state of Texas using Niklas Luhmann's systems theory. In a blink of an eye, I was in Milwaukee starting my PhD.

Since my first attempts in Texas to conduct sociological research on poetry, some professors and colleagues asked me: «why poetry?». Even though throughout the history of the discipline several sociologists have focused on the analysis of different dimensions of the literary phenomenon (i.e., Adorno 1974; Childress 2015, 2017; Course 1997; Escarpit 1965; Griswold 1981, 1987; Griswold and Bastian 1987), poetry has not been a popular subject of analysis. But my answer to that question can be divided into two parts, the first

one is personal, subjective, maybe a whim or an obsession; but the second one is a fact, a reality, maybe not very visible, but real.

The first reason is based on my takeaway of Berger's book: I am extremely passionate and interested in poetry, it is the universe that I know the most, and I am willing to dig to its depths and then bury myself within it. The second reason can be more technical and historical. As I mentioned it is a fact, and for some people (particularly for those who are not familiar with poetry or simply are not interested in this literary genre) an unknown one. I elaborate in-depth on it in the following section.

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INTRODUCTION

According to some literary historians, the earliest literary work is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a Sumerian/Babylonian epic written around 2150 BCE. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is a poem (Sandars 1972). Several centuries before narrative prose emerged in other ancient civilizations, poetry was already being used as a main form of written literary expression (see Hall 1979). Before poetry (and other forms of literature) was produced and used for artistic, political, and religious purposes, it was social (Adorno 1974). Even before the first writing systems, primitive forms of poetry were practiced with religious and social ends. But poetry, as well as any other forms of literature, is also deeply connected with space and place. Cities and poetry have always been interconnected. Whether looking at ancient cities like Persepolis or Aleppo, medieval London, or contemporary Lagos, San Francisco, or Sao Paulo, this connection is persistent and strong. Cities shape the production (Mexico City is naturally embedded in my poems, just as Milwaukee in Trevon's and Melody's, or New York City in McKay's) distribution, and consumption patterns of poetry.

Particularly after the industrial revolution, cities became places where most humans live, where they spend their lives, and try to make sense of them. Also, in modern times, cities are places where all the different actors of the literary field meet and interact to make this process possible (Miles 2018). Literature, as any other form of art, needs a wide variety of actors working collaboratively to exist (Becker 2008). Literature also contributes to the production of social and urban space (Lefevre 1991), and is an instrument of historical preservation and identity formation (Corse 1997) that shapes cities' narratives and history. Among all forms of literature, poetry is the closest one to the conversational language and has always been embedded in social life (Paz 1987).

Poetry is not a monolithic unidimensional entity, rather, it manifests in different forms. Traditional written poetry is only one of the multiple forms in which it can exist. The ways poetry is practiced and expressed is closely tied to the development of technology and the social context (Miles 2018). For example, poetry was first an oral practice, but when the first writing systems appeared, it started to be registered and consumed on physical platforms. Similarly, when newspapers started to proliferate thanks to technological advances in printing techniques, poetry was published and consumed also there. Thanks to its flexibility, multiformat nature, and role in diverse areas of social and cultural life, poetry has been an instrument used by scholars from diverse disciplines to study phenomena such as the city's geography and representations (Benson 2019; Chad 2017; Larrissy 2016; Skoulding 2013), institutional change and historical processes (Askew 2014; Chalamanda 2001; Mhina 2014), and community formation and identity (Biggs-El 2012; Cheep 2016; Isler et al. 2015; Johnson 2017; Sommers-Willet, 2005, 2009), among others. Recent studies have also looked at the poetry field and its actors (Craig and Dubois 2010; Nenadić, Vejnović, and Marković 2019) and the influence of technology in patterns of consumption and distribution of poetry (Misztal 2016; Paquet 2019). Sociologists have made critical contributions to the study of the mechanisms through which literary works acquire meaning and the multiple implications of its production and consumption (Corse 1997; Corse & Griffin 1997; Griswold's 1981, 1987; Griswold and Bastian 1987; Childress 2017; Santana-Acuna 2014). Also, they have devoted attention to the institutional configuration of the literary field (Childress 2017), as well as the different actors within it (Berkers et al. 2013; Chong 2011; Ekelund and Börjesson 2002; Franssen 2015).

Cultural and urban sociologists have widely studied the intersection of the literary phenomenon and the city; however, this body of literature predominantly draws or focuses

on narrative forms of literature. Also, while such studies have successfully illuminated diverse aspects of the social and urban milieus in which those literary works were produced, distributed, consumed, and/or performed (Griswold 2008), there has been little examination of poetry in the same socio-spatial context across time. In light of the important advances that scholars from disciplines like sociology, anthropology, geography, literary studies, and communication have made in the study of the intersection of poetry and the city, as well as the viability of studying the social and urban phenomena through the lenses of the poetry field (Prendergast 2009), I decided to develop a dissertation project focused on the study of the interaction between poets and the city across a range of formats and time periods in the same city: Milwaukee.

The three studies that this dissertation comprises draw on different data, draw on different data sources, and pursue different objectives. However, they are thematically related as all of them analyze a specific form of poetic expression in the context of Milwaukee. While they can be read independently, together they provide a wider view of how the city and the practice of poetry are intertwined, and how the study of such relationships can be pivotal in the study of social and urban phenomena. In the paragraphs below, I elaborate on each chapter's content and focus.

In Chapter I I analyze poetic representations of Milwaukee's social, urban, and institutional change during a critical period of its modern history, 1967-1973. I conducted an extensive discourse and content analysis of poems published in Milwaukee's two major underground newspapers from the period: *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American.* I focus on the variation and/or continuity of poems' focus throughout that period in order to explore the ways in which poets portrayed and illuminated the multiple changes that the city (and of course, the country and the world) went through during those years. Results show that

during months of intense social mobilization or particular events, poets tended to use rhetorical mechanisms that reflected solidarity and a sense of community. However, throughout the period analyzed, “love” and “death” were always dominant themes in those poets’ publications. Drawing on examples from the poems analyzed, this chapter shows how poetry is a tool for historical preservation and how it is capable of providing rich information about a range of social and urban phenomena.

In Chapter II I analyze the community dimension of poetry by exploring Milwaukee’s spoken word poetry scene. Drawing on twenty-eight (28) semi-structured interviews with local spoken word poets and poetry/cultural promotors, as well as extensive ethnographic data collected through participant observations in multiple venues, I analyzed the functioning of the local spoken word poetry scene and developed a categorization system helpful in understanding the key actors and their roles. Results show that even though poetry communities/events tend to be welcoming and open to all individuals, Milwaukee’s patterns of race-based residential segregation are present in the demographic and spatial configuration of the scene. This chapter also looks at how poets understand and discuss their interaction with the city and what is the role that poetry has played in the development and consolidation of artistic and non-artistic communities that they belong to. Results show that poets tend to see poetry as a vehicle for the formation and consolidation of communities, and in the vast majority of the cases, it played a central role in the construction of individual and collective identities. Finally, this chapter shows the strong influence of social experience in the poetry production process (and in this case performance) and explores diverse forms of non-artistic use of poetry.

Finally, in Chapter III I analyze the phenomenon of the so-called Instapoetry (from the acronym Instagram + poetry) in the context of Milwaukee, devoting particular attention

to the ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic influenced and/or modified patterns of use of this platform to produce, distribute, and consume poetry. Results show that while the pandemic strongly influenced poets' discourses, it did not have any effect on their publication or consumption patterns through the platform. Also, this chapter focuses on poets' motivations and/or interests in joining literary virtual communities versus in-person ones. Results reveal that, in the Milwaukee context, poets use Instapoetry to accumulate social and symbolic capital used in launching their careers in traditional platforms (i.e., physical publication of books or live performances in venues). This finding suggests that in contexts with strong presence of literary (or broadly speaking, artistic) communities, poets tend to be more inclined to develop and strengthen a career in in-person settings rather than in virtual ones. This chapter also reveals that Instapoetry has become an important platform for minority poets to resist against diverse forms of oppression, join and participate in social movements, and to be involved in virtual conversations concerning social justice, equality, and diversity.

Even though findings derived from these studies vary depending on the specific objectives and research questions guiding them, I identify four central outcomes that are relevant for the discipline and its concerns regarding the connection between cultural production and the local environment, place-making, art-based communities, and the effects of technology on artistic performance and cultural products. First, studies presented in this dissertation confirm the close interaction between poetry and the city, and show diverse ways in which they influence and shape each other. In the context of this research, regardless of the platform or period, the city played a key role in poets' performance and production. At the same time, this dissertation unveils diverse ways in which poetry (and poets) have historically influenced the city's cultural landscape and urban life. Particularly

findings derived from Chapters I and II provide evidence that the production, consumption, and performance of poetry shapes local identities and the ways in which place is understood, artistically represented, imagined, and experienced by individuals. Second, poetry is an instrument of social organization, a source of social action, and a catalyst in the community and identity formation processes. Even though the production of poetry is individual in nature, its consumption and/or practice tends to be social. Thus, apart from having an artistic component, poetry has also a strong social/community component, that is pivotal in the development of communities. The study presented in Chapter II contributes to a better understanding of the relationship of art and community life, as while most poetry communities in Milwaukee aim at the promotion and diffusion of poetry, they also have secondary objectives and non-artistic activities and initiatives that positively contribute to diverse groups (particularly marginalized ones) in the city. While the community dimension of poetry (particularly spoken word poetry) has been widely explored by scholars from different disciplines, Chapter II of this dissertation analyses this relationship in the context of a highly segregated city like Milwaukee, unveiling the multiple ways in which poetry is used by minority individuals to protest and resist against systems of oppression and injustice. Third, poetry is a powerful tool of historical preservation. It provides us with the opportunity to know unheard voices from the past, that can help us understanding diverse processes of social change over time. Poetry is also a testimony of those who observed and tried to make sense of their contexts, those ones that are the basis of our current times and cities. The study of poetry and poets can benefit a wide range of scientific and historical studies of cities and their inhabitants, as poets tend to capture diverse features of the socio-cultural contexts in which they write. Thus, a close analysis of their work (or experience), can provide researchers with data that would be difficult to find in a different source. This

is demonstrated across the three chapters of this dissertation. Finally, poetry has a close relationship with technology. Technological advances have historically influenced patterns of production, distribution, and consumption of poetry, and have also allowed individuals to use poetry for non-artistic ends (i.e., activism, social mobilization, protest). The technological dimension of poetry (and any other form of artistic expression) is something that social scientist should consider when analyzing the intersection of art and society, as technology as historically determined patterns of production, consumption, and distribution of cultural products; this dissertation provides an analysis of that phenomenon in the context of the relationship between poetry and the city.

This dissertation, that I see as a dragon with three heads, does not only attempt to contribute to the sociological study of literature, but to also be a testimony of the greatness and depth of the Milwaukee poetry and poets. The ethnographic approach to the study of the relationship between the city and poets in the context of Milwaukee allowed explore the city through the lens of poetry; and deeply analyze a poetry scene from different angles within the same socio-spatial context. As it tends to happen, conducting this research probably generated more questions than the ones that I was able to address through the three chapters below, however, I truly believe that they have the potential to contribute to ongoing conversations and debates within sociology and other disciplines, and maybe motivate future researchers to study the fascinating universe of poetry.

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CHAPTER I

SEEING THE CITY THROUGH THE LENS OF NEWSPAPER POETRY: AN ANALYSIS OF MILWAUKEE, 1967-1973

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

There is a strong connection between cities and literature; they inhabit and shape each other. Over the last few decades sociologists have made important contributions to the study of the relationship between cities and literature, looking at how literary meaning is developed and how it shapes urban and social milieus. While there is a growing body of poetry-based research, newspaper poetry remains largely unexplored in the United States. Drawing on discourse and content analysis of a new and never-used set of poems published in Milwaukee's two major alternative newspapers (*Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American*) between 1967 and 1973, this chapter analyzes poetic representations of Milwaukee's social, institutional, and urban dimensions. Additionally, it examines variability and continuity in the focus of these poems, as well as the factors that might shape these patterns. The results show multiple technical and rhetoric mechanisms used by poets when representing that historical period poetically and reveal that even in periods of intense social upheaval, 'love' and 'death' appear to be the primary themes in which poets focus on. This chapter also devotes particular attention to the relationship between poetry and the urban space, and the implications of platforms of distribution and consumption in poetic representations of cities' historical periods and change, building on literature on the connections between local environment and cultural production.

INTRODUCTION

There is a strong connection between cities and literature; they inhabit and shape each other. Throughout history, and especially since the urban expansion fueled by the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century, this connection has become even stronger. Cities shape the production, distribution, and consumption patterns of literary works. Also, they are places where all the actors of the literary field meet to make such processes possible (Miles 2018). Literature, as well as any other form of art, needs a wide variety of actors working collaboratively to exist (Becker 2008). Literature also contributes to the production of social and urban space (Lefevre 1991), and is an instrument of historical preservation and identity formation that shapes the cities' narratives and history.

Among all forms of literature, poetry is the closest to the conversational language because, unlike prose, it is less reflective and more natural (Paz 1987). Although more abstract and condensed than prose, lyric poetry's content—both in spoken and written forms—is essentially social (Adorno 1974), and in consequence, a "social referent" (Hall 1979). Poetry can be instrumental in the study of diverse social and urban phenomena such as individual and community identity and social problems (Johnson 2017; Sommers-Willet 2005, 2009; Soranzo 2016), construction and representation of urban landscapes (Benson 2019; Miles 2018; Skoulding 2013; Woods 2018), political power and legitimacy (Askew 2014: Chalamanda 2001; Mhina 2014), social lived experience (Collins 2018; Lahman et al. 2011), and experience and outcomes of literary consumption (Marsland 1984; Nenadić, Vejnović, and Marković 2019), among others. Writers, as Miles (2018:x) has argued, "contribute to understandings of social formation as well as literary form, and may try to influence both."

Some scholars have pointed out the advantages of using poetry as data in the study of the social and urban phenomena (Chatterjee 2013; Hanauer 2010; Janesick 2016; Ward 2011), nevertheless, the analysis of fictional prose has been dominant, at least in the sociological field (see Course 1997; Griswold 1981, 1987; Griswold and Bastian 1987; see also Longo, 2016; Misztal 2016). Yet, over the last few decades, there has been a growing interest in poetry-based methodological approaches in the social sciences (Hanauer 2010; Janesick 2016; Prendergast 2009; see also Shapiro 2004). Even though books, journals, and literary magazines have been the primary poetry publishing platforms, newspapers were fundamental instruments for the distribution and consumption of poetry in the United States during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Spaulding 1999; McMillan 2011). While the study of newspapers has been of central interest for urban sociologists (Gazit 2010; Hein 2014; Janowitz 1967), there are only a few studies, all of them in non-American contexts, that have drawn on poetry published in newspapers and other forms of printed media (Askew 2014; Chalamanda 2001; Mhina 2014).

Therefore, drawing on a novel and never-used sample of poems published in the two major Milwaukee's alternative newspapers (*Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American*) during a period of accelerated change (1967-1973), I conducted content and discourse analyses to answer the questions of: (1) how do poets represent Milwaukee's social, institutional, and urban dimensions in a period of accelerated change (1967-1973)? and (2) do poems' focus change over time? if so, what variations and continuity appear, and what factors might be contributing to those patterns?

Findings derived from this study reveal that even in periods of intense social upheaval, heightened attention to social, institutional, and urban change, 'love' and 'death' appear to be the primary themes in which poets focus on. Also, in those periods, poets'

discourse and rhetorical composition of the poems tend to vary—for example, during such periods, poets' discourses tend to be more collective than individual in nature. This study does not find robust evidence that supports the direct influence of specific institutional and/or urban transformations of the city on the poetic representations analyzed. Another relevant finding is that newspapers' editorial agenda and organizational practices also influenced the production and consumption of poetry during that period through their publication criteria and ideological/political orientation. This article contributes to knowledge about the connections between local environment and cultural production. Given that newspaper poetry has been under-analyzed in contemporary American sociology, this research also contributes to literature on cultural representations of cities, using the case of Milwaukee during the period of 1967-1973.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Newspapers as Cultural Objects

Griswold (2008:12) defines cultural object as a "meaningful expression that is audible, visible, or tangible or that can be articulated." The study of cultural objects has been central in sociology as they are "vehicles of meaning" (McDonnell 2010) that can be instrumental in the study of groups of people, social action, and a wide range of urban phenomena. As Griswold (1987:1079) suggests, "the meaning attributed to any cultural object are fabrications, woven from the symbolic capacities of the object itself and from the perceptual apparatus of those who experience the object." Over the last decades, cultural sociologists have focused the process through which cultural objects acquire meaning (Childress 2017; Childress and Friedkin 2012; Corse 1997; Corse and Griffin 1997; DiMaggio 1987; Griswold 1987; Santana-Acuna 2014; Zolberg 1990). Urban and

community sociologists, on the other hand, have made important contributions to the study of the relationship between meaning and place-based identities and cities (Brown-Saracino 2015; Logan and Molotch 1987; Molotch et al. 2000; Zukin 1993, 1995). Both urban and cultural sociologists have drawn on cultural objects such as plastic art (Mannion & Miles 1997; Talen & Ellis 2004; White and White 1965), music and records (Bartmanski & Woodward 2015; Calkins 2019), TV shows (Bielby and Bielby 1994), movies (Baumann 2007; Essig, 2019; Platts 2013), and fashion and clothes, (Bovone 2006; Crane and Bovone 2006), among others, focusing both on the meaning creation process and the multiple ways in which meaning(s) attributed to those objects shape social and urban milieus.

Even though sociologists have historically drawn on cultural objects both in quantitative and qualitative research, during the early twentieth century some of them started to devote special attention to print media due to its rich sociological data (e.g., Davis 1952; Park 1923; see also Schudson 1989). There is a large body of sociological literature drawing on newspapers (Gazit 2010; Hein 2014; Moore 2005[3]; Mueller, Restifo, and Restifo 2012; Sampson et al. 2005) and magazines (Smith Maguire 2018) as cultural products. Cities are central in the production and consumption of cultural products (Craig 2013), and as Gazit (2010:399) suggests, "unlike other collective representations, local newspapers are inevitably linked to place and anchored in daily life of the city." Similarly, Donald (1999:63) argues that newspapers "packaged a view of the world which both mirrored and made sense of their readers." Additionally, since they are documents capable of mapping social and urban functioning and space (Moore 2005), they have been pivotal for very important contributions to the field. Gazit's (2010:408) study shows that apart

3 She is the only one who is not a sociologists but a media studies scholar.

from reflecting the social composition and urban space of a city, newspapers function as "virtual public spheres" through which groups differentiate from others and create and reproduce boundaries. Similarly, Smith Maguire (2018:19) demonstrates that magazines are "mechanisms of categorization and legitimation" that groups use to generate social distance and distinction. Drawing on the analysis of newspapers, scholars have studied collective action and urban life (Henin 2014; Sampson et al. 2005), the incorporation of other cultural markets into the newspaper narrative (Moore 2005), and policy implications of media coverage of international events (Mueller, Restifo, and Restifo 2012), among others. This body of literature shows that, apart from containing a wide variety of social and urban information, as well as different forms of cultural expression, newspapers are themselves cultural products. Thus, in the context of this research, not only the poems' discourse, narrative, and rhetoric matter when analyzing poetic representations of Milwaukee, but also a wide range of characteristics of the cultural product in which they are contained: newspapers.

Poetry in the Urban and Social Worlds

Just as print media, the study of literary products has a long tradition in sociology. Since the emergence of the discipline theorists started to analyze literary works sociologically, (see Hall 1979; Laurenson and Swingewood 1972), however, it was not until the mid-twentieth century when sociologists intensified the analysis of literary products (Lowenthal 2016; Luckas 1963; Goldman 2013) and the relationship between literature and society (Albrecht 1954; Escarpit 1965) primarily focused on the social meaning of the literary content. Later in the 1980s, mainly influenced by the Frankfurt School (e.g., Adorno 1974) and Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) *Distinction* (see Eastwood 2007), a new generation of sociologists started focusing—unlike their counterparts of the 1950s

and 1960s—less on the sociological interpretation of literary works and more on the processes and mechanisms through with literary works acquire meaning. Griswold's (1987:115) analysis of literary meaning-construction reveals that "human beings fabricate cultural meanings both from both socially shared presuppositions and the particular characteristics of the cultural objects encountered." More recently, Childress and Friedkin (2012:63) found that "readers' social-structural positions influence cultural interpretations" (see also Corse & Griffin 1997; Santana-Acuna 2014). While there is a renewed interested in the study of the literary field (Childress 2015, 2017; Craig & Dubois 2010; Ekelund & Börjesson 2002; Sapiro 2016), sociologists have also made important contributions to the study of literature and national identity (Corse 1997), structural changes of literature (Issac 2009), crime and deviant behavior, (Ruggiero 2003), and historical analysis through literature (Van de Poel-Knottnerus & Knottnerus 1992, 2002), among other areas.

Sociological studies drawing on literary works as cultural objects have primarily used narrative forms of literature—mainly novel and short stories. Nevertheless, over the last few decades some sociologists have analyzed poetic works due to poetry's capability of illuminating diverse characteristics of social problems, situations, events, and socio-spatial contexts in a concrete and synthetized way (Janesick 2016); as Paz (1987) has pointed out, there has not been society without poetry—even including societies without written language. Scholars from other disciplines have also supported the idea that poetry can be a powerful piece of data in social and urban inquiry (Furman 2004, 2007; Hanauer 2010; Shapiro 2004). This agreement rests on the idea that authors are embedded in and shaped by a wide variety of social forces so poetry provides a "deep understanding of subjective [social] experience that it is difficult to access in other ways and is capable of presenting diverse, often contrary, narratives and images" (Shapiro 2004:173). An example of this is a

recent study by Miles (2018) that analyzes the ways in which poetic representations of cities reflect and contribute to social change, as well as how the urban space shapes the mode of writing. As Miles (2018:ix) suggests that literature "does not merely record times and places; it asks questions and raises issues, takes sides and introduces otherwise unheard voices."

Through poetic inquiry, scholars have studied diverse phenomena such as the development of cultural identity (Soranzo 2016), the influence of poetic discourse on readers (Marsland 1984), interpretation and poetic experience (Nenadić, Vejnović, & Marković 2019), poetic representation of the urban space (Skoulding 2013), and poetic representations of individual experiences and social problems (Collins 2018; Lahman et al. 2011; Lahman & Richard 2014; Ward 2011), among others. Likewise, since the early 2000s, there has been a growing body of literature on slam and spoken-word poetry, paying particular attention to the poetic representation of social problems, inequalities, and politics (Fisher 2003; Johnson 2017; Somers-Willet 2005, 2009). In the context of this investigation, newspaper poetry appears to be a powerful instrument to study poetic representations of cities and historical periods, their variations over time, the forces that influence such changes, and ultimately, the connection between local environment and cultural production.

Social, Urban, and Historical Inquiry through Newspaper Poetry

As discussed previously, social scientists and humanities scholars have made significant contributions to the study of diverse social and urban phenomena through the analysis of newspapers and different forms of literature. Nevertheless, only a few of them have relied on literary works, specifically poetry, published in newspapers. Recent works have demonstrated that, unlike the analysis of poems sampled from books, the analysis of

newspaper poetry makes possible the over-time analysis of poetic narratives that allow researchers to examine writers' representations of social problems, events, periods of time, and institutional transformations in diverse contexts (Askew 2014; Chalamanda 2001; Mhina 2014). Askew (2014), for example, analyzes praise poems from Tanzanian newspapers from three different periods of the country's history to explore popular expectations and assessment of the government. She finds that newspaper poetry embodies a central way in which Tanzanians assess and challenge existent institutions and report individual perceptions of social change. Similarly, in her study of Malawian press poetry, Chalamanda (2001:389) concludes that "poetry contributed to newspapers not only responds to certain topical issues, but also gives an indication of how these topical issues in the paper are read" (see also Mhina 2014). Apart from being instrumental to the study of the social and urban influence on cultural production, the study of poetry-based narratives of specific periods, events, or social change also contributes to the study of the interplay between two cultural products—literature and newspapers—and their production, distribution, and consumption patterns. This is critical because the analysis of both elements in the same socio-spatial context can be instrumental in having a better understanding of the cultural landscape, as well as the social, institutional, and spatial composition of the city (and period) to analyze.

Just as other American cities, Milwaukee went through an intense process of change during the 1960s and 1970. The Civil Rights Movement resonated loudly in the city with the mobilization of minorities such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Latina/o resisting against historical race-based inequalities in the city—Milwaukee was by the time and is still one of the most segregated cities in the country (see Gurda 1999; Rindfleisch 2016; Smith 2016). Anti-war, women, and LGBT movements were also strong in the city.

Also, during that period the city government launched diverse programs of infrastructural and urban development that gradually modified the landscape, geography, and demographic distribution of the city—for example, the development of freeways (Casey 2016), public transportation (Rodriguez 2016), public housing (Santacroce 2016), and urban renewal (O'Farrell 2016). Finally, the city's cultural and entertainment landscape also changes during this period with the establishment of iconic local music/artistic festivals (see Austin 2016), the expansion of movie theaters (Widen 2016), and the growth of the city's nightlife/music scene (Prigge 2016). Apart from these transformations, the emergence of alternative/undergrown press in the city embodied a fresh source of information and a platform of cultural consumption outside of the mainstream media.

Besides the fact that newspaper poetry is largely unexplored in American sociology, there are two aspects that make newspaper poetry a powerful data source for this study. First, alternative newspapers tended to include a poetry section in most of their issues, which represents, although less in number compared to a book, a constant flux of poems by a more diverse group of individuals. Second, the fact that the sample of poems analyzed in this study comes from two different newspapers published within the same period in Milwaukee, allows not only the over-time analysis of poems' focus, discourse, and representations but also the extent to which the differences between publications in terms of editorial agenda and content may have influenced such variations and continuity. This is critical to the study of how platforms of distribution and consumption of literary products influence focus and discourse (Chalamanda 2001). Therefore, analyzing newspaper poetry from a period of accelerated change in Milwaukee, embodies a novel approach to the study of alternative representations of social, institutional, and urban dimensions of the city, the production, distribution, and consumption patterns of poetry and alternative press during

the period that this analysis covers, and unveils alternative narratives of the city's history and urban landscape.

DATA AND METHODS

This study is based on nine hundred and seventy-seven (N=977) poems I collected from the two primary alternative Milwaukee newspapers—*Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American*—that provided particular views of political, social, and artistic perspectives, and established new modes of production and consumption of information and culture during the late 1960s and 1970s. Apart from being the principal source of data, those newspapers also contain rich information about their socio-historical context and provide an overall view of the social, urban, and cultural landscape of Milwaukee during that period. The analysis of diverse non-poetry sections within those papers was central to understanding the historical period, as well as patterns of productions, distribution, and consumption of poetry and other cultural products between 1967 and 1973 in the city. In the following two subsections I provide information about *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American*, as well as the sampling process.

Kaleidoscope

Kaleidoscope circulated in Milwaukee from October 1967 to November 1971. A total of 105 biweekly issues were published during that period. Its price was 25¢, and it was distributed mainly through non-conventional channels (e.g., taverns, concerts, festivals, etc., as opposed to home delivery and newsstands). Even though *Kaleidoscope* was not the first "underground" newspaper in Milwaukee, it was the first controversial and massively consumed one due to its radical-liberal points of view about local and national politics, sexuality, counterculture, etc. Some conservative groups in Milwaukee considered

Kaleidoscope as obscene and vulgar, to the point that its headquarters and editors were attacked several times, and it went through an obscenity case in 1968 in which the U.S. Supreme Court decided in its favor (Austin 2016; see also McMillan 2011). Kaleidoscope's had a wide variety of content, ranging from local and national news, political analysis, and gay rights to music, fashion, nightlife, and literature (see Kissack 1995). While its points of view around contemporary social and political issues were very radical, it was pivotal in the promotion of the local artistic and cultural agenda just as other American alternative papers from that period (McMillan 2011). Throughout its five volumes, *Kaleidoscope* included a poetry section in the majority of its issues, publishing between five and fifteen poems by well-known and emerging Milwaukee authors, as well as readers who contributed to the section—readership poetry[4]. While the "call for poems" had no restrictions in terms of ideology, content, or theme, all poems submitted to the paper had to go through an editorial process that determined which ones were going to be published and when. Information about this process is not available in the few existing documents on the organizational practices of the paper I was able to find and consult. The *Kaleidoscope* collection was recently digitized by the UWM Digital Humanities Lab[5]. I consulted this collection electronically and transcribed all poems available by hand. Given that *Kaleidoscope's* poetry section was usually accompanied by illustrations and/or photos, it was not possible

4 Both in *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American*, the editors included ads to invite readers to send their poems to be published in the paper. In the case of *Kaleidoscope*, the ad was as follows: "*This here is poetry that people have sent us from all over. We'd like to do a poetry page every issue, and would especially welcome local poetry. So send your work your works of art to us, [address].*" The ad included in *Bugle American* was as follows: "*We need poets. If you write poetry, short stories—any creative writing—drop it off or send it to [address].*"

5 After a complete run of *Kaleidoscope* was donated to the UWM Special Collections, the UWM Digital Humanities Lab conducted the digitation process using funding from the Polly and Stanley Stone fund, supervised by *Chipstone Foundation*. This collection is open to the public and can be found on: https://uwm.edu/lib-collections/kaleidoscope/

to use any object character recognition software. As Table 1 displays, the final sample from this source accounts for four hundred and nineteen (N=419) poems published between 1967 and 1971—the total number of poems published in the paper during that period. During the period between 1970 and 1971, published poems decreased substantially compared to previous years. Although the reasons for this change are not clear in the documents I consulted, it is possible that this decision was related to a printing-cost issue due to diverse financial and legal problems that the paper was going through at that time.

Bugle American

For eight years, *Bugle American* was central in Milwaukee political and cultural debates. It circulated weekly in Milwaukee and other Wisconsin cities from September 1970 to September 1978. Although with a similar editorial agenda as *Kaleidoscope*, *Bugle American* reached a larger population throughout the state as it was distributed through conventional press-distribution channels (e.g., newsstands) and offered three different subscription plans—lifetime ($50.00), annual ($9.00), and 6-month ($5.00). By 1970, its cost was 25¢ and had a print run of 15,000 copies weekly. However, a year later it became free with a larger distribution network throughout the state. Even though it became a statewide paper, it rarely covered news/issues from cities other than Milwaukee and Madison—it had its headquarters in Milwaukee and offices in Madison. Unlike *Kaleidoscope*, *Bugle American* started as a non-profit, but it became a profit-making business as it was more opened to commercialization of space for ads, especially since it became free. Even though *Kaleidoscope* was replaced by *Bugle American* as the "major counterculture print media" upon its disappearance in 1971, its content was less politicized and more variate to target larger audiences (Austin 2011). Apart from incorporating usual sections such as news, opinion, health, and literature—including poetry—it also included

Table 1: Sample Information, Over-time Distribution of Poems, and Technical/Contextual Characteristics of the Sample

	* Kaleidoscope						Bugle American					K+BA
Volume	Vol 1		Vol 2	Vol 3	Vol 4		Vol 1	Vol 2	Vol 3	Vol 4		
Year	**1967**	**1968**	**1969**	**1970**	**1971**		**1970**	**1971**	**1972**	**1973**		
# poems	21	149	156	26	67		25	175	212	166		
Total poems sampled			419			$\bar{x}$		578			$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$
Type of verse												
Lyric	31%	22%	19%	15%	9%	19%	12%	25%	30%	37%	26%	23%
Narrative	69%	78%	81%	85%	91%	81%	88%	75%	70%	63%	74%	78%
Author's perspective												
Collective	16%	22%	24%	27%	11%	20%	26%	14%	10%	19%	17%	19%
Individual	84%	78%	76%	73%	89%	80%	74%	86%	90%	81%	83%	82%
Plot's characteristic												
Situation/event	69%	51%	57%	49%	71%	59%	44%	55%	50%	64%	53%	56%
Process/period	6%	11%	21%	27%	6%	14%	20%	17%	28%	22%	22%	18%
Place	18%	35%	12%	14%	10%	18%	32%	16%	13%	6%	17%	18%
Object	4%	22%	21%	5%	6%	12%	3%	6%	4%	16%	7%	10%
Abstract or unclear	7%	3%	10%	10%	13%	9%	4%	12%	9%	8%	8%	9%
Central Theme												
Death/Loss	12%	46%	28%	34%	22%	28%	19%	24%	10%	31%	21%	25%
Life/Existence	4%	9%	12%	5%	6%	7%	8%	5%	11%	8%	8%	8%
Love/Romance	36%	41%	27%	51%	50%	41%	46%	52%	39%	44%	45%	43%
Motivation/self-esteem	4%	3%	5%	6%	11%	6%	3%	6%	12%	4%	6%	6%
Nature/Beauty	13%	19%	18%	24%	29%	21%	20%	28%	22%	19%	22%	22%
National Identity/Patriotism	7%	9%	6%	11%	10%	9%	5%	4%	10%	9%	7%	8%
Religion/Spirituality	7%	4%	11%	14%	9%	9%	10%	11%	7%	5%	8%	9%
Sexuality/Erotic	6%	11%	5%	4%	9%	7%	9%	11%	19%	14%	13%	10%
Social Problems	10%	21%	26%	19%	17%	19%	17%	4%	5%	2%	7%	13%
***** Social Problems***												
Race/Ethnic-based Inequalities	50%	18%	23%	50%	-	35%	50%	40%	40%	65%	49%	42%
Economic	-	13%	18%	25%	9%	16%	-	-	-	-	-	16%
Institutional/Political	50%	25%	26%	-	45%	37%	-	30%	40%	-	35%	36%
Infrastructural/Urban	-	12%	17%	-	18%	16%	25%	30%	-	35%	30%	23%
Environment	-	3%	4%	-	18%	8%	25%	-	-	-	25%	17%
Geopolitical/International	-	29%	12%	25%	10%	19%	-	-	20%	-	20%	20%
Setting												
Urban	28%	35%	38%	44%	29%	35%	34%	30%	31%	39%	34%	35%
Rural	23%	17%	8%	16%	19%	17%	21%	12%	14%	19%	17%	17%
Other	7%	14%	10%	17%	8%	11%	7%	13%	16%	4%	10%	11%
Unclear	42%	34%	44%	23%	44%	37%	38%	45%	39%	38%	40%	39%
****** Urban Location***												
Milwaukee	49%	59%	67%	64%	69%	62%	82%	77%	72%	66%	74%	68%
Another US location	17%	13%	9%	11%	10%	12%	5%	13%	18%	22%	15%	14%
International	2%	1%	-	-	2%	2%	1%	-	1%	-	1%	2%
Unclear	32%	27%	24%	25%	19%	25%	12%	10%	9%	12%	11%	18%

*Unlike Bugle American that published poetry uninterruptedly since 1970, Kaleidoscope poetry section was not included constantly and became sporadic during 1970 and 1971.
**All poems whose central theme felt into the 'social problems' category, were subcategorized into these six groups based on the characteristics of the problems they focused on.
***This distribution corresponds only to the poems whose *setting* (location) was urban.

recipes, handcrafts, jokes/humor, and classified ads. Both its larger distribution scope and the diversification of its content propelled and kept it working and publishing weekly issues for almost a decade.

Bugle American is not available in a digital format, so I digitized and transcribed the sampled poems by hand from the physical collection available at the UWM Special Collection and Milwaukee Public Library, as for similar reasons it was not possible to use character recognition software. The sample analyzed in this study comes from the first four volumes of *Bugle American*—1970-1973, one volume per year—as this study focuses on the period from 1967 to 1973. *Bugle American* had a constant poetry section throughout the period it circulated with a similar number of poems per issue—between ten and fifteen, on average. Even though the majority of poems published were by local emerging poets or newspaper readers, they included pieces by well-known poets from other cities or states sporadically—when this was the case, they included information about the poets (e.g., city/state of origin, publications, etc.). Thus, in order to maintain the internal validity of this analysis, I only sampled poems by Milwaukee poets—poets' city of origin was usually mentioned in the poetry section. As Table 1 shows, the final sample of selected poems from all published between 1970 and 1973 accounts for five hundred and seventy-eight (N=578) poems.

Analytic Strategy

This article asks: (1) how do poets represent Milwaukee's social, institutional, and urban dimensions in a period of accelerated change (1967-1973)? and (2) do poems' focus change over time? if so, what variations and continuity appear, and what factors might be contributing to those patterns? In order to answer those research questions, I divided the data analysis into two parts. First, a discourse analysis focusing on poets' representations of

Milwaukee and variations and/or continuity of such representations over time. Second, a software-based content analysis focusing on potential urban, social, and/or institutional factors contributing to such patterns.

In the first stage of the data analysis, I conducted a discourse analysis of the sample looking at the ways in which poets represent Milwaukee's social, institutional, and urban dimensions between 1967 and 1973, as well as the over-time variation of those poems' focus. To do so, I first analyzed the poems sampled looking at their technical, discursive, and thematic composition. I began by capturing the technical and narrative composition of the sample including verse style (lyric or narrative), authors' perspective (individual or collective), and plot's characteristics (description of a situation/event, process/period, places, and/or objects). Then, based on the frequency of thematic areas emerging from the sample, I grouped the poems into nine thematic categories[6] to examine the range of themes that poets were concerned about and the discourse they developed around those issues (see Table 1).

Since one of the objectives of this study is to analyze the relationship between the social milieu of the city and over-time variations and continuity of poems' focus, it was critical to identify poems' representations of those elements in a more specific way. So, I subdivided the category "social problems" into six different subgroups[7] to examine which specific issues authors focused on the most (see Table 1). This part of the analysis also

6 Following Course's (1997) method of classification and data analysis employed in her study on nationalism and literature in the United States and Canada, I classified the poems into nine (9) thematic categories. I created those categories based on the most recurrent themes emerging from the sample. Thus, instead of grouping the poems in pre-generated categories deductively, I created this system based on the in-depth analysis of the sample inductively; those categories emerged during the data analysis.

7 Just as the general thematic categorization, I grouped the poems into those six (6) categories following the process described previously.

benefitted from the method of classification and data analysis employed by Course (1997) in her study on nationalism and literature in the United States and Canada.

Additionally, since another central goal of this study is to analyze the poetic representation of the physical characteristics and change of the city over time, I looked at spatial setting in which the poems' situational context took place (urban, rural, or other) and, within those whose narratives took place in urban settings, I looked at specific places and where they were positioned in Milwaukee (see Gieryn 2000). For the subset of poems that described the city or were related to a narrative taking place in an urban setting, I recorded information about the specific places within the city that authors talked about to track the ways in which they represented both the physical characteristics of a given place and change of the city (if so), as well as the frequency of those mentions (see Table 1).

In the second stage of the analysis, I focused on examining the possible influence of specific institutional and/or material transformations of the urban and social milieu of the city on poems' representations and over-time variations and continuities. I sought to evaluate if such variations and continuities were connected and/or influenced by such events in the city. To do so, I conducted a content analysis using Nvivo 12 in which I generated a list of words and linguistic expressions related to (1) social and institutional transformations (e.g., phrases/words related to the inclusion of minorities in positions of power; LGBT rights; civil rights, etc.) and (2) urban/material ones (e.g., phrases/words related to the ongoing process of urban transformation such as the development of the

highways[8], renovation of certain neighborhoods, and displacement/relocation[9] of populations in the wake of those projects, etc.). Based on both groups or words, I conducted a coding process which consisted of identifying and grouping the poems that comprised any of the two elements described above. In this process I did not take into account the number of mentions/words related to the above categories in each poem. Rather, I classified and grouped them only by determining if there was presence of those themes or not regardless of the number of mentions/words[10]. This coding process grouped the poems based on presence (or not) instead of the degree of presence (how many words/expressions per poem).

Once I grouped the poems with presence of mentions/words linked to any of those categories, I analyzed them over time focusing on two aspects. First, I assessed the extent to which poems that touched on social and institutional dimensions also referenced specific places within the city. Second, I examined the extent to which specific places within the city are mentioned in the poems and if those mentions were related to specific events in Milwaukee's history. Finally, I analyzed the results across time and newspaper, devoting particular attention to the way they overlapped temporally with specific historical events/processes. To do so, I constructed a timeline of the most impactful events/processes of Milwaukee's history between 1967 and 1973 based on information gathered from three

8 Between 1946 and 1978, Milwaukee's urban landscape changed substantially due to the development of a freeways system that allowed the city to be connected with other Wisconsin and Midwestern cities. More information about this process available on: https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/freeways/

9 During the development of the freeway system in Milwaukee, thousands of families—specifically people of color and from economically-disadvantaged communities—were displaced as part of the freeway-development process. This displacement (or housing relocation), generated many social and urban problems that are still present in the city. For more information about the implications of this process see Gurda (1999).

10 The reason for doing that was because evaluating the presence of those themes in each poem by counting the number of mentions/words related to each category present in each poem would generate inaccurate results as, depending on the structure of the poems, verses or words can be repeated to emphasize an specific idea/feeling without being a new line/idea strictly (e.g., sonnets).

main sources: (1) an in-depth content analysis of news and articles reported in *Kaleidoscope* (1967-1971) and *Bugle American* (1970-1973); (2) articles published in the *Encyclopedia of Milwaukee*[11]; (3) and diverse publications by Milwaukee historian John Gurda (1999, 2015, 2016). Events identified through these three sources are reported in Figures 2 and 3. I classified the events in that timeline into three categories: protests, institutional transformations, and urban transformations. Outcomes derived from this stage of the analysis complemented the ones from the first one—discourse analysis—and were instrumental to answer the second part of this article's second research question: what variations and continuity appear, and what factors might be contributing to those patterns?

RESULTS

In this section I present results from the two stages of the data analysis. First, I present results derived from the discourse analysis of the sample. Here, I discuss the ways in which sampled poems portrayed the period of 1967-1973 in Milwaukee's history, specifically focusing on poetic representations of social, institutional, and urban dimensions of the city. Also, I discuss over-time variations of poems' focus during this period. Second, I discuss results derived from the software-based content analysis that seeks to examine potential factors contributing to over-time variations and continuity in poems' focus found in the first stage of the analysis. Here, I also discuss the extent to which social problems and the urban landscape are part of poems' representations of the city and the implications of newspapers' editorial agendas, content, and structure in the outcomes.

11 The Encyclopedia of Milwaukee is a collaborative research project leaded by historians Amanda Seligman and Margo Anderson that aims at collecting and preserving the history of Milwaukee. So far, the interdisciplinary team working in this project has published more than 740 entries and collected thousands of historical documents and images. For more information visit: https://emke.uwm.edu/

Poetic Representations of a Period of Intense Social Upheaval

The discourse analysis I conducted in the first stage of the data analysis allowed me to identify how authors represent Milwaukee's social, institutional, and urban dimensions in the period of 1967-1973, and in doing so, explore these representations as alternative ways to narrate the city's history. As Table 1 shows, although with some minor variations, poems from *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American* were mostly narrative rather than lyric, and although all of them were written in verse, they mostly aimed at describing the authors' individual experiences as their perspective was consistently individual throughout time. However, both in *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American*, the proportion of poems with a collective perspective (e.g., "we" instead of "I") increased between 1968 and 1970, a period of significantly increasing social mobilization in Milwaukee. This pattern suggests that it is possible that in periods of intense social mobilization poets' interpretation of different events, objects, and/or places may become more collective than individual.

Another notable pattern that this stage of the analysis reveals is one related to the poems' plot characteristic. The description of specific situations and/or events appears to be a dominant characteristic of poems' plots, both in *Kaleidoscope* (1967-1971) with 59 percent and *Bugle American* (1970-1973) with 53 percent, overall. This is a constant pattern observed in the poems sampled from both newspapers during the period that this analysis covers. While the second most recurrent plot category in *Kaleidoscope* is the description of place with 18 percent, overall, in *Bugle American* is process/period accounting for 22 percent, overall. Interestingly, when describing places, both *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American* poets were considerably more prone to focus on urban rather than natural ones.

This stage of the analysis also allowed me to generate a classification of the most recurrent thematic areas on which poets focused. The proportion of poems by thematic area that Table 1 displays is not a zero-sum one. In other words, the same poem can fall into more than one central theme depending on its narrative characteristics, focus, and structure. Overall, the dominant themes over the years analyzed in both newspapers were, in first place 'love/romance', followed by 'death/loss'— the only two years in which the proportion of poems in the category 'death/loss' became slightly larger than the one in 'love/romance' were 1968 and 1969 in *Kaleidoscope*[12]. Interestingly, those two years were the most critical ones—from the period covered in this analysis—in terms of social mobilization in Milwaukee and other American cities. Even though the dominant focus of poems varied slightly throughout these years, this pattern suggests that even in periods of intense social upheaval, heightened attention to social, institutional, and urban change, 'love/romance' and 'death/loss' appear to be the primary themes that poets focus on (see Figure 1).

While results derived from the discourse analysis have revealed a constant and dominant presence of poems focusing on 'love/romance' and 'death/loss' in the sample over time, they have also shown an interesting pattern regarding poems focused on social and urban issues. Although the category 'social problems' did not rank among the most recurrent ones throughout the years analyzed, during 1968 and 1969 the proportion of poems in this category was considerably higher than in other years in both papers. Given the relevance and impact of the ongoing local and national social movements by the time, this pattern suggests that it is possible that this specific variation might be influenced by

12 Bugle American had not been published yet.

this intense social mobilization. Specifically, in poems categorized in 'social problems', poets were prone to describe daily-life experiences framed by the current social movements in the city. This finding also shows that one of the distinctive contributions of sociological poetry analysis is how it illuminates connections between personal, subjective experiences, and macro-sociological phenomena like social movements (see Shapiro 2004). For example, the following passage from a poem titled "Brain Waves of Today" published in *Kaleidoscope* in late April 1968, is framed in the context of the Civil Rights Movements in the city:

> […]
> & then people
> Are gathered chuming fighting screaming
> Over dos & don'ts)
> Over tropical nights where
> Brown furry monkeys of deception and mistrust scramble in trees
> Over tenements of broken glass and grassless lawns
> From the Haight perfumed and tempting
> (Telling of lover, loves, & love
> Of love in a milligram or a leaf of grass)
> From Milwaukee's Southside and Messiah
> Groppi
> ("Sock it to me Black Power, Commandos")
> From the reds from the smoking may be hazardous to your health ads
> From the poor jag shooting in the steamy jungle
> From A & G & M who were good
> From Mary who knows and doesn't know at all
> I hear these people and things &
> Places but
>
> Dear God
>
> What do I do?
>
> (Kaleidoscope 1969 Vol. 1 Num. 13, p.10)

Published just a few weeks after the Milwaukee 200th march[13], this poem is an example of how specific events are narrated from an individual position providing information both from the individual and collective perspectives. In this poem the author describes a mobilization in which people are gathered "fighting and screaming." This poem, rich in rhetorical figures, also highlights the critical role that Father James Groppi[14] played in the "March on Milwaukee" and subsequent movements that advocated for race-based equality. The fact that the author recognized him as a "Messiah"—using a religious metaphor around his position as a Catholic priest—also informs about the moral authority that Groppi had and his level of authority and influence within the movement as historical narratives consulted in my research suggest (e.g., Avella 2016; Gurda 1999, 2015, 2016). The author concludes the poem by asking god, "What do I do?," illustrating the uncertainty that this movement was generating for many social groups, especially African Americans and other communities of color. The analysis of the poems framed in social movements/social mobilization shows that, unlike historiographic works that usually provide a narrative from a single perspective, poetry offers a polyvocal narrative approach of such historical processes and cities where while there are commonalities and overlapping points with historiographic narratives, there are also variations and different perspectives from the same event/process/period/city.

While a considerable number of poems, especially between 1967 and 1971, described specific aspects of the social and institutional composition of Milwaukee, as well

13 March 200th was the last of a set of marches advocating for race-based inequality in the city during the late 1967.

14 James Groppi (1930-1985) was a catholic priest, civil rights activist, and community leader from the city of Milwaukee who promoted and leaded the local Civil Rights Movement advocating for race-based equality in the city from the 1960s through his death in 1985.

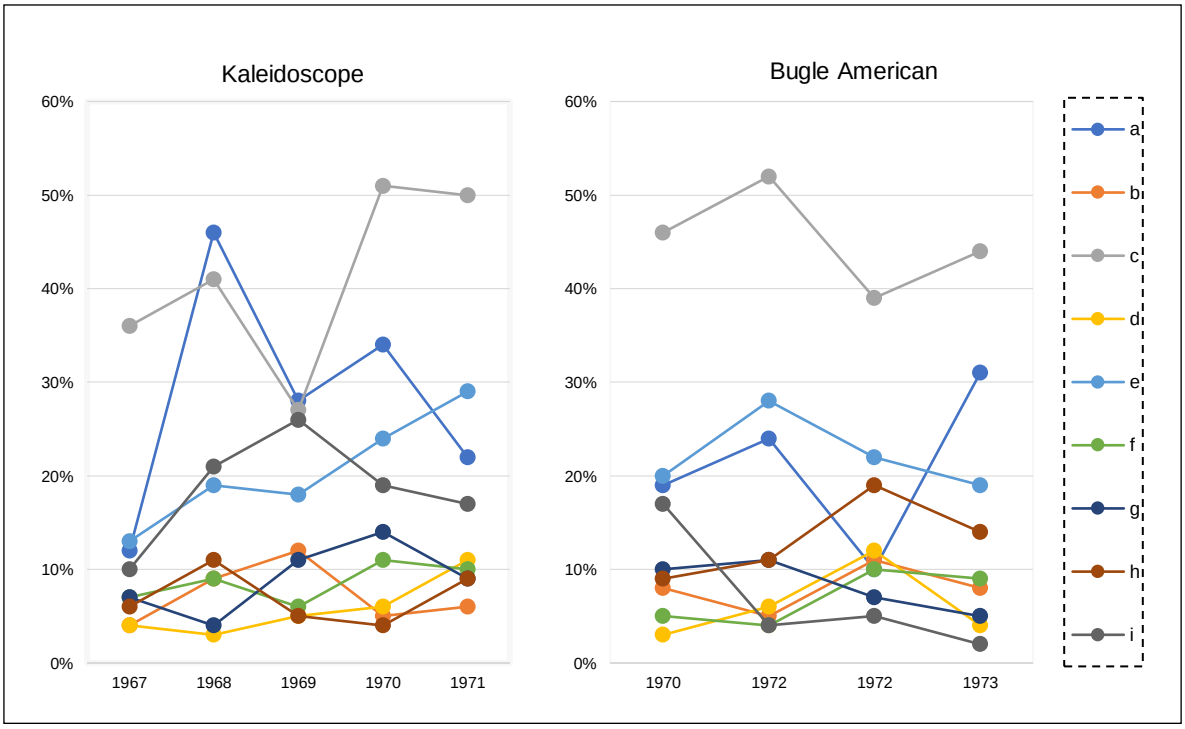
as massive mobilizations that the Civil Rights Movement was generating locally, others described specific forms of inequality present in the city at the time. The following poem titled "How it is, sisters" published in *Kaleidoscope* in mid-October, 1969, reflects the profound race-based inequality existing in the local justice system that was especially harmful for African Americans:

> A Black woman
> is in Milwaukee jail tonight.
> She has been there 63 nights,
> so far, charged with stealing
> a 79 cent package
> of frozen fish.
> The pigs claim
> they cannot find her
> birth certificate.
> Or something. Some bullshit
> document they need
> to fuck her with.
> She has had no hearing.
> 63 days for 79 cents.
> Frozen fish for a birth
> certificate. A Black woman's
> life to feed
> the Pig System.
>
> (Kaleidoscope 1969 Vol. 2 Num. 22, p.10)

This profound critique of the Milwaukee justice system also makes visible other related social problems like poverty, race-based inequality in the legal system, institutional deficiencies in the attention of communities of color and/or the ones living in poverty, among others. Even though this poem is a clear institutional/governmental critique, it reflects both the individual perception and collective understanding of a racial issue, and also points out unequal institutional practices. Those inequalities, mostly racially motivated, were the ones that sparked social movements in the 1960s in the United States.

Findings also reveal important patterns regarding poetic representations of Milwaukee's social, institutional, and urban dimensions between 1967 and 1973. First, even though the description of individual experiences was dominant among poems from *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American*, between 1968 and 1970 poets were more prone to write from a collective perspective. Second, description of specific events and/or situations were dominant plots among poems from both newspapers. Third, although some variations in focus are evident during years of intense social upheaval, the dominant themes observed over time in poems published in both newspapers are 'love/romance' and 'death/loss'. Finally, based on the patterns observed in this stage of the analysis, poems represented this period of time by describing three specific aspects: (1) social and institutional composition of Milwaukee; (2) ongoing social movements and political conflicts; (3) diverse forms of inequality present in the city by the time.

Figure 1: Over-time Focus Variation



Thematic categories: (a) Death/Loss/Tragedy; (b) Life/Existence; (c) Love/Romance; (d) Motivation/Self-esteem; (e) Nature/Beauty; (f) National Identity/Patriotism; (g) Religion/Spirituality; (h) Sexuality/Erotic; and (i) Social Problems (see Table 1 for the full list of sub-categories for Social Problems).

The Role of the City in Poetic Representations of a Historical Period

Physical space is often a central component of the poetic language. Although poetry can employ abstract and condensed rhetoric forms, descriptions of situations, processes, periods, and objects, take place in physical spaces. As Table 1 displays, the percentage of poems whose discourses take place in urban settings ranges from 28 to 44 percent, depending on the source and year—*Kaleidoscope* in 1970 concentrates the highest percentage (44 percent) while the same source in 1967 the lowest (28 percent). Interestingly, from all those poems, the majority of them point to specific places in Milwaukee. This pattern shows that in the sample of poems analyzed in this article, the city is not only a recurrent and relevant element of poets' discourse but in some cases a protagonist of their poetic narratives and representations (Lefebvre 1991).

While results derived from this analysis do not show a consistent pattern of description of the urban space, the set of poetic representations of Milwaukee's urban geography analyzed in this article are pictures that preserve images of the city's history and landscape that were part of the daily life of the people who inhabited it during the period this analysis covers. For example, the following poem published in February 1972 in *Bugle American*, pictures a winter scene taking place on Milwaukee's East Side:

> december snow-
> field, nineteen seventy
> one still brown
> and East Side
> Milwaukee sidewalks leading
> to edges of a thistle
> garden tended by one old
> man
> and starlings.
>
> (Bugle American 1972, Vol 3, Num 5, p.14)

Similarly, the following poem titled "I Return to Milwaukee," published in January 1971 provides a description of Brady St.[15]:

> i remember brady street winter death with
> snow on my bedroom floor and green tea and
> blue lips and feet and blues from a big
> chrome national guitar with frost on it.
>
> (Bugle American 1971, Vol 2, Num 3, p.13)

While not all poems taking place in Milwaukee provide rich descriptions of its urban landscape, some of them use the city to frame daily-life situations and/or to provide a spatial context. It is particularly interesting that rather than talking about the city as an abstract entity or place, most poems point to specific—sometimes iconic—points in the urban landscape. Unlike the above poem that provides a description of Brady St., the following one published in *Kaleidoscope* in January 1971, uses that specific point in the urban landscape to inform a daily-life situation:

> […]
>
> I remember
> you
> as
> being
> walking
> your dog
> down Brady
> street.
>
> […]
>
> (Kaleidoscope 1971, Vol 3, Num. 33, p.8)

15 'Brady' is a well-known street on East Milwaukee that was traditionally an Italian neighborhood. Nowadays it is known for the high concentration of bars and restaurants that have made this are one of the most popular entertainment centers in the city.

The fact that this stage of the analysis reveals a large proportion of poetic narratives describing and/or pointing to places localizable in Milwaukee's urban geography not only evidences the relevance of physical space and specific places in poets' representations of a particular historical period, but also the role that the city plays in poems describing daily-life situations or individual feelings. These patterns also confirm that poetry and the urban/physical space are "intersecting practices" (Skoulding 2013) that inform each other and, in the case of poetry, can represent, preserve, and "remake" a city in a specific period of time. These representations embody alternative/complementary ways to narrate Milwaukee's history (Molotch et al. 2000).

Factors Influencing Poetic Representations of a Historical Period

Results derived from the software-based analysis reveal important patterns regarding the influence of specific institutional and/or material transformations of the urban and social milieu of Milwaukee on poetic representations and over-time focus variations and continuity of the poems analyzed in this article. In Figures 2 and 3, I present results from the second stage of the data analysis, in which I grouped and contrasted poems focused on institutional and material transformations of the city across time—those figures report over-time variations and proportion of presence of those themes by newspaper. Also, I identified specific transformations, events, and processes based on the analysis of archival and historiographic materials to examine if poets' representations and over-time variations or continuity are associated with or influenced by such events.

Overall, the results do not reveal concrete evidence of a constant influence of institutional and/or material transformations of the urban and social milieu of Milwaukee on poems' over-time focus between 1967 and 1973. Nevertheless, the visual analysis of the data shows two important patterns. First, when contrasting the proportion of poems

mentioning institutional transformations with the ones focused on urban ones, there are some moments in which both lines are similarly intense. Even though this is not a constant pattern throughout the seven years this analysis covers, in some specific moments with intense social mobilization (e.g., protests and demonstrations), the proportion of poems focused on institutional transformations and the ones focused on urban ones tends to be similar. An example of this is *Kaleidoscope's* first year. As Figure 2 illustrates, from January 1968 to January 1969 in *Kaleidoscope*, both poems which focus on institutional and material transformations of the city appeared in similar proportions. As one line moves, the other one follows a similar pattern. This reveals that, in the case of *Kaleidoscope*, poems published in periods of intense social mobilization and social/institutional change (1968-1969) were more prone to be framed in urban settings than the ones that did not inform any transformation of this nature. Apart from showing that in some specific periods, poems' focus responds to actual events/processes taking place in the city, this pattern shows that the poetic use of the city and urban space is largely influenced by presence of social issues in the overall poetic discourse.

Poems published in *Bugle American* between 1970 and 1973, in contrast, show a different pattern as they are more consistently focused on social/institutional themes than urban/material ones, which might reflect the geographically broader readership of *Bugle American* relative to *Kaleidoscope*—also, this pattern could respond to a specific editorial criteria. As Figure 3 illustrates, only in certain sporadic points in time (e.g., October 1971 and May 1972) do lines tend to overlap, so there is no robust evidence to assume those overlapping lines and/or the presence of poems focused on those aspects are the consequence of actual events taking place in the city. Therefore, even though in periods of intense social mobilization poems focused on institutional and urban transformations of the

city tend to show similar proportions, there is no evidence that this pattern is caused by specific events in the city as those patterns are not clearly aligned with the events/processes I identified based on the analysis of archival and historiographic materials.

Another important aspect that this part of the analysis reveals is the differences between *Kaleidoscope's* and *Bugle American's* poems in terms of focus, proportion, and time in which they tend to be more intense. Even though both newspapers were published in periods of intense social, institutional, and urban change in Milwaukee—and for two years they circulated simultaneously: 1970 and 1971—overall, *Kaleidoscope's* poems were slightly more politically oriented as throughout the more than four years in which it circulated, poems focused on institutional transformations—including racial, LGBTQ, poverty, and other related ones—were more intense than *Bugle American's* (see Figures 2 and 3). Results derived from the discourse analysis previously presented are consistent with this pattern: poems published in *Kaleidoscope* tended to be more politically/socially oriented (see Figures 2 and 3). While there are no documents and/or testimonials that provide an explanation for this difference, this particular pattern shows that the production and focus, distribution, and consumption patterns of newspaper poetry are not only determined by external factors such as current social, institutional, and urban conditions of their contexts, but also by internal ones like editorial agenda, structure, production, and distribution patterns, audience, and editorial practices—these are the major differences I identified when analyzing both papers.

Figure 2: Kaleidoscope Social/Institutional and Urban/Material Transformations in Relation to Specific Events

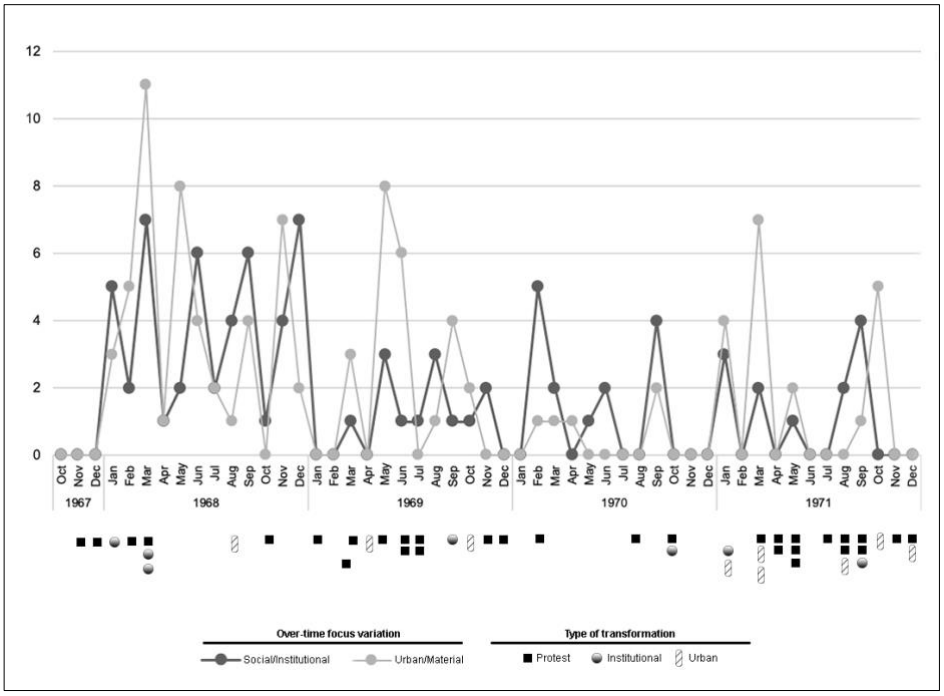
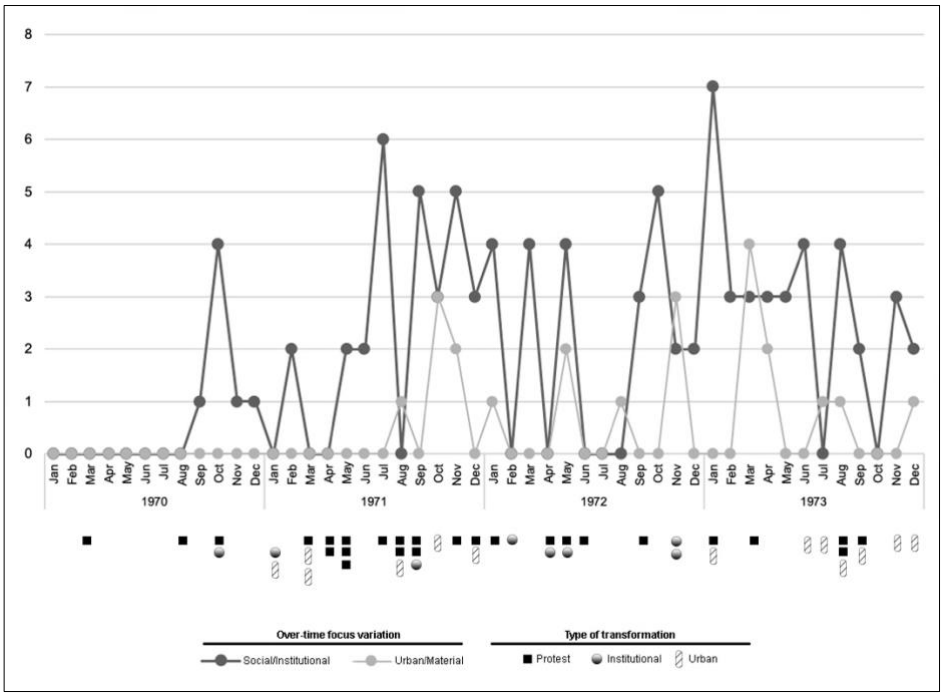


Figure 3: Bugle American Social/Institutional and Urban/Material Transformations in Relation to Specific Events



DISCUSSION

Results derived from this study reveal three central sets of findings. First, overall the dominant theme among the poems analyzed from *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American* was 'love/romance' followed by 'death/loss'. Even though in periods of intense social mobilization (1968-1970) the proportion of poems in the categories 'death/loss' and 'social problems' increased, 'love/romance' appears to be the most recurrent theme in the sample throughout time in poems from both newspapers. Regarding poems' technical composition and poets' discourse, this study shows that, although mostly written in verse, poems tended to be primarily narrative and used to communicate individual experiences. However, in periods of intense social mobilization, their discourse tended to be more collective in nature—both in *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American*—mostly framed in the ongoing movements (e.g., March on Milwaukee, Civil Rights Movement, LGBTQ movements, etc.). Finally, this study shows that poets were especially prone to write about specific events and/or situations and rescreening places, depending on the newspaper. When writing about 'social problems', poets focused on three particular aspects of that period of Milwaukee's history: (1) description of specific aspects of the social and institutional composition of the city; (2) description of ongoing social and/or political mobilizations; and (3) description of specific forms of inequality present in the city at the time. The fact that several poems in the sample provided individual experiences framed in larger events/processes taking place in the city, shows that poems comprise valuable information about the socio-historical processes in which they were created (Adorno 1973; Hall 1979), and when analyzed within their historical context, they can embody alternative ways to narrate the city's history and provide information about specific aspects of the social and urban milieu of the city (Molotch et al. 2000), as well as its institutional composition and

governmental/institutional practices (Janesick 2016). Newspaper-based poetic representations of historical periods, processes, social change, and cities are instrumental not only to strengthen the sociological analysis of a wide variety of phenomena, but also they can contribute to historiographic studies of specific cities, nations, and periods (Askew 2014; Barber 2007; Chalamanda 2001).

Second, the city plays an important role in poetic representations of lived experience. In both newspapers, and throughout the period analyzed, the proportion of poems whose discourses are framed in urban settings ranged between 28 and 44 percent, depending on the source and year, and interestingly, most of them are located in specific places within the city. Apart from providing critical information about physical characteristics, social use, and transformation of the urban space, poetic representations of the city's urban geography are critical to preserve collective memory, the city's history, and to learn more about the forces that have propelled changes in the urban landscape (Miles 2018). This analysis has shown the critical role that the urban geography plays in representing social and institutional dimensions in a city poetically, and that newspaper poetry can offer a rich accounting of the social and physical landscape of the city. These findings support Miles' (2018) idea that the way literary products are framed has an impact on the ways in which cities are perceived, imagined, and even planned.

Third, the software-based content analysis of the poems sampled has also revealed important findings. Even though there is no concrete evidence that supports the direct (causal) influence of specific institutional and/or urban transformations of the city on poetic representations of Milwaukee's social, institutional, and urban dimensions, there are some interesting patterns. In the case of *Kaleidoscope*, just as results derived from the discourse analysis, in periods of intense social mobilization, the proportion of poems focused on

institutional and physical transformations of the city tends to be similar and in some cases complement each other—this is evident in the first year of *Kaleidoscope* although in *Bugle American* it only happens in some sporadic points in time. Thus, even having identified those patterns, there is not robust evidence that confirms that this pattern is directly connected to specific events/processes taking place in the city. Regarding poetic representations of institutional and material changes of the city, there are clear differences between poems published in *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American*. Even though there are not concrete explanations for those differences, based on the content analysis of both newspapers, as well as other historical documents I consulted, it is possible that particular features like editorial agenda, structure, production, distribution, and consumption patterns, audience, and/or editorial/organizational practices are factors that determine those variations.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed diverse ways in which the poems sampled represented Milwaukee's social, institutional, and urban dimensions between 1967 and 1973. Just as in previous studies in African contexts show (Askew 2014; Chalamanda 2001; Mhina 2014), the analysis of newspaper poetry, considering its socio-spatial context, can reveal the multiple ways in which poems represent a city, historical period, socio-political processes, or social change. As Chalamanda (2001) suggests, the analysis of newspaper poetry is also instrumental in the study of how those narratives are produced, reproduced, and consumed depending on the discursive and structural characteristics of the platform from which they were sampled. In this research this is evident through the differences between *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American* poems—while *Kaleidoscope* poems' discourse was more politically

oriented, the *Bugle American* ones were more centered on spatial description and daily-life experiences. Results derived from this study have not only shown different ways and degrees in which poems published in *Kaleidoscope* and *Bugle American* between 1967 and 1973 represent Milwaukee's social, institutional, and urban dimensions, but also that platforms of distribution and consumption of those literary products also determine the variations and continuity of those representations over time. Although this analysis does not show a concrete, constant, and/or chronological influence of specific institutional and/or material transformations of the city on the nature of such representations, there is evidence that confirms that in periods of intense social mobilization, those transformations influence poetic production and certain technical and content patterns in poems appear (e.g., author's perspective). This research has also shown that, apart from being a cultural product whose analysis can provide rich information about specific socio-historical contexts, poetry is also an instrument of historical preservation of the urban landscape (Skoulding 2013) as it reflects physical characteristics of cities that are not necessarily reflected in non-literary documents—this also contributes to traditional forms of urban history preservation and reproduction over time (Miles 2018). In doing so, this research has attempted to contribute to sociological knowledge about the connections between local environment and cultural production.

As some scholars have suggested, apart from mapping social and urban functioning, as well as space (Moore 2005), newspapers are spaces used by groups to differentiate from each other and create and reproduce boundaries (Gazit 2010; see also Smith Maguire 2018). More research needs to be done to understand these differences in newspaper poetry and the relationship between those variations and poetic representations of historical periods and cities. Future studies should focus on the comparative analysis of poetry published in

different platforms and socio-historical contexts. Also, researchers should focus on comparing poetry-based narratives with other ones from other literary products. Finally, based on the main limitation of this research which is the limited knowledge about newspapers' organizational/editorial practices, future studies should explore the influence of such practices on the production, distribution, and consumption patterns of literary products, as well as authors' discourse and literary representations. While the analysis of poetry requires additional efforts to decode information hidden behind its rhetorical structure, it is a powerful source of sociological data capable of helping social scientists investigate a wide variety of social phenomena and strengthen and complement other non-literary based analyses. Contemporary sociologists—especially urban and cultural sociologists—should explore the multiple worlds hidden in literature. As this study has shown, literary products are vast sources of sociological and historical data that can help researchers explore a wide range of issues. The correct methodological approach to the analysis of literary products can be pivotal to the study of issues that are relevant for contemporary sociology.

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CHAPTER II

'MY MILWAUKEE, YOUR MILWAUKEE': SPOKEN WORD POETRY, URBAN EXPERIENCE, AND COMMUNITY

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Over the last few decades social scientists have developed critical studies on various dimensions of the phenomenon of spoken word poetry such as education, community, activism, and identity, among others. While a voluminous body of literature has contributed to the understanding and study of this art form in diverse sociocultural contexts, little attention has been paid to the poet-city interaction in the context of hyper segregated American cities. Drawing on twenty-eight (28) semi-structured interviews with Milwaukee spoken word poets and local poetry promotors, and ethnographic data collected in Milwaukee spoken word venues, this chapter analyzes the status and functioning of the local spoken word poetry scene. Also, it looks at how poets understand and discuss their interaction with the city at the discursive level—ways in which the city is present in their work. Finally, poets' views on the multiple mechanisms through which spoken word poetry communities are formed, as well as the characteristics that make this art form conductive to the development and strengthening of community ties. Apart from showing the complex functioning and configuration of the Milwaukee spoken word ecosystem, this ethnography reveals critical patterns that show the impact of the city's sociodemographic patterns and multiple forms of inequality on poets' understanding and discussion of the connection between the city and their artistic work, as well as the community dimension of poetry. This chapter devotes particular attention to the relationship between the art communities and the local environment, as well as the multiple implications of segregation and inequality on cultural production.

INTRODUCTION

Even before the first writing systems were developed and used for literary purposes, poetry was already being composed, performed, and transmitted orally. Orality and performance have been two fundamental components of poetry throughout history. Spoken word poetry has a long tradition in American history, however, over the last few decades, its practice in different formats has popularized and generalized in most American cities (Novak 2011, 2020). The complexity and multidimensional nature of this performative art form has led scholars to investigate its intersections with diverse aspects of social life. For example, previous studies have revealed that spoken word poetry is a powerful tool that allows individuals to develop and strengthen community ties (Chepp 2016; Isler et al. 2015; Johnson 2017; Somers-Willet 2005, 2009) and can be instrumental in the identity formation process (Aterianus-Owanga 2015; Biggs-El 2012; Flyn and Marrast 2008; Jones, 2011; Lopez 2021; McCann 2020; McCormick 2000; Noel 2014; Sommers-Willet, 2009). Scholars of education, for example, have found in the practice of spoken word poetry valuable pedagogical tools (Fiore 2015; Merriweather 2011; Stovall 2006; Weistein 2018).

While this voluminous literature has explored diverse dimensions of spoken word poetry in its multiple formats and has also rooted those analyses in specific sociocultural contexts, few have focused on the multiple forms of interaction between poets and their cities, and those cities' poetry scenes (English 2021). Additionally, most of the works focusing on the community dimension of spoken word poetry have focused on one specific racial/ethnic group, usually marginalized ones (Chepp 2016; Isler et al. 2015; Johnson 2017; López 2021; Somers-Willet 2005, 2009).

Therefore, drawing on twenty-eight (28) semi-structured interviews with Milwaukee spoken word poets and local poetry promotors, as well as ethnographic data

collected in diverse poetry events between 2018 and 2021, this study analyzes the status, configuration, and functioning of the Milwaukee spoken word poetry scene. In addition, this study analyzes poets' understanding and discussion of their interaction with the city, and the extent to which the city's cultural and demographic composition shape their work and performance. Finally, this study focuses on the multiple mechanisms through which spoken word poetry contributes to community building and identity formation across three predominant racial/ethnic groups of Milwaukee (Black, Latina/o, and white), a hyper-segregated metropolitan area. This study aims at answering the questions of: (1) How is the current Milwaukee spoken word poetry scene configurated? How does it work?, (2) How do poets understand and discuss the role of the city and their lived experience within their work and performance? How do these patterns vary or continue across groups?, and (3) How do poets understand and discuss the role of spoken word poetry, and their own work, in community building and identity formation process among Milwaukee communities?

Findings derived from this study reveal that while the city's patterns of race-based segregation and inequality impact the configuration and functioning of the local spoken word poetry scene, it is a place of cross-cultural conversation, and is becoming more racially, ethnically, and sexually inclusive and diverse. Additionally, this study shows clear group-based variation in poets' understanding and discussion of the city and their lived experience in their work; while white individuals' interaction with the city at the discursive level tends to be 'contemplative', minority poets tend to have a 'participative' one; these patterns emerged through the analysis of poets' own cognitive mapping of the city.

Regarding poets' approach to the community dimension and identity of spoken word poetry, while all groups show similar understandings of most of the elements that

intersect spoken word poetry and community, the concept of 'vulnerability' was more embraced by minority poets.

This study contributes to knowledge about the connection between spoken word poetry and the community building process. Also, it builds on literature on the effects of the local environment on cultural production and art communities. Finally, given that this ethnography focuses on three racial/ethnic groups in the context of a hyper-segregated city, it also contributes to literature on the effects of segregation and inequalities on the local art and cultural ecosystems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lived Experience, Space, and Discourse

Bauman (2011:6) uses the term "spoken word" to make reference to "verbal art forms of oratory, theater, literature" (see also Bauman 2018). Spoken word poetry is a performative form of poetry that requires a performer, a space, and an audience (see Smith and Kraynak 2009). The most common formats used in spoken word poetry are open mics and poetry slams. As Fisher (2003:356) points out, open mics are "the ultimate example of multiple literacies, where people share their poetry and prose." Unlike poetry slams, that are poetry competitions in which performers are assessed based on a specific criteria and there is always a winner (see Somers-Willet 2014; Woods 2008), open mics, the predominant format of spoken word poetry in the United States, are events usually held at bars, restaurants, or coffee shops where poets, and sometimes other artists (i.e., singers, musicians, dancers) share their art with the audience in a non-competitive setting (Novak 2011). While diverse forms of spoken word literature (including poetry) have been

practiced for centuries in most American cities, over the last decades spoken word poetry has popularized and more poetry communities, and spaces for its practice, have emerged.

Becker (2008) has argued that the artistic production is a collective activity in which diverse actors interact to make an artistic product possible. Spoken word poetry is a collective, and primarily social activity, however, poets' creative process is individual in nature. Hence, the individual experience is a fundamental component of their poems/performances (Novak 2020). Sociologist Norman K. Denzin's (2003) concept of 'mystory' is useful to illustrate the role of individuality and lived experience in spoken word poetry. According to Denzin (2003:26), "'mystories' are reflective, critical, multimedia tales and tellings. Each 'mystory' begins with the writer's biography and body; 'mystories' relate epiphanic moments, turning-point experiences, and times of personal trouble and turmoil." The raw material of most poems performed in open mics, poetry slams, or any other poetry event, is 'mystories' (see also Novak 2020; Somers-Willet 2009) To transform their experiences into poems, poets also go through a process (that can be either while writing and performing) that in philosophy is called 'the poetic experience,' understood as a "unique moment of awareness in which poet discovers and rediscovers a perennial existence of cosmic nature—the state of 'absolute perfection'" (Khan 2013:46). The process through which poets "discover and rediscover" a wide array of elements of their human nature and nature itself is always individual. Nevertheless, the 'poetic experience' is not an isolated process that takes place out of the social world, and considering that before this moment the poet has been exposed to a wide array of social and urban forces, the result of this process will be shaped by them. In this regard, sociologist Theodore Adorno (1974:62) argues:

> Lyric poetry is not to be deducted from society; its social content is precisely its spontaneity, which does not follow from the conditions of the moment. But philosophy (again that of Hegel) knows the speculative position that the individual is rendered through the general and vice versa. This can only mean here that the resistance to social pressure is not something absolutely individual. Rather, through the individual and his spontaneity, objective historical forces rouse themselves within the poem, forces which are propelling a restricted and restricting social condition beyond itself to a more humane one. These forces, therefore, must belong to an all-embracing configuration and in no sense merely naked individuality, blindly opposing itself to society.

As the above passage suggests, poetry does not emerge directly from society. Rather, it is through the poet, and their spontaneous ability to make sense of their nature and the nature of the world they inhabit, that the social composition of poetry emerges reflecting the forces that have shaped their individual and social experience. Spoken word poetry then also becomes a place conductive for individual expression (McCormick 2000).

As a performative art form, space is an essential element of spoken word poetry. As do Cebreiro and Villar (2011:113) argues, "poetic performance is one of the spaces in which body, affect, and voice neatly intersect, these elements being understood here as vectors of intervention in the social space." Also, as Sutton (2004) explains, spoken word poetry emerged as a form of community activism aimed at vanishing the boundaries between the individual and the collective. Several scholars have highlighted the critical role that the physical space plays in spoken word poetry in promoting a connection and effective dialogue between the performer and the audience (Fisher 2003, 2005; Flynn and Marrast 2008; Reyes 2006), as well as the forums of spoken word poetry as safe spaces for

individuals (Desai and March 2006). Scholars have also studied the body as a vehicle of performing action in spoken word poetry (Ellis, Gere, and Lamberton 2003).

Not only the space where spoken word poetry is practiced, but also the social space that influences poets is important for the development of their discourse. Barbara H. Smith (1971) theorized the temporal and spatial composition of poetry using the concepts of 'mimetic discourse' and 'natural discourse.' According to her, the 'natural discourse' is made of utterances, defined as "verbal acts of real persons on particular occasions in response to particular circumstances" (Smith 1971:260). In other words, particular events in time (e.g., the death of Adolf Hitler on April 30, 1945 in Berlin). Nevertheless, poetry uses the 'mimetic discourse,' which instead of being made of utterances is made of 'representations' of them. Contrary to the general conception of poetry as a vehicle to express images, ideas, feelings, characters, scene, or moments, Barbara H. Smith holds the idea that poetry represents "discourse" (Smith 1971). Unlike images, feelings, or scenes, discourse does not depend on a specific spatial or temporal location. While people in their daily-life conversations use the 'natural discourse' to communicate with each other contextualizing their conversations by pointing to specific moments, events, and spaces (most of the times chronologically) poetry represents those verbal acts and events discursively by evoking an interplay of several spaces and times.

Community and Identity

Apart from analyzing the characteristics, aesthetics, and components of spoken word poetry, scholars have also focused on the community dimension of spoken word poetry. Recent studies have shown that it is a tool of community engagement and cohesion (Cheep 2016; Isler et al. 2015; Johnson 2017) as it democratizes the use of poetry and lived experience by gathering people from different backgrounds and allowing them to share

their work in front of an audience (English 2021; Glazner 2000). Spoken word poetry has also democratized the practice of this art form by moving it from exclusively academic settings to popular ones (Cullell 2015). Since the early 2000s, there has been a growing body of literature on effects of spoken word poetry on ethnic/racial performance and identity (Aterianus-Owanga 2015; Biggs-El 2012; Flyn and Marrast 2008; Jones, 2011; Noel 2014; Sommers-Willet, 2009). In her study of minority spoken word poets in the United States, Somers-Willett (2005:57) found that poetry performances are "generative sites of social practice from which these identities are performatively cited, recapitulated and questioned." Somers-Willet's (2009) in-depth analysis of poetry slam in the United States also reinforces the idea that spoken word forms of literary expression generate spaces where ideas and values are exchanged, while individuals build, perform, and reinforce their identity. Similarly, in her analysis of Black British poets, Novak (2020:327) suggests, "In the act of speaking, the poet-performer's identity becomes part of the poem through their physical presence on stage, which in turn creates unique possibilities for poetry that highlights their performed identity."

The community dimension of spoken word poetry is not exclusive to traditional settings (i.e., open mics) and poetry communities. Rather, it is also an instrument to generate communities aimed at achieving non-artistic goals. For example, Isler et al. (2015) used spoken word poetry as an approach to HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, and as a tool to promote an intra-community dialogue that could derive in the mitigation of stigma against individuals with HIV/AIDS. As they report, "the SWP [spoken word poetry] demonstrated benefits for both participants and the local community by improving some aspects of self-efficacy among participants and reducing HIV-related stigma among both participants and showcase attendees" (Isler et al. 2015:9). As Bagwell's (2021) study

shows, one of the reasons why spoken word poetry is conductive for the development and strengthening of community ties is due to the development of empathy and active listening

Previous studies have also unveiled the implications of spoken word poetry for social justice. For example, Fiore (2013) showed that spoken word poetry has been a very powerful tool for minorities of color to fights against oppression (see also Damon 1998; Hoffman 2001; Stovall 2006). Recently, scholars have started to explore the intersection of spoken word poetry with global inequality and colonialism (see Lopez 2021; Moore 2020). Scholars of education have widely studied the effects of spoken word practice on the educational field. Education scholarship has focused on the pedagogical components of spoken word poetry (Fiore 2015; Merriweather 2011; Stovall 2006; Weinstein 2018), social and educational outcomes of its practice (Bagwell 2021; Weinstein and West 2012; Williams 2018a, 2018b), and its role in literacy and communicational competences (Scarbrough and Allen 2014), among others. Gender scholars have also built on literature intersecting gender and racial/ethnic identity (Hastings 2009a, 2009b). Multidisciplinary approaches to gender inequalities (Switzer, Bent, and Endsley 2016), racial discriminations (Johnson et al. 2017), social policy (Fields et al. 2014), and platforms of consumption (Walker and Kuykendall 2005) have also benefited from the analysis of the spoken word phenomenon. Other scholars have focused on the aesthetics and history of spoken word poetry (Hoffman 2011). Its relationship with feminism has also been studied (McCann 2020; Ohito and Nyachae 2019).

As previous literature on or drawing on spoken word poetry shows, its practice comprises substantial data capable of helping researchers to study diverse social phenomena. Paradoxically, there is not a voluminous body of sociological research touching spoken word poetry, at least in the American context. There are a few sociological

studies on spoken word poetry, primarily focused on the political, ideological, and racial implications of its practice (Chepp 2012, 2016; see also Driver 2008; Polletta et al. 2011). Drawing on ethnographic data, Chepp (2012:241-42) investigated multiple mechanisms through which spoken word poets express their political views and promote social change through their work. In this sense she argued:

> Spoken word performance poets engage in creative politics by deploying artistic creativity as a political tactic, using their involvement in the performance poetry community as a vehicle for doing social justice projects aimed toward social critique and change.

Chepp (2012) also found a strong relationship between the practice of spoken word poetry and the production of collective knowledge generating change at the community level. Nevertheless, recent studies have found that individuals' experience and performance, especially in multiracial spoken word communities, varies along racial groups (Idriss and Atie 2020).

As discussed in this review of literature, scholars from different disciplines have made critical contributions to the study of diverse dimensions of spoken word poetry in a wide variety of contexts, populations, and approaches. While sociological literature on spoken word poetry is growing, only few studies have focused on one sociocultural context analyzing different populations. This study attempts to build on existing literature by providing a cross-group analysis of both the individual and community dimensions of the practice of spoken word poetry in the context of a hyper-segregated city: Milwaukee.

DATA AND METHODS

The study presented in this chapter draws on an ethnographic fieldwork I conducted for nearly three years (between June of 2018 and April of 2021) focusing on the Milwaukee spoken word poetry scene. I collected data via two ethnographic methods: (1) interviews with active members of the scene—twenty-four (24) semi-structured with poets and four (4) unstructured with local spoken word poetry promotors—and (2) participant observation in local poetry venues, both in face-to-face and virtual modes. This project, including materials and procedures of data collection, was fully approved by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board (IRB) on August 6, 2019 under file number 19.A.337. An amendment to meet the social-distancing requirements established by federal local governments in the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic, was approved on December 23, 2020 under the same file number[16]. In the following two subsections I provide detailed information about the sampling, data collection process, and analysis of each piece of data.

Interviews

Sampling

I determined a sample size of twenty-four (24) participants based on Creswell's and Poth's (2016) approach to interview research that suggests a sample size between five and twenty-five participants for phenomenological research[17] to avoid theoretical saturation. Using snowball sample techniques, as well as through a local poetry/literary organization

16 All post-Covid data collection activity that involved any physical interaction in which social distancing could not be guaranteed (i.e., interviewing, signing informed consents, etc.) took place in virtual settings. To do so, critical documents like the "participant informed consent," had to be digitized and signed electronically by participants—such changes were supervised and approved by the IRB.

17 Appelrouth and Desfor Edles (2012:519) define phenomenology as "a philosophy, methodology, and approach… [that seeks to] explain how people actively produce and sustain meaning."

that functioned as a gatekeeper who contacted me with different poetry groups/collectives around the city, I recruited participants based on two main criteria. First, residency: participants must have been living in the city of Milwaukee for at least three years before the day of the interview. Second, experience and involvement in the local spoken word poetry scene: participants must have been participating regularly[18] in any local spoken word poetry event for at least a year before the day of the interview. Such participation included featured poetry readings, 'open mics', poetry slams, or any other event that involves any kind of performance of poetry. In appreciation for their time and participation in the study, all participants were offered a $10.00 electronic gift card to a local bookstore that is also part of an organization that promotes and preserves local literature. All electronic gift cards were funded by me—no grant money was used to purchase them.

Since in this study I am also concerned with the potential influence of poets' racial/ethnic identification on their interaction with the city both at the discursive (second research question) and community (third research question) levels, my sample includes eight African American, eight Latina/o, and eight white participants (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999), as these are the three largest racial/ethnic groups in Milwaukee. Also, the sample is equally divided by genre within three groups[19] (Handcock and Gile 2011); more details about the sample's demographic composition can be found in Table 2.

18 The frequency of poets' participation in spoken word poetry events varied depending on several factors. For example, some poets may be inactive during relatively long periods of time (i.e., during the winter, holidays, etc.). Also, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, most spoken word events were cancelled or moved to virtual platforms. Thus, the criteria to determine if a poet meets this requirement for inclusion was if the poet participated in at least four poetry events during 2019 and 2020 (before Milwaukee went locked down in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic) or the same number of events in the online mode since the pandemic hit.

19 The only exception is the Latina/o group, that comprises four female individuals, three male individuals, and one that preferred not to specify their gender.

Table 2: Demographics of Spoken Word Poets Interviewed

	African American	Latino/a ¤	White †
Gender			
F	50% (4)	50% (4)	50% (4)
M	50% (4)	37.5% (3)	50% (4)
Other	—	12.5% (1)	—
Age			
20-29	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)	—
30-39	37.5% (3)	12.5% (1)	37.5% (3)
40-49	37.5% (3)	—	12.5% (1)
50-59	12.5% (1)	50% (4)	12.5% (1)
60-69	—	25% (2)	12.5% (1)
70 or older	—	—	12.5% (1)
Education			
Some college but not degree	50% (4)	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)
Associates degree	12.5% (1)	—	—
Bachelor's degree	25.5% (2)	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)
Graduate degree	12.5% (1)	75% (6)	75% (6)
Occupation			
Employed for wages (private sector)	25% (2)	37.5% (3)	12.5% (1)
Employed for wages (public sector)	37.5% (3)	50% (4)	50% (4)
Self-employed	25% (2)	—	12.5% (1)
Student	—	—	—
Retired	—	12.5% (1)	25% (2)
Other	12.5% (1)	—	—
% whose main occupation is writing	12.5% (1)	—	25% (2)
Years living in the city			
3-5 years	—	—	25% (2)
5-10 years	—	37.5% (3)	—
More than 10 years	62.5% (5)	25% (2)	50% (4)
Whole life	37.5% (3)	37.5% (3)	25% (2)
Residence area			
North Side	37.5% (3)	25% (2)	25% (2)
South Side	25% (2)	50% (4)	25% (2)
East Side	25% (2)	12.5% (1)	50% (4)
West Side	—	12.5% (1)	—
Suburbs	12.5% (1)	—	—
Other	—	—	—
Years performing poetry			
3-5 years	—	—	12.5% (1)
5-10 years	12.5% (1)	25% (2)	12.5% (1)
10-20 years	62.5% (5)	—	50% (4)
More than 20 years	25% (2)	75% (6)	25% (2)
Published			
Yes	75% (6)	87.5% (7)	87.5% (7)
No	25% (2)	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)
Poetry community affiliation			
Yes	100% (8)	62.5% (5)	75% (6)
No	—	37.5% (3)	25% (2)

() Total number of individuals in parenthesis
¤ two of the eight participants in this category also identified as white (Latino and white)
† one of the eight participants of this category also identified as northern European (white and northern European)

Besides the twenty-four (24) interviews with local spoken word poets, I also conducted four (4) unstructured interviews with local spoken word poetry promotors. While most of these individuals are not poets, they were referred by participants, and were identified as important actors within the local poetry scene. Data collected through these interviews was supportive in answering the first question guiding this study. All the stages of the process through which these interviews were planned and conducted were also aligned with the protocol approved by the IRB.

Data collection

To collect interview data, I employed two instruments of data collection: (1) a pre-interview questionnaire and (2) an interview. Aligned with the social-distancing measures I have mentioned, all interviews were collected virtually (Janghorban, Roudsari, and Taghipour 2014) via *Zoom* between January 14 and March 29 of 2021, following the process bellow. Once participants agreed to participate in the study after being invited via email or telephone, a formal invitation with all the information of the study was sent to them, along with a link to a calendar in which they were able to choose the date/time that worked best for them. To do this, I utilized a free software called *Calendly*.

Once the day/time for the interview was chosen, participants automatically received an email with a link to the *Zoom* meeting and another one to the electronic pre-questionnaire interview (programed and hosted in *Qualtrics*). The main objective of this instrument was to have a deep understanding of the demographic composition (i.e., age, gender and racial/ethnic self-identification, educational attainment, neighborhood of residency, etc.) and professional background (i.e., years of experience within the local poetry field, publication record, affiliation to local poetry communities, etc.) of the sample (Phellas, Block, and Seale 2011). The list of questions that this questionnaire comprised

can be found in Appendix A. Apart from completing the questionnaire, participants also read and signed (electronically) an informed consent form approved by the IRB.

All interviews with poets lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. Interviews were divided into four sections to collect the data needed to address the three questions guiding this analysis (Creswell and Poth 2016). The first section focused on the participant's experience and view of the current Milwaukee spoken word poetry scene. In this section I primarily asked about their experience in the field and their overall view of it. In the second section I asked questions about their view on the relationship between poetry and the city, as well as the community component of spoken word poetry. In the third section I asked about the dominant themes in their work/performances and how (if so) poetry shaped their individual identity. Finally, in section four I asked about potential non-artistic uses that they give to their poetry performances (i.e., political, social activism, education, etc.). The set of questions that guided the interviews I conducted can be found in Appendix B. Electronic gift cards were sent to participants via email upon completion of the pre-interview materials and the interview.

While the pandemic prevented me from conducting interviews in person (which is what I desired), it also brought some benefits to this project. First, it was more convenient and easier both for participants and for me to have an interview from home; I noticed that most of them felt comfortable without having to go meet me somewhere (which either way would not be possible due to the pandemic). Second, scheduling and collecting data was easier for participants using *Zoom* and *Calendly* as they were able to choose the day/time and schedule the interview by themselves (also, the distribution of pre-interview documents was easier and more effective). Third, most participants (particularly the older ones) had been isolated (some of them completely alone) for months. So, I felt that interacting with

me for some time in a conversation centered in their work and experience was so enjoyable for some of them. Finally, my positionality within the field as a poet, allowed me having deep conversations that, in some cases, extended for a long time talking about poets and my own work as a poet. About seven participants sent me via mail their books or manuscripts; they were very excited about sharing their work with me. The interview process allowed me to become friends with magnificent poets of the city. I am still in contact with some of them and they regularly invite me to poetry events in Milwaukee and other Wisconsin cities where they have presence and influence.

Analytic strategy

Upon conducting all interviews, I manually transcribed them using as base the transcriptions generated automatically by *Zoom*. While these transcriptions were not accurate at all, they facilitated the transcription process and reduced the time I would spend in this process if I had not had them. Once transcriptions were edited and accurate, I saved them in text edit (.vtt) format.

I coded the interview transcriptions using "concept coding"—also known as "analytic coding"—techniques. Regarding this method, Saldaña (2016:119) explains:

> Concept Codes assign meso or macro levels of meaning to data or to data analytic work in progress (e.g., a series of codes or categories). A concept is a word or short phrase that symbolically represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action – a "bigger picture" beyond the tangible and apparent.

Among the different coding methods that qualitative researchers and ethnographers use to analyze interview data, "concept coding" appears to be the most suitable for this study for two central reasons. First, because it allowed me to transform individual abstract and symbolic assertions and ideas into broader and concrete concepts instrumental in

addressing the questions guiding this investigation. Second, because as several methodologists have concluded, "concept coding" is an effective coding method for grounded theory phenomenological ethnographic analyses (Corbin and Strauss 2014; Mihas 2014).

I conducted the coding process in two stages. In the first one I created a set of seventeen primary concepts that are central for this investigation and which the interview questions intended to capture—Appendix C displays the set of concepts and codes I used to identify them. Then, I manually allocated codes within each interview transcription, identifying the specific sections in which each concept was mentioned or elaborated by the participant. Codes were added within the text in each file (vff.). Apart from coding the actual transcriptions, I also broke down each interview into small passages/sections that I organized in an *Excel* file by concept and participant, which allowed me both to analyze the data by concept, and to compare outcomes across racial/ethnic and gender groups.

In the second stage of the process, I conducted a word-frequency test using *Nvivo 12*—similar to the one discussed in the previous chapter—in order to identify secondary concepts that, may not be considered in the first stage of the coding process, but were recurrent within a specific group or across participants. In doing so, I generated a word-frequency report and analyzed manually. Once I identified recurrent words that could have a potential connection with either the primary concepts, I examined in what way (if so) they were related to them by reading them in the context of the categorization I assigned previously using the coding system included in Appendix C. This stage of the process also allowed me to recognize emerging concepts that strengthened my analysis of the data (Feng and Beher-Horenstein 2019).

While due to the nature of my research questions and interview data its analysis had to be highly interpretative, employing a "concept coding" approach allowed me to maintain the internal validity of the study and generate more accurate outcomes as I categorized and analyzed the data based on standardized concepts directly connected theoretical framework in which this study is embedded (Saldaña 2016), as well as the concepts that are central for this study.

Participant Observation

Data collection

This study also draws on data collected through participant observations I conducted in four Milwaukee poetry venues/seasonal local festivals distributed across the city (Musante and DeWalt 2010), as well as a set of virtual poetry events taking place after the Covid 19 pandemic hit. Based on Wolcott's (2008) approach to participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork, I collected data between June of 2018 and April of 2021. Table 3 shows the list of venues, location, dates of data collection, and total hours of participant observation in each one. To protect participants' identities, names of venues, festivals, or any other physical or virtual place/event that could be potentially connected to an individual, names were changed.

This piece of data was critical to enlarge my analysis of the status and functioning of the local spoken word poetry scene, as well as the different formats and settings in which spoken word poetry is performed in Milwaukee. Also, the fact that in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic most poetry events (i.e., poetry readings, "open mics", poetry slams, reading series, poetry festivals, etc.) migrated to virtual formats, allowed me to incorporate into this analysis the effects of the pandemic on the local poetry scene, and how it reacted to such contingency.

Since my first observation during the summer of 2018, I took field notes. However, it was starting from February of 2019 when based on Charmaz (2006) I developed an "analytic memo" that helped me organized my field notes and capture aspects of each event, venue, and performance that were critical for this analysis (see also Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). The "analytic memo" I designed, that can be found in Appendix D, allowed me to capture the following aspects of each in-person and virtual event I observed: (1) format of the event, (2) event information, context, and general description, (3) approximate number of poets/performers participating, (4) approximate number of members of the audience, (5) dominant themes in poets' performances, (6) key terms, performative aspects, and audience response by poet/performer, and (7) general comments. I continued to use this format to take notes after the pandemic hit, so I was able to standardize my note taking system across time in order to better capture the effect of the pandemic on those events.

Throughout the almost three years in which my participant observations occurred, the total time of my observations accounted for 113.5 hours. Data derived from those hours of participant observation was an instrumental complement to the interviews I conducted.

Analytic strategy

Unlike my concept-based analysis of interview data, I analyzed field notes using an "incident-based" approach that, rather than focusing on categorizing incidents—or events across specific concepts—I identified the major concepts and highlights emerging from each individual observation (Chazmaz 2006). This approach was critical in analyzing the dynamic, rhythm, and format of each incident, the interaction between diverse actors involved in the event, as well as the dominant themes touched by performers, as well as the

Table 3: Data Sources

Interviews

Participants	**Number**
Poets	24
Promotors	4
	Total: 28

Participant Observation

In-person observation

Venue	**Location**	**Type**	**Period of observation**	**Hours observed**
Venue A	Riverwest	Open mic	1/19 – 3/20	51
Venue B	Riverwest	Multiple	6/18 – 3/20	13
Venue C	Downtown	Featured readings	6/18 – 9/19	12
Venue D	South Side	Open mic	9-19 – 12/19 & 3/21 – 5/21	8
				Total: 84

Virtual observation

Event	**Platform**	**Type**	**Date(s)**	**Hours observed**
Event A	Zoom	Open mic	8/21/20	1.5
Event B	Zoom	Open mic	10/18/20	2
Event C	(customized)	Poetry marathon	1/30/21 & 1/31/21	24
Event D	Zoom	Featured reading	3/20/21	1
Event E	Microsoft Teams	Open mic	4/6/21	1
Event F	Zoom	Open mic	4/9/21	2
				Total: 29.5

potential connection of each particular incident with the seventeen concepts on which my interview data analysis rest.

Drawing on Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) I analyzed my field notes in three stages. First, using the data collected through the "analytic memos" I created a document per venue/event that summarizes that incident's information on the seven aspects previously mentioned. Second, I gathered and summarized additional comments/notes made in every session I observed—either in person or virtually—, added to the document previously created, and finally generated a solid and condensed summary of the most

relevant aspects of the incident. Third, I analyzed all summaries generated based on the "analytic memos" I generated and the extra notes I took, and I finally contrasted across format, venue, and period, looking for variations or continuity across time—particularly between pre and post-Covid events and in-person versus virtual events. This process did not involve any qualitative data analysis software.

RESULTS

This section is organized based on the three research questions guiding this study. First, I present results on the configuration and functioning of the current Milwaukee spoken word poetry scene (first research question). Then, I present results on poets' discussion of the influence of the city and lived experience in their work and performance (second research question). Finally, I present results on poets' discussion and understanding of the community dimension of spoken word poetry (third research question). Results presented in this section derive from the analysis of the different forms of ethnographic data I collected for this project—explained in detail in the previous section. Results derived from this analysis are aligned with previous studies intersecting the urban environment and the artistic production, as well as spoken word poetry and community (Cheep 2016; do Cebreiro and Villar 2011; Isler et al. 2015; Johnson 2017; Sutton 2004). One of this study's primary finding is that in most cases the city shapes poets' discourse and work and the practice of this art form is a catalyst and propeller of the creation and strengthening of community ties.

The Milwaukee Poetry Scene

Spoken word poetry is one of the most accessible forms of performing arts Glazner 2000; English 2021; Smith and Kraynak 2009). The recipe is very simple: a poet, a poem,

and an audience in a physical space. As Luis, a Latino poet in his 50s, mentioned: "unlike music and other performing arts, in spoken word there are not artifacts between you and the poet…it is completely accessible." The fact that its practice does not require major infrastructure or material resources, makes it accessible to all people (Smith and Kraynak 2009). As Chapter I shows, Milwaukee has had a vigorous poetry scene at least since the 1960s. Just as in its written format, spoken word poetry has also been part of the local cultural landscape for decades. However, the local "culture" of spoken word poetry is a recent phenomenon. Frederick, a Black poet in his 50s, shared with me his view regarding the transformation of the scene over the last few decades: "when we [his generation] came along, there was open mics but there was not a culture." Frederick suggests that in the late 1990s, when he started his career as a performer in different venues across the city, poetry events (i.e., poetry nights, open mics) were not seen as artistic but also as drinking or social events; in consequence, audiences attending them were not necessarily receptive to the performers' literary/poetic products—this was also confirmed by four other participants. This started to change in the early 2000s when new generations of poets started to develop collectives and poetry communities aimed at promoting the practice of spoken word poetry in different venues and areas of the city. The development of a "spoken word culture" in Milwaukee was accompanied by a process of growth and diversification of poetry communities and their audiences. Tiffany, a 62-year-old white poetry promotor, remembers that during the 1980s and 1990s most poetry events in the city were monopolized by "older white" performers— "hippies", in her words. According to her, due to the recent diversification of the local scene, "the image of this 'white master poet' has disappeared."

While in general the local spoken word poetry scene has become more racially/ethnic diverse over the last decades, and it is possible to say that nowadays all

minority groups are well represented[20] in it, the profound patterns of segregation of the city are also manifested in the spatial configuration of the scene. Borrowing local historian John Gurda's (2015) idea of Milwaukee as a "city of neighborhoods," this ethnography revealed that Milwaukee's spoken word is a "scene of scenes." More than fifty percent of participants, although using different terminology, identified two kinds of poetry communities/scenes that I have named as: 'neighborhood scenes' and 'confluent scenes.' 'Neighborhood scenes' are made of small groups of poets (and audiences) that organize, host, and promote poetry events at the neighborhood-level. In some cases, they gather in private settings (i.e., houses, parks) to share their work. Members of these communities rarely attend events outside of their neighborhood or communities. In this particular type of scene patterns of race-based segregation of Milwaukee tend to be more visible as are formed by individuals living in the same neighborhood/area.

The second type of scenes that I identify, 'confluent scenes,' corresponds to larger and more diverse groups of poets, usually gathered around an organization, a collective, or even a venue that attracts poets from diverse backgrounds and areas of the city. 'Confluent scenes' in Milwaukee are like hubs, spaces in which most groups and local poetry communities are represented and converge. Usually, these scenes go beyond traditional poetry readings or open mics by promoting other activities like workshops, courses, community programs, summer camps, etc. 'Confluent scenes' tend to be more institutionalized and sometimes they operate through non-profits that promote poetry and other forms of literature.

20 One example of this is the recent appointment of Dasha Kelly Hamilton as poet laureate for the city of Milwaukee. She is nowadays a central figure in the poetry field and is nationwide recognized for her multiple cultural and social contribution to Milwaukee's segregated and disadvantaged communities.

Apart from understanding the current configuration of the Milwaukee poetry scene, I also focused on identifying the different types of events in which poetry is performed in the city. Based on the interviews I conducted and my observations, I identify three types of spoken word poetry settings:

1) *recurrent events:* examples of events in this category are 'open mics' and 'poetry nights.' They usually take place in bars, coffee shops, or even private settings on a regular basis (i.e., weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly). These events are more common among 'neighborhood scenes' and are usually curated by community leaders or venue owners.
2) *special events:* examples of events in this category are 'featured readings' and 'book/album presentations.' In these events performers are usually well-known or recognized poets that congregate audiences interested in their work—these usually both within 'neighborhood scenes' and 'confluent scenes.' Sometimes these events (particularly 'featured readings') can have more than one poet performing. They are usually curated by a poetry promotor, community leader, collective, or local organization, and can take place in bars and coffee shops, or also in galleries, bookstores, museums, libraries, and other venues.
3) *festivals:* examples of events in this category are 'annual poetry festivals.' These events are usually planed, promoted, and executed by large organizations and sometimes are sponsored by governmental entities, non-profit organizations, and companies—these are more common within 'confluent scenes.' These festivals tend to feature both local, national, and sometimes international poets, and they congregate larger audiences from all over the city and other cities.

Milwaukee has important spoken word poetry festivals that have become benchmark in the local and regional (Midwest) cultural ecosystems.

Aligned with Becker's (2008) approach to the sociology of art, a complex interaction between diverse actors is needed for spoken word poetry to exist and reproduce in the city. First, and probably the most important, there must be poets willing to perform (most of the times without any economic/material compensations). Second, venues available to host such events. Third, curators interested in organizing them. Finally, an audience willing to attend such events and consume what performers have to offer. In Milwaukee all these actors are abundant and very active. In almost every neighborhood it is possible to find venues (i.e., bars, coffee shops, bookstores, etc.) where spoken word poetry events are held on a regular basis.

However, the local poetry scene is not homogenous across the city. As I have explained, the complexity of Milwaukee's sociodemographic configuration strongly shapes the spoken poetry scene(s). Milwaukee's scene is large and rich, and thanks to the work of local poetry organizations, established and emerging poets, curators, educational institutions, and other actors, spoken word poetry has been expanding and popularizing rapidly in the city. This has been noticeable over the span of this ethnography. Since I started collecting data for this project, around four new poetry nights (open mics) have been created, at least in the Downtown area and South Side. According to Pearl, a Black poetry promotor in her 40s and co-organizer of one of the most important Milwaukee poetry festivals, the number of participants and audience in annual festivals has increased considerably since 2015—at least in her festival. Similarly, Luis, who is also a community leader and co-organizer of another poetry festival, and member of a local literary organization, told me that the number of local poets requesting to participate in their

festival has increased substantially; this festival was virtual in 2021 because of the pandemic, and had a record of participation and attendance.

The City and Lived Experience in Spoken Word Poetry

Literary products (just as all forms of art) are inevitably shaped by the social and urban environments of the author (Miles 2018). Life cannot happen in absence of space (physical or virtual)—even our dreams happen in spaces—and since one of the main sources of art is human experience, the poet and their city will always interact in one or another way. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, one of the objectives of this study is to analyze how poets (in the Milwaukee context) understand and discuss the role of the city and their lived experience within their work and performance, and how (if so) those patterns vary across groups (second research question).

In my interviews, but particularly in the multiple poetry events I observed, the city was always an omnipresent and, sometimes, a central actor. We were in the city sharing poetry. In every event we were a small component of that huge machinery called Milwaukee. Even in the virtual events that I observed, and in which probably some attendees were not in physically the city, the city was present. Poems about the pandemic, about the city during the pandemic, about protests in the city during the pandemic in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, about the absence of swimmers and sail boats in Lake Michigan during the summer of 2020, about a city without summer festivals, without night life…Milwaukee was always present in these poets' verses and performances.

Out of the twenty-four (24) poets I interviewed, only two reported that the city is not relevant at all in their work (one Latina/o and one white). Themes and ways through which poets incorporate the city into their works vary. From a set of poems describing the South Side during the Great Recession (by Eddie, a white poet in his 30s) to two whole

books of poems talking about Milwaukee's history (by Richard, a Black poet in his 30s and Leah, a white poet in her 70s) and a collection of poems describing bus rides along the North Side (by Leticia, a Latina poet in her 20s). Most of those poems have been performed/read in diverse Milwaukee poetry events—I watched some of these performances during my ethnography. Nevertheless, the way(s) the poets understand and discuss the role of the city in their work, varies dramatically across groups.

To explain the results of this ethnography in this regard, I have classified their interaction with the city into two categories. First, 'discursive interaction' (interaction at the discursive level). This refers to the ways in which poets interact with the city at the discursive level (or within their poems/performances). This, in other words, is their "poetic" interaction with the city, the way the city is present in their work and how they inhabit the city *within* their own poetic discourse. The second classification is 'community interaction' (which I discuss in the next subsection). This refers to the interaction that poets have with other members of their communities, and which the main vehicle is the practice of spoken word poetry. 'Community interaction' can also refer to the community ties poets build and strengthen thanks to the practice of spoken word poetry and the multiple mechanisms trough which this is possible. In the following paragraphs I will discuss results related to the 'discursive interaction' and how this varies across groups.

During my interview with Leticia, she mentioned: "the city and the blank page are the only places where I can be free." Her phrase instantly reminded me of a poem titled "Milwaukee, freedom" performed by a young Black poet in one of the venues I observed (unfortunately I only wrote the title in my field notes) in which she described how free she felt during a long walk from the North Side to the Lake Front. Poets tend to see the city as a place of exploration, of freedom, as a place that offers them the instruments they need to

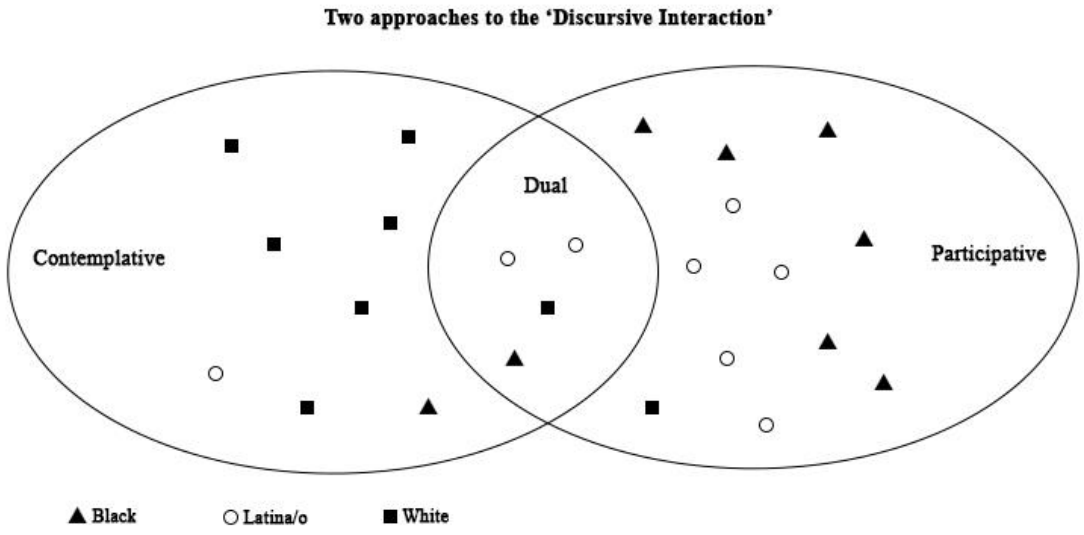
make their poems real—as the master of ceremonies of a poetry reading I attended in Riverwest said: "this poetry night is being like Alice's wonderland." However, poets' position in relation to the city within their own work is the problem that I would like to discuss, and a central finding in this part of the investigation. Among my participants and the hundreds of performances that I observed, I identified two approaches to the 'discursive interaction.' First, the 'contemplative', in which poets treat the city (or parts of it) as a sacred entity that is contemplated, poetically described, and sometimes worshiped; this approach can be summarized as *the poet interacting as an observer*. Poets using this approach tend to highlight the beauty or the magnificence of the city but as observers, usually from an outsider perspective.

Second, the 'participative', in which the poet lives, moves, and acts within the poem interacting with the city physically; this approach can be summarized as *the poet interacting as an active participant*. Here the poet is part of the scenes that take place, is directly touching and is even capable of changing the course of the poem from one verse to another one. The poet is an active participant who is always within the city that the poem is focused on. In summary, the difference between the 'contemplative' and the 'participative' approaches to 'discursive interaction' can be summarized as follows: *the city* versus *me within the city.*

Twenty-two (22) of twenty-four (24) poets I interviewed reported a strong presence of the city in their work. In fact, some of these poets' work is mostly focused on the city. However, the distribution of poets using the 'contemplative' and 'participative' approaches across racial/ethnic groups shows an interesting pattern. As Figure 4 illustrates, whereas in the 'contemplative' approach one (1) Black, one (1) Latina/o, and six (6) white participants are located, there are six (6) Black, five (5) Latina/o, and one (1) white in the 'participative'

approach. I also created another category called 'dual' that includes one (1) Black, two (2) Latina/o, and one (1) white participants whose discourse comprise elements from both approaches: 'contemplative' and 'participative.' I will evoke some examples that illustrate this pattern. The first one rests on two short phrases that two participants shared with me. When I asked Karl, a white poet in his 40s, about the presence of the city in his work, he responded: "well, my Milwaukee is the East Side and Riverwest…I write about its parks, nature, the river…Lake Michigan, that's the most beautiful part of the city"—just as an interesting fact, during the interviews, the word "Lake Michigan" was mentioned at least once by: 7 of the 8 white participants, 2 of the 8 Latina/o participants, and 1 of the 8 Black participants. Days later, Lora, a Black woman in her 40s, responded the following to the same question: "I write about being a Black woman in the City of Milwaukee… I love my city…"

Figure 4: Group-based Variance in 'Discursive Interaction'



Whereas the position of the poets within their own poems in relation to the city varies substantially between minority and majority groups, the way they treat historical landmarks, and the urban space poetically also varies. Such variation might be connected to the city's patterns of segregation and race-based inequalities. I will illustrate this with two participants' cases. Robert, a white poet in his 30s recently wrote and performed a poem in which he describes the city without the old Bucks arena (Bradley Center)[21]. He told me that he was very touched by the demolition of Bradley Center as its replacement (the Fiserv Forum) was, from his view, something bad for the city as, even though the area has gone through a process of revitalization, the Bradley Center was an important landmark. "With the old Bucks arena, an important part of Milwaukee's recent history disappeared", he mentioned. Weeks later, I interviewed Melissa, a Black poet also in her 30s who wrote a poem on another important Milwaukee's urban landmark: the Milwaukee Domes[22]. When talking about the influence of the city on her work, she illustrated this relationship with this example:

> I wrote a poem about the Milwaukee Domes…some years ago they were going to close the Domes and then all these people gathered together to protest that, and demonstrate for that, so I wrote a poem about how as a Black American in the community, how it seemed that people could gather to protect flowers more than it could gather together to protect Black lives.

21 The BMO Harris Bradley Center was the home of the Milwaukee Bucks from 1988 to 2018 when it was permanently closed. Upon the opening of the Fiserv Forum (the current Bucks Arena) in 2018, the Bradley Center was demolished (2019).

22 Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory, often known as "The Domes", comprises as set of three structures built in 1898 within which diverse ecosystems are reproduced and conserved—tropical dome, arid dome, and seasonal dome. This place is also riddled with structural problems that will be very expensive to repair. (see Surface 2016 for more information).

At different points of this ethnography, I had the opportunity to read Robert's poem and watch Melissa performing her poem in a virtual event. Both are incredibly deep and beautiful poems. Both are also inspired by two important urban landmarks of Milwaukee (one does not exist anymore; the other one is still there). However, there is a critical difference between them: whereas Robert is poetically describing the absence of an important urban landmark (Bradley Center) that was demolished, Melissa is an active participant in a discussion in which the urban landmark (the Milwaukee Domes) is connected to a problem that challenges her community—the poem implies that she witnessed those demonstrations/protests. Thus, both poets have a 'discursive interaction' with the city, however, one of them uses a 'contemplative' approach (Robert) and the other one a 'participative' approach (Melissa).

The Community Dimension of Spoken Word Poetry

I would like to start this subsection by quoting Briana, a Black poet in her 30s who mentioned this close to the end of the interview: "…if I can credit poetry to anything is the connections that I've made from hosting [poetry events], performing… I've met some of the most amazing people, the most amazing people that implanted in Milwaukee and other spaces to poetry." Unlike other art forms (i.e., painting, sculpture, etc.), verbal/performative ones (like spoken word poetry) are fundamentally social (Chepp 2012). In the specific case of spoken word poetry, it is because interpersonal interaction in real time is most times needed (both in face-to-face and online settings; unlike in pre-recorded events) as there is always an audience and a space where performances take place. The community dimension of spoken word poetry is strong and always visible. Individuals begin by going to perform or consume performances, and they end being part of a community that might have diverse goals and activities (including non-artistic ones). This ethnography builds on a large body

of literature that has shown that spoken word poetry is a powerful community and identity formation propeller (Biggs-El 2012; Cheep 2016; Isler et al. 2015; Johnson 2017; Jones, 2011; Sommers-Willet, 2009). Nevertheless, in this study, focused on a hyper segregated city like Milwaukee, where despite such sociodemographic patterns poetry communities appear to be strongly cohesive and are becoming more diverse, I elaborate on three key elements that participants of this study mentioned when describing and discussing the role of spoken word poetry, and their own work, in community building and identity formation process among their own communities (third research question).

Language

When talking about the community dimension of spoken word poetry, George mentioned: "[spoken word poetry] is an interesting form of art, it is all about language…it is accessible because it is only the poet and their language…your language is your tool." Besides referring to the language poets use to create and perform their work (i.e., English, Spanish, German), George is also talking about the poetic language, the way in which poets create and communicate with their audiences, with other poets, and with themselves; the poetic language that allows poets to create and make sense of the world. In a similar vein, Anastasia, a white poet in her 30s mentioned: "…we [poets] spend a lot of time looking at the world around us, and poets tend to be reflective and introspective, and they find similarities with each other…poets start talk [among them] immediately." As Brianda, a Latina poet in her 50s, shared with me: "we [poets] are people who are in love with what we have to say, and also with how to say it…poetry builds community, partly because we are outsiders [poets] who find others who speak the same language." Critical studies have been conductive on the role of language in spoken word poetry's community function (see Reyes 2006; Fisher 2003, 2005).

Shared language (including the poetic language) is an element that facilitates the creation of cohesive communities around the practice of spoken word poetry. However, one fundamental question emerged as I was collecting data was: what is the role that the city/urban environment plays in the creation and use of this language? I found some clues. The urban environment feeds this language and helps poets identify as members of a community. The city provides poets with a particular language that may be unknown in other cities. Milwaukee is not only a city but is a constant source of language, language that transforms overtime and is used and manipulated by poets. Leah, who has written intensively about Milwaukee, shared the following thoughts with me:

> "I write about the city, and the city gives me language, and it gives me architecture, and history, and communities…. I was always in love with the language of the city, and I always thought the language of this place was so amazing, you know, Kinnickinnic Ave[23], how can't you dance to that?...it's just full of funny little idioms and rituals…I wrote a poem in which I say something like: Milwaukee within the city within the city within the city within the city…"

It is worth to reflect on Leah's conceptualization of Milwaukee as "the city within the city within the city…" Milwaukee is multiple cities that provide poets with elements with which they build a unique poetic language. The city, in this case, can be seen as a spring from which linguistic and poetic elements emerge and feed poets' work constantly.

A common *poetic language,* the one that all poets use to communicate among them and with their audiences, coupled with a *local language* built upon physical, symbolic, and historical elements of the city, is one of the reasons why, in Milwaukee and other contexts,

23 Kinnickinnic Avenue runs from Milwaukee downtown to Cudahy (close to the General Mitchell International Airport). It is one of the landmarks of the Bay View area (see Winkler 2016).

we observe that poetry communities, of people that probably otherwise would never have contact, are created. As Mario, a Latino poet in his 50s, commented when talking about the relationship between community and spoken word poetry: "poetry communities are places of cross-cultural conversations." The diversity (i.e., racial, sexual, age, occupation, etc.) that can be observed in some spoken word poetry communities is largely thanks to a common language: a bridge that allows people from different backgrounds to interact in a neutral island, inclusive, a territory called poetry.

Vulnerability

The first time that this concept emerged in my ethnography was at an open mic I observed in the East Side in the fall of 2019. One of the participants, a young female Latina poet, performed a poem titled "Because I am Vulnerable." In this poem she described diverse daily-life threats that made her a vulnerable person. I found three of the verses towards the end of the poem particularly interesting: "…this is what I am / a vulnerable woman / as all my fellow humans…" She was right, all humans are vulnerable. We are permanently threatened by millions of natural, biological, and social forces. The practice of spoken word poetry is, as Chepp (2012:230) argues, closely related to lived experience:

> The subject matter of African American spoken word art forms [and I extend it to spoken word poetry performed by any individual] are often rooted in lived experiences; that is, they tend to draw upon the actual history of the performer or the community to which the performer belongs.

It is precisely because people's lived experience is always vulnerable, that vulnerability is one of the forces that push individuals to create communities around poetry (Johnson 2017; Somers-Willet 2009). Spoken word poetry, as any other art form, is in part an instrument to make sense of the world (including its calamities). This is acknowledged and recognized by

some poets as one of the key elements of the community dimension of poetry. However, the concept of vulnerability is not present evenly across groups. Out of the twenty-four (24) poets I interviewed, the following proportion by group mentioned it during the interviews: five (5) out of eight (8) Black participants, six (6) out of eight (8) Latina/o participants, and two (2) out of eight (8) white participants. Thus, when discussing the community dimension of spoken word poetry in the Milwaukee context, the concept of vulnerability appears to be more relevant among communities of color.

Mario mentioned the following about vulnerability: “It [poetry] shows your vulnerability, and when you show vulnerability, you have empathy with others.” Mario mentioned a key word: empathy. According to him, empathy is a consequence of showing how vulnerable we are. Within poetry communities, strong bonds are developed automatically because individuals are capable of understanding each other as they are showing who they are in a transparent way. Also, the act of performing poetry puts the performer in a vulnerable position while in front of an audience, so the development of empathy among poets plays a central role in the creation of poetry communities—this has been showed by Bagwell (2021). In this regard, David, a Black poet in his 40s, mentioned: “Poetry is about experience, it is all about human experience… I think community is about being able to connect with people who are willing to be vulnerable, as you are." David, as all poets, are vulnerable both in the social world and within their communities (especially while performing in front of an audience). From his view, the strong connection that he feels for his poetry community, largely comes from the fact that all have the same willingness to show their vulnerability and show that all are on the same journey, facing similar threats (see Bagwell 2021). Finally, it is worth to quicky elaborate on a secondary concept that emerged in around six interviews: listening. The format of spoken word

poetry, that privileges and promotes the act of listening (usually spoken word poets and their audiences are very good listeners), facilitates the development of empathy regarding vulnerability. In this regard, Melissa argued:

> …poems give you a very bold invitation to listen, and our culture is so much 'speak first and listen second' but the posture you have when you come to a poem is 'you listen first', and I think when you are prepared to listen, you open yourself up to hear something, and see something from somebody else's eyes.

Interestingly, the concept of vulnerability was one of the vehicles through which, especially Latina/o and Black poets, explained the reason why communities are formed around the practice of spoken word poetry in the context of Milwaukee. Meanwhile, four (4) out of eight (8) white participants identified this phenomenon as a consequence of having similar interests—this was also the case of some participants of color (two (2) out of eight (8) Latina/o and one (1) out of eight (8) Black). The fact that most participants who discussed the concept of 'vulnerability' belong to communities of color, may be an example of how diverse forms of inequality that are present in the city have a resonance in poetry communities, and specifically, shape the way minority poets interpret the community dimension of spoken word poetry; while everybody is vulnerable, some individuals, specially individuals of color in a city like Milwaukee, are more vulnerable, and in consequence, experience vulnerability in different ways.

The 'Safe Space'

Finally, the notion of the 'safe space,' which is also related to the concept of 'vulnerability,' is critical to understand the role of spoken word poetry in the community building and identity formation process in the Milwaukee context. The practice of spoken word poetry goes beyond the boundaries of art. Poets' goals in performing their work are

not only limited to artistic ends, rather, in some cases, poetry is the vehicle through which a particular individuals or collectives achieve their goals. Out of the twenty-four (24) poets I interviewed, sixteen (16) reported being participants of activities (initiatives, organizations, or programs) that involve the practice of spoken word poetry for non-artistic purposes. To name some of them, Alex, a white poet in his 70s, co-founded a program that brings poetry nights to Wisconsin state prisons. Briana collaborates with a local organization called Still Waters Collective (founded by the current Milwaukee poet laureate, Dasha Kelly Hamilton), that promotes diverse poetry-related activities such as workshops, summer camps, and afterschool projects among youth in disadvantaged communities across the city. Mario, who for more than thirty years has created spaces for Mexican and Central American immigrants to learn and practice spoken word poetry in different areas of the city and beyond, but particularly in the South and North Sides. Finally, Anastasia collaborates with a local organization that curates poetry events (including open mics where any poet can participate) across the city.

Yes, Alex, Briana, Dasha, Mario, and Anastasia are primarily poets. They belong to different groups and "scenes" throughout the city. However, they generate 'safe spaces' through poetry. Spaces where everyone is welcome, where every individual has a place in the table. Spaces where 'vulnerability' is mitigated with friendship and support. All this through different forms of poetry-related activities. As Briana commented "we create, as a collective, safe atmospheres…and it's not fake, it is real, completely real, everybody is valued here." It does not matter if it is in a prison, in a school, in a bar, or in a museum. Wherever there is a group of poets performing their poetry, there is a 'safe space.' Being in a 'safe space,' being invited to a table where everybody has a seat, is an atmosphere conductive to developing strong community ties. Spoken word poetry has been

acknowledged by eighteen (18) out of the twenty-fours (24) poets I interviewed as a 'safe space' (some individuals employed different terminology to refer to this concept) where empathy is abundant, and vulnerability shared and mitigated.

DISCUSSION

Spoken word poetry is a complex machinery, an immense universe through which we can explore several areas of society and the city (Cheep 2016; Isler et al. 2015; Johnson 2017; Novak 2020). In analyzing the current Milwaukee spoken word poetry scene, this ethnography has revealed important findings. First, the way the scene is configurated and functions. As I discussed in the previous section, the multiple patterns of segregation and inequality predominant in Milwaukee (see Levine 2020) have a resonance in the configuration of the scene. The current Milwaukee's spoken word poetry can be seen as a "scene of scenes" where what I call 'neighborhood scenes' and 'confluent scenes' comprise a complex network of spaces where thousands of local poets perform every week. One important aspect that is worth highlight here is the critical role that local organizations, mostly by forming 'confluent scenes,' play in the diversification, promotion, and cultivation of talent. It is particularly these kinds of scenes the ones that, by building bridges between diverse poetry (and artistic) communities across the city, promote the heterogenization of this art form in the city. One of the main findings of this ethnography is that the configuration of the local scene is shaped by the city's sociodemographic patterns. However, it also shows, that over the last few decades, it has been becoming a more diverse place, and most importantly, a place of cross-cultural conversation that has been, little by little, erasing boundaries between racial/ethnic groups. Moreover, this ethnography has also contributed to understanding both the different formats in which spoken word is practiced

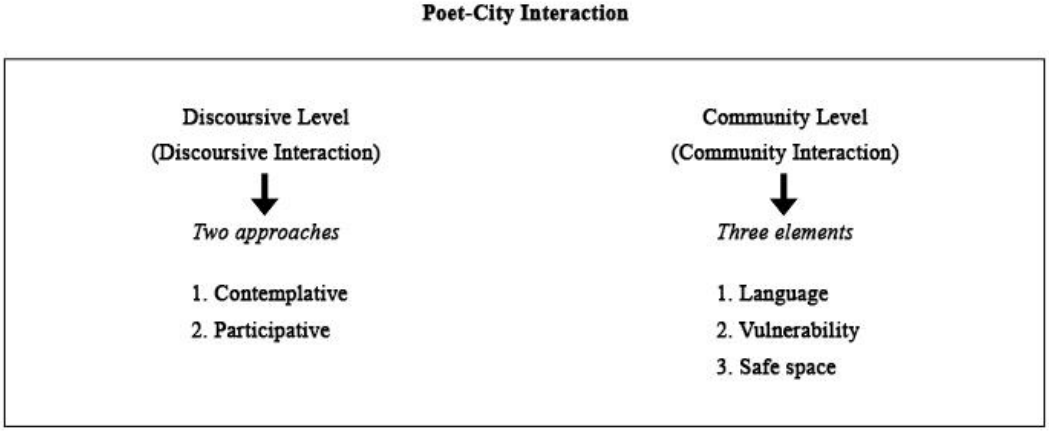
in the city, as well as the multiple actors that make possible the diverse events that take place in Milwaukee.

Apart from analyzing the complex functioning and configuration of the Milwaukee poetry scene (or scenes), this ethnography also aimed at examining poets' interaction with the city. This chapter is primarily focused on two levels of poet-city interaction: (1) 'discursive interaction' and (2) 'community interaction.' Consistent with previous studies focused on the connection between the urban environment and artistic production (do Cebreiro and Villar 2011; Sutton 2004), as well as the community dimension of spoken word poetry (Cheep 2016; Isler et al. 2015; Johnson 2017), this ethnography reveals that in most cases the city shapes poets' discourse and work and the practice of this particular art form is a catalyst and propeller of the creation and strengthening of community ties. While results do not suggest a different pattern in the Milwaukee context, the central findings of this ethnography are circumscribed in the variances among groups in their understanding and approach to both 'discursive' and 'community' interactions with the city.

Regarding 'discursive interaction,' this ethnography has shown that while white poets are more prone to have a 'contemplative' approach to their 'discursive interaction' with the city, minority poets tend to have a 'participative' approach as they tend to include themselves in the city, whereas their counterparts tend to develop more descriptive poetic representations of the city. This dissimilar integration into the city and individual position in relation to the city is something that should be further examined. This pattern suggests that Milwaukee's sociodemographic configuration, coupled the multiple forms of inequality present in the city, do have an effect on poets' themes, discourse, and uses of poetry, and also, in the ways poetry appears within their work and their own position within such poems (and performances).

Based on the twenty-four (24) interviews I conducted, and the multiple poetry events I observed, I identified three key elements that are pivotal in spoken word poetry's ability to promote the generation and strengthening of community ties: 'language,' 'vulnerability,' and the concept of 'safe space.' Specifically, when talking about vulnerability, and the ability of spoken word poetry to mitigate that feeling (and being able to create communities), another race/ethnic-based variance emerged. While most white individuals (and also a few individuals of color) identified the 'shared interest/hobby' as one of main pillars of the community dimension of poetry, participants of color, especially Black individuals, identified the 'shared/common vulnerability' as the main community-based poetry's feature. This is also a very important finding as it shows (once again) the powerful influence of Milwaukee's profound inequalities on the way poets discuss and understand the community dimension of poetry. Finally, as confirmed by most interviewees, spoken word poetry communities (including physical spaces where it is practiced) are perceived as 'safe spaces' where vulnerability and threats are mitigated by empathy and diverse forms of community, intellectual, and artistic interaction/exchange. Figure 5 provides a summarize of the above concepts.

Figure 5: Interactional Levels, Approaches, and Key Elements



A quick note on the effects of the pandemic

Unlike other artistic communities, the Milwaukee spoken word scene experienced a smooth transition from in-person to virtual events in the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic. As most of my interviewees reported, given that poetry events do not require any major infrastructure, it was possible to migrate most events (i.e., poetry nights, open mics) quickly. One interesting aspect that emerged in some interviews was that some poets appeared to understand social distancing as a positive aspect for their poetry communities, as first it was more convenient for them to meet from home and being able to attend all recurrent events, and also to reach audiences that are not necessarily familiar with their activities. For example, the annual poetry festival I mentioned before, benefited from the virtual format because more people participated (both audience and poets), and they invited poets from other parts of the country, and some internationals, to participate and interact with local poets. This is something extremely positive.

Given that I started this ethnography before the pandemic, and I continued it throughout it, I had the opportunity to observe events both in person and virtually. While overall formats and protocols (particularly of open mics and poetry nights) were replicated just as in their regular format, the virtual events presented two interesting characteristics. First, more diverse audiences. The fact that most of those events were open to public and got promoted in social media, the roster of performers and members of the audience was more diverse. This is aligned with what some participants argued: virtual events brought more diversity and participation to our activities.

Second, analytical attitude. Usually, in poetry events the performer (or master of ceremonies) is located on a stage from where they perform. The fact that in the online format there was not a (physical) stage, and it was more like a round table (like a seminar

room), turned the setting into one more conductive to commenting or analyzing performances. In some cases, rather than being a performance, it was like a roundtable in which artists wanted other participants' opinions/feedback on their work. This was a continuous pattern in the different virtual events I observed since the pandemic hit. More research needs to be done on the multiple effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on spoken word poetry (and other forms of poetry) in American cities.

CONCLUSION

This ethnography has allowed me to explore the fascinating world of the Milwaukee spoken word poetry. I confess that conducting this research was like being in a room surrounded by doors; every time I opened one and got into that room, there was larger number of doors waiting to be opened. Spoken word poetry is frequently perceived as a hobby, as a trend, or even as a strategy that helps businesses to attract diverse audiences to consume (particularly at open mics). Spoken word poetry, and particularly spoken word poetry in such an interesting and fascinating city like Milwaukee, embodies an opportunity to study not only the complexity and multiple dimensions of this phenomenon, but also other aspects of the socioeconomic and urban composition of the city. As I have explained in the previous section, in this chapter I only analyzed a few aspects of the Milwaukee's spoken word poetry universe, nevertheless, it attempts to contribute to the growing body of sociological literature focused on the connection between cultural production and the local environment, as well as art-based communities. Also, results presented in this chapter build on the large body of literature on the diverse forms of inequalities and segregation in Milwaukee by showing the impact of the individual experience on the conceptualization, creation, and performance of spoken word poetry. Finally, this chapter also unveils the

pivotal role that diverse forms of spoken word poetry play in the community creation process and identity formation. The case of Milwaukee in this regard is particularly interesting as, even with high levels of race-based segregation and inequality, poetry communities are cohesive, and are becoming more diverse. This ethnography provides an overview on the critical contribution of spoken word poetry to the development and strengthening of community ties that, as many studies suggest, are pivotal in the improvement of people's lives, particularly disadvantaged populations.

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CHAPTER III

INSTAPOETRY IN MILWAUKEE: SELF-REPRESENTATION, PLATFORMIZATION, AND IDENTITY

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Over the last decade, Instapoetry, a new form of social media-based production, distribution, and consumption of poetry, has been popularized around the globe. While scholarship on this literary form is recent and somewhat sparse, researchers have conducted studies focusing on diverse dimensions of Instapoetry such as its codes, conventions, and aesthetics; its relationship with activism and social movements; and the way it is used by individuals to construct, reaffirm, and perform their identities. Compared to other forms of social media-based literature, Instapoetry has received relatively little scholarly attention, and only few studies have approached this phenomenon ethnographically. Drawing on ten (10) interviews with active Milwaukee Instapoets, this study examines the status and popularity of this form of poetic expression in the city, and the potential effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on Milwaukee Instapoets' work and publication patterns. It also investigates the influence of Instapoets' racial/ethnic/gender identity on their publications and the ways Milwaukee's sociodemographic composition and race-based inequalities resonate in those individuals' poems. Results derived from this study reveal that some poets use Instapoetry to acquire social and symbolic capital to be used in launching/pushing their literary careers in more traditional settings (editorial and spoken word). Also, it shows that the Covid-19 pandemic did influence Instapoets' works' thematic composition but not publication patterns. Finally, aligned with previous research, this chapter shows that Instapoetry is a powerful tool for self-representation, as well as the construction, reaffirmation, and performance of racial, ethnic, and gender identities.

INTRODUCTION

Instapoetry is an emerging form of poetic expression that uses Instagram (and occasionally other social media) as a main platform of production, dissemination, and consumption of poetry (Khilanani 2020). One of the central characteristics of Instapoetry, and something that differentiates it from written and spoken word poetry, is that it incorporates images and other visual resources such as old-fashioned typographies, illustrations, photography, and others (Grubnic 2020; Paquet 2019). Since its emergence in 2010, Instagram has impacted social, economic, and urban life in diverse ways (Caliandro and Graham 2020). Scholars have studied the intersection of Instagram with diverse aspects of social life like traveling and tourism (Fatanti and Suyadnya 2015; Mele, Kerkhof and Cantoni 2021; Smith 2018), sports (Hull, Kim, and Stilwell 2019; Pegoraro, Comeau, and Frederick 2018; Rahbari 2019; Toffoletti and Thorpe 2018), art , (MacDowall and de Souza 2018), and activism and social mobilization (Ardèvol, Martorell, and San Cornelio 2021; Hirji 2021; Kidd and McIntosh 2016; Linbary, Corple, and Cooky 2020; Stanley 2020), among others.

Over the last few years, scholars have studied Instapoetry from diverse perspectives drawing on different methodological approaches. Such studies have revealed that Instapoetry tends to be used primarily by minorities, and allows underrepresented communities to construct, reinforce, and perform their identities (Khilnani 2021; Manning 2020; see also Paquet 2019). Others have shown that Instapoetry has codes, conventions, formats, and aesthetics that facilitates self-expression, and appears to have a strong component of self-literature (Grubnic 2020; Paquet 2019). Finally, scholars have devoted attention to the analysis of specific well-known Instapoets and their contributions to diverse areas of social life like activism and minority rights (Adek and Satria 2019; Kruger 2017).

While previous studies on Instapoetry have been critical to understand the basis of this phenomenon, its characteristics, and relevance of its study, less attention has been paid to studying poets as subjects of analyses. The focus tends to be on the phenomenon itself or the analysis of certain Instapoets' work or career. Drawing on ten (10) interviews with active Milwaukee Instapoets, this study attempts to address the following research questions: (1) What is the current situation, popularity, and scope of Instapoetry in the Milwaukee context?; (2) Did the Covid-19 pandemic modify Instapoets' work, discourse, and/or publication patterns? If so, how? Are there other events associated with these changes?; (3) What themes are dominant among those Instapoets' work?; and (4) Do they see their racial/gender identity and the multiple local inequalities existing in the city shaping their discourse and poems? If so, how?

Findings derived from this study reveal that even though the poetry culture in Milwaukee is, and has been historically strong, Instapoetry appears to be a relatively uncommon practice in the city. Borrowing Nieborg's and Poell's (2018) concept of 'platformization,' I find that the majority of Milwaukee Instapoets' final goal within the field is not becoming a well-known Instapoet. Rather, they are using the platform to accumulate social and symbolic capital that can be instrumental in launching/pushing their career in traditional channels (i.e., the editorial industry, spoken word, poetry festivals, etc.). This study also shows that the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on Instapoets' thematic approach (themes they wrote about during the pandemic) but not on their publication patterns (how often they published). Finally, aligned with previous studies on the identity and self-expression dimension of Instapoetry (Khilnani 2021; Manning 2020; Paquet 2019), this study shows that in the context of Milwaukee, gender, sexual, and racial identity plays a fundamental role in Instapoets' use and understanding of Instapoetry as a

tool of self-expression and construction of the self. This study also shows that while important aspects of the city's sociodemographic composition might be present in Instapoetry, most poets' writing focus on personal experiences and anecdotes through which the city might not be as visible as in other forms of poetry (i.e., traditional written poetry and spoken word poetry).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Digital vis-a-vis Physical Spaces

One of the major changes that digital media has brought is the way cultural products are produced, distributed, and consumed (Nieborg and Poell 2018). Digital media, (i.e., websites, video games, social media, and mobile applications) (see Bolter 2019) have become multidimensional spaces where actors involved in different cultural system interact and exchange information, ideas, and/or products (Arora 2012; Baoill 2004). Digital/virtual space has been conceptualized in a wide variety of ways; however, scholars have agreed that it is not a monolithic structure, but a plurality of networks shaped by the actors involved in it (Haythornthwaite 2005; see also Sassen 2002). Scholars have paid attention to how people's daily life is shaped by their use of and experiences in the different platforms they use for different purposes (Özbaş-Anbarlı 2021). Due to their impact and massive use around the world, there is a growing body of literature looking at specific social media and their effects and uses in different contexts (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke 2008; Ross et al. 2009; Valenzuela et al. 2009).

Several scholars have analyzed the impact of digital media (and particularly social media like Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube) on different artistic and cultural industries. In a recent article, Nieborg and Poell (2018:4276) have elaborated on this problem drawing

on the concept of 'platformization', that they define as "the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries." According to the authors, it is through this process that cultural production has changed since the emergence and generalized use of social media, and several cultural fields have modified their internal dynamics. Using this concept, Tomasena (2019) analyzes the phenomenon of Book Tube[24] through a digital ethnography. Drawing on Bourdieu (1993, 1996), Tomasena states that the case of BookTubers (from the acronym book + YouTuber) "illustrates how 'platformization' allows the social and symbolic capital acquired on digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Twitter to be transferred to other cultural industries" (Tomasena 2019:9; see also Sorensen and Mara 2013).

Digital media has not only modified the way in which actors within a given field interact and exchange products or ideas, but also the mechanisms through which actual cultural products are produced, as well as the experience of consuming them. In this sense, through the analysis of spoken word poetry on digital platforms, de Haas (2018) has found that thanks to social media and video technology, spoken word poets have been able to recreate atmospheres of immediacy, intimacy, and interpersonal interaction with the virtual world—this was very visible during the pandemic when cultural events started to migrate to virtual settings, providing participants with a new experience. Similarly, in her analysis of YouTube poetry, Sacks (2020:5-16) highlights a form of performative art (in this case

24 According to Perkins (2017:352) BookTube is an "online community that began during the 2010s, which grew out of the YouTube vlogging trend. Within this community people share everything and anything related to books."

spoken word poetry) is transformed in a virtual setting and their advantages in terms of reaching larger audiences:

> Digital spaces, which limit material or bodily identifications, have emphasized the idea of the 'voice' purely as a metaphor for political participation. Performance poetry highlights the role of the physical voice: a corporeal manifestation of the embodied subject. […] Posted online, the poem becomes both an object of cultural consumption, and a discrete event for each of its consumers in sequence. However, each scene of consumption incorporates competing publics…Even as the words and sounds are preserved, then, the poem's online life yields an alternative, more diffuse structure of engagement. It empowers the individual viewer to produce her own poetic community while limiting the power of a pre-existing, spatially bound community.

Tierney (2013) has argued that there is a strong impact of the online activity on the physical world as conversations taking place online transcend their virtual boundaries and go to the physical world, where they are likely to shape a wide variety of aspects of social life. Grandinetti and Ecenbarger (2018) explore this phenomenon through the analysis of the game *Pokémon Go*, that some years ago became a worldwide trend and stimulated the scholarly investigation on the relationship between the virtual and physical space. As Grandinetti and Ecenbarger (2018) explain, due to technical elements of the game such as augmented reality and GPS, it was a powerful tool for the creation of space that modified the physical interaction between individuals and the places their inhabit. Scholars have also approached social media as a tool to improve public space. Drawing on Twitter data, Kim, Chae, and Park (2018) analyzed the way people used such social network in the so-called "High Line" in New York, and found that public space evaluation, as well as urban

planning and policy, can be done more effectively by analyzing people's patterns of use of social media, and their intersection with the physical space.

The 'Instagramization' of Social Action and Self-representation

In the United States alone the number of Instagram users has grown from 107.2 million in 2019 to 118.9 million in 2021 (Statista 2021a). Recent estimations suggest that there are close to one billion monthly active users in the world, which means that roughly 1/8 of the world population is present in the platform (Statista 2021b). Since its release in the fall of 2010, Instagram has been one of the dominant and more used social media platforms in the world, and has deeply shaped several aspects of the social and economic in the countries and regions in which it is present. Now, with the recent consolidation of "Meta" (new conglomerate of social networks), it is expected that Instagram, as well as its functions and uses, will continue to expand, grow, and provide new services and possibilities to its users. Both the number of users, and most importantly the degree to which Instagram is embedded in those individuals' lives, have grown dramatically in the last few years. For that reason, as Caliandro and Graham (2020:2) suggest "Instagram has an enormous impact on people's everyday lives on many levels and so clearly it deserves rigorous academic attention." Over the last five years or so, scholars have produced a vast body of literature both drawing on Instagram data to approach diverse social/urban phenomena, and on the multiple intersections of Instagram with social life.

Due to its immediacy, easy access, and technical features that facilitate the creation of communities with common interests/goals, Instagram (just as other platforms like Twitter and Facebook) has been pivotal for social mobilization and activism. The influence of social media on social mobilization and activism gained academic attention in the wake of the Arab Spring, when scholars analyzed the roles that Facebook and Twitter played in

processes like the Egyptian and Libyan revolutions (Al Omoush, Yaseen, and Alma'Aitah 2012; Alhindi, Talha, and Sulong 2012; Arafa and Armstrong 2016; Lewinski and Dima 2012; Papaioannou and Olivos 2013). Important movements like feminism (Hirji 2021; Linbary, Corple, and Cooky 2020), queer and body positivity (Stanley 2020), and the environmental movement (Ardèvol, Martorell, and San Cornelio 2021) have been widely studied in recent years. Scholars have also focused on analyzing the role of Instagram on diverse social movements around the globe (Kidd and McIntosh 2016).

Given that Instagram is primary visual, it has had a strong impact on the industry of tourism in recent years. There is a growing body of literature on this dimension of Instagram. For example, in a recent study Smith (2018) has shown that Instagram has not only the capacity to modify international traveling patterns, but also to modify the narratives and views of destinations in the eyes of tourists (see also Smith 2021). Other studies like Fatanti and Suyadnya 's (2015) and Mele, Kerkhof, and Cantoni's (2021) have demonstrated that Instagram has strongly shaped the way destinations are perceived, promoted, and valued by travelers around the globe.

Another area that Instagram has widely impacted, and scholars have put particular attention on, is the sports world (Hull, Kim, and Stilwell 2019; Pegoraro, Comeau, and Frederick 2018; Rahbari 2019; Toffoletti and Thorpe 2018). For example, in their analysis of the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup, Pegoraro, Comeau, and Frederick (2018) found that social media (and particularly Instagram in this case) is a powerful tool to challenge gender-based stereotypes in sports, and it is being used by sports fans to regenerate perceptions of women athletes, particularly in male-dominated sports like soccer. In similar vein, through an analysis of baseball major leagues, Hull, Kim, and Stilwell (2019) explain

that social media has also democratized sports by generating content that ethnic and linguistic minorities in the United States can get access to.

Even though some scholars have questioned the community formation capacity of some social media platforms (Burry 2017), most studies on social media, and particularly on Instagram, have pointed out its strong community component (see Blight, Ruppel, and Schoenbauer 2017). Apart from being able to shape (and in some cases radically transforming) diverse aspects of social and economic life, Instagram has also shaped the urban/physical space. This effect has been explored by scholars of art and culture that have looked at, not only at the effects of the use of Instagram on the urban/physical space, but also the ways in which the artistic production and consumption (also linked to Instagram) has generated those changes. For example, in their analysis of the effects of Instagram use on the consumption of street art and graffiti, MacDowall and de Souza (2018) show that the language, protocols, and architecture of Instagram have substantially shape the way street art is consumed in large cities.

Instapoetry: A Novel Form of Poetic Expression

Compared to other forms of social media-based poetry, Instapoetry has historically received relatively little scholarly attention. However, in recent years scholars from different disciplines have started to study this phenomenon in a deeper way. When approaching Instapoetry scholars have usually had two problems: one related to its characteristics and boundaries, and another one related to its literary composition—whether it must be considered as a genre (or subgenre) of poetry. While most definitions have captured similar technical and aesthetic features, they tend to approach its literary value differently. Some scholars like Grubnic (2020:146) see Instapoetry as a genre: "[I]nstapoetry [or Instagram poetry] as a neologism denoting a particular genre of poetry

characterized by the instantaneity afforded by social media platforms like the photo and video-based app Instagram, the genre's primary mode of dissemination." Others, like Khilanani (2021:136), consider that the fact that Instapoetry is by definition a kind of poetry that is disseminated and consumed in a digital form and in the digital space, does not turn it into a genre as it exists within the boundaries of traditional poetry:

> Instapoetry is the name given to a new form of poetry that is consciously designed for circulation on social media platforms including Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr[25]…The sonnet or Haiku-like structure of the poem, the frequent line breaks, and the combination of the literary and visual material attract the attention of the audience at the level of form.

Besides the way scholars classify Instapoetry, what makes it different from other literary expressions is a set of specific characteristics. Instapoems consist of a short poem (usually around five verses) that is usually accompanied by an illustration related to the theme or topic of the poem. Unlike traditional poetry that is concerned with any kind of human experience, preoccupation, and problem, Instapoetry usually deals with the search of identity, as well as sad or traumatic experiences (Grubnic 2020; Manning 2020; Paquet 2019).

Another important characteristic of the aesthetics of Instapoetry is the emotional and nostalgia loaded in its visual components. As Grubnic (2020:147) has pointed out Instapoetry "exemplifies visual aspects of nostalgic aesthetics that further corroborate the consistent expression of analogue nostalgia in popular culture." The majority of instapoems

25 Even though by definition Instapoetry has its roots and primarily takes place on Instagram, some scholars hold the idea that poetry published in other platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Tumblr, should also be recognized as Instapoetry when it follows its format and aesthetics.

tend to employ typewriting styles, old paper, etc., to generate a visual atmosphere of nostalgia that adds to the poem's theme. This aesthetic is what Grubnic (2020) calls "nosthetics." In similar vein, in her study approaching Instapoetry as a self-help form of literature, Paquet (2019:299) states, "the use of old-fashioned technology, such as typewriters, contrasts the idea of the poets working solely online, adding depth to their brand."

In studying Instapoetry, scholars have found two relevant features regarding its demographic composition and tendencies of use. First, recent studies show that Instapoetry tends to be dominated by women of color (Khilnani 2021; Manning 2020; Paquet 2019). In fact, the most popular and worldwide recognized Instapoet, Rupi Kaur, is an Indian Canadian woman who, besides her success in the literary field with the publication of two books and millions of copies sold around the world, has also become an activist who advocates for female and minority rights (see Kruger 2017; Wilson 2017a, 2017b). As Manning (2020) suggests, using Instagram, a free and accessible platform for all users, to disseminate poetry, has generated a democratization of this cultural product, and challenged established ways of production and consumption of poetry within the literary field. This has greatly contributed to the representation of minorities within Instapoetry. Second, since Instagram is a shared-image platform in which users are free to curate their profiles without any restriction or cohesion other than the legal policies and format of the platform, Instapoetry (as well as other uses of the platform, as I have highlighted earlier in this review of literature), is a powerful tool for self-expression, self-representation, and identity formation and reaffirmation. In this sense, scholars have developed important studies on the female self-representation through Instapoetry (Manning 2020), the self-help dimension of Instapoetry (Paquet 2019), and (de)colonialism, feminism, and geospatial narratives

(Kruger 2017). Important studies on Instapoetry's aesthetics (mentioned above) have also been developed (Grubnic 2020; Khilnani 2021).

Apart from analyzing diverse aspects of Instapoetry, either as a genre, movement, or social media trend, scholars have also developed in-depth analyses of specific Instapoets for diverse purposes. For example, drawing on a set of poems by Instapoet Lang Leav, Adek and Satria (2019) analyzed linguistic and literary elements of the poet's work in order to identify the extent to which that particular content was accessible for a potential audience. The authors conclude that even though Leav was known for her innovations in terms of her poetic and linguistic project, her work is very similar to traditional structures of poetry. However, they found that her popularity and success might be linked to the linguistic and conceptual accessibility of her work. Similarly, Kruger (2017) provides an in-depth analysis of the career and work of Instapoet Rupi Kaur, paying particular attention to her activism and relationship with feminism and minority rights. Though the analysis of diverse dimensions of Kaur's work, Kruger (2017) shows the relevance of Instapoetry as a tool of social expression, as well as the way through which minorities support their causes through it.

As this review of literature shows, there is a vast body of literature on social media, the digital space, as well as the impact of Instagram on diverse areas of social, economic, and urban life. Regarding the relationship between social media and the literary field, scholars have explored diverse forms of literature and the ways they exist within social media and coexist within their traditional forms. In this sense, the concept of 'platformization' (Nieborg and Poell 2018) has been particularly beneficial to analyze the interaction and influence between digital and traditional forms of literature, literary criticism, and cultural consumption. Literature on Instapoetry is still very limited, scholars

have done important contributions to the study of this noble phenomenon drawing on theoretical analysis or secondary data analysis. However, no study has focused on the study of Instapoets through traditional ethnographic methods (in this case interviews). Therefore, the present study has the potential to build on literature on the relationship between social media and the literary field, and naturally on Instapoetry, by analyzing the connection between Instapoets, their environment, and use of the platform in the context of a hyper segregated American city.

DATA AND METHODS

The data that this chapter draws on was collected during the same period and using similar criteria, documents, and analytical procedures as the one used in Chapter II. Even at risk of being repetitive and redundant, I will provide all the information regarding data and methods I used in this chapter again.

This study draws on ten (10) interviews with Milwaukee Instapoets. This project, including materials and procedures of data collection, storage, and analysis, was fully approved by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board (IRB) on December 23, 2020, through an amendment[26] under file number 19.A.337. In the following subsection I provide detailed information about the sampling, data collection process, and analysis.

26 Given the similarities between participants interviewed for Chapter II and the present one, documents (i.e., informed consent, interview questions, and pre-interview questionnaire) just suffered slight variations that were approved by IRB. Thus, I said that this project was approved through an amendment as it was in the second version of the project when changes related to the data collection for a chapter on Instapoetry were submitted and approved.

Sampling

Just as I highlighted in the previous chapter, I determined a sample size of ten (10) participants based on Creswell's and Poth's (2016) approach to interview research that suggests a sample size between five and twenty-five participants for phenomenological research to avoid theoretical saturation. Using snowball sample techniques, as well as through a local poetry/literary organization that functioned as a gatekeeper who contacted me with different poetry groups/collectives around the city, I recruited participants based on two main criteria. First, residency: participants must have been living in the city of Milwaukee for at least three years before the day of the interview. Second, experience using Instagram (and additional social media platform) for poetry ends: participants must have been sharing their work on Instagram for at least one year before the day of the interview. In all cases, Instagram is their main platform for creation and dissemination of poetry. All participants included in the sample have an Instagram account fully dedicated to their poetic work (some of them have personal accounts as well). It is important to mention that three (3) out of the ten (10) participants have set their professional accounts in private mode, which means that only Instagram users that they approve are allowed to see the content they generate. Just as I did with participants interviewed for the previous chapter, in appreciation for their time and participation in the study, all of them were offered a $10.00 electronic gift card to a local bookstore that is also part of an organization that promotes and preserves local literature. All electronic gift cards were funded by me—no grant money was used to purchase them.

In this study I am also concerned with the potential influence of poets' racial/ethnic/gender identification on the themes of their poems and discourse in general (fourth research question). So, my sample includes five (5) African American, two (2)

Table 4: Demographics of Instapoets Interviewed

	African American	Latino/a	White
Gender			
F	80% (4)	50% (1)	33.3% (1)
M	20% (1)	50% (1)	66.6% (2)
Other	—	—	—
Age			
20-29	60% (3)	—	—
30-39	40% (2)	100% (2)	66.6% (2)
40-49	—	—	33.3% (1)
50-59	—	—	—
60-69	—	—	—
70 or older	—	—	—
Education			
Some college but not degree	40% (2)	50% (1)	—
Associates degree	—	—	—
Bachelor's degree	20% (1)	50% (1)	100% (3)
Graduate degree	40% (2)	—	—
Occupation			
Employed for wages (private sector)	40% (2)	50% (1)	66.6% (2)
Employed for wages (public sector)	20% (1)	—	—
Self-employed	20% (1)	—	—
Student	20% (1)	—	—
Retired	—	—	—
Other	—	50% (1)	33.3% (1)
Years living in the city			
3-5 years	—	—	—
5-10 years	20% (1)	—	—
More than 10 years	—	50% (1)	—
Whole life	80% (4)	50% (1)	100% (3)
Residence area			
North Side	40% (2)	—	33.3% (1)
South Side	40% (2)	50% (1)	—
East Side	20% (1)	50% (1)	33.3% (1)
West Side	—	—	—
Suburbs	—	—	33.3% (1)
Other	—	—	—
Years as Instapoets			
1-3 years	80% (4)	100% (2)	100% (3)
3-5 years	20% (1)	—	—
5-10 years	—	—	—
Published in traditional channels			
Yes	20% (1)	50% (1)	—
No	80% (4)	50% (1)	100% (3)
Poetry community affiliation			
Yes	80% (4)	—	66.6% (2)
No	20% (1)	100% (2)	33.3% (1)

() Total number of individuals in parenthesis

Latina/o, and three (3) white participants (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999). The three largest racial/ethnic groups in the city are represented in this sample. Finally, this sample comprises four (4) male and six (6) female participants (Handcock and Gile 2011). Most participants' age ranges between 30 and 40 years old. Table 4 displays the sample's demographic composition.

Data Collection

Just as I explained in the previous chapter, to collect interview data, I employed two instruments of data collection: (1) a pre-interview questionnaire and (2) an interview. In order to meet all the social-distancing measures set by the university and governmental authorities, interviews took place virtually (Janghorban, Roudsari, and Taghipour 2014) via *Zoom* between February 2 and March 22 of 2021, following the process below. Upon participants' participation confirmation (invitations were sent via email and/or social media), a formal invitation was sent with all the information about the study, along with a link to a calendar in which they were able to choose the date/time that worked best for them. To do this, I utilized a free software called *Calendly*.

After they choose the day/time of their interview, they automatically received an email with a link to the *Zoom* meeting and another one to the electronic pre-questionnaire interview (programmed and hosted in *Qualtrics*). The main objective of this instrument was to have a deep understanding of the demographic composition (i.e., age, gender and racial/ethnic self-identification, educational attainment, neighborhood of residency etc.) and professional background (i.e., years of experience within the local poetry field, experience publishing poetry on social media, etc.) of the sample (Phellas, Block, and Seale 2011). The list of questions that this questionnaire comprised can be found in Appendix E. Apart from

completing the questionnaire, participants also read and signed (electronically) an informed consent form approved by the IRB.

All interviews with poets lasted between 40 and 65 minutes. I divided interviews into three sections in order to gather the data I needed to address the research questions guiding this study (Creswell and Poth 2016). In the first section I asked questions regarding participants' experience within the poetry field, as well as their transition from traditional forms of poetry writing/performing/publishing (i.e., written or spoken word poetry) to the Instapoetry field (first research question). In the second section I focused on the potential effects of the Covid 19 pandemic and social distancing on their production and consumption patterns of poetry through Instagram (or other platforms) (second research question). Finally, in the third section I asked questions about the dominant thematic areas in their writing, the potential influence of their racial/ethnic/gender identification (as well as the city's urban and sociodemographic characteristics) on their writing (third and fourth research questions). In this section I also asked questions about potential non-artistic uses of Instapoetry (i.e., activism, commercial, etc.)—I asked similar questions to participants of Chapter II. Full list of questions can be found in Appendix F.

Analytic Strategy

Once I concluded all interviews, I manually transcribed them using the transcriptions generated automatically by *Zoom* as base. Just as I explained in the previous chapter, while these transcriptions were not accurate at all, they facilitated the transcription process and reduced the time I would spend in this process if I had not had them. Once transcriptions were edited and accurate, I saved them in text edit (.vtt) format.

Drawing on Saldaña (2016), I coded the interview transcriptions using "concept coding"—also known as "analytic coding"—techniques, as explained this in the "Data and

Methods" section of the previous chapter. Among the different coding methods that qualitative researchers and ethnographers use to analyze interview data, "concept coding" appears to be the most suitable for this study for two central reasons. First, because it allowed me to transform individual abstract and symbolic assertions and ideas into broader and concrete concepts instrumental in addressing the questions guiding this investigation. Second, because as several methodologists have concluded, "concept coding" is an effective coding method for grounded theory phenomenological ethnographic analyses (Corbin and Strauss 2014; Mihas 2014).

Just as I did in the previous chapter, I conducted the coding process in two stages. In the first one I created a set of fourteen (14) primary concepts that are central for this investigation and which the interview questions intended to capture—Appendix G displays the set of concepts and codes I used to identify them. Then, I manually allocated codes within each interview transcription, identifying the specific sections in which each concept was mentioned or elaborated by the participant. Codes were added within the text in each file (vff.). Apart from coding the actual transcriptions, I also broke down each interview into small passages/sections that I organized in an *Excel* file by concept and participant, which allowed me both to analyze the data by concept, and to compare outcomes across racial/ethnic and gender groups.

In the second stage of the process, I conducted a word-frequency test using *Nvivo 12*—similar to the one discussed in the previous chapter—in order to identify secondary concepts that, may not be considered in the first stage of the coding process, but were recurrent within a specific group or across participants. In doing so, I generated a word-frequency report and analyzed manually. Once I identified recurrent words that could have a potential connection with either the primary concepts, I examined in what way (if so) they

were related to them by reading them in the context of the categorization I assigned previously using the coding system included in Appendix G. This stage of the process also allowed me to recognize emerging concepts that strengthened my analysis of the data (Feng and Beher-Horenstein 2019).

While due to the nature of my research questions and interview data its analysis had to be highly interpretative, employing a "concept coding" approach allowed me to maintain the internal validity of the study and generate more accurate outcomes as I categorized and analyzed the data based on standardized concepts directly connected theoretical framework in which this study is embedded (Saldaña 2016), as well as the concepts that are central for this study.

RESULTS

This section is organized based on the four research questions guiding this study. First, I present results on the current situation, popularity, and scope of Instapoetry in the City of Milwaukee (first research question). Then, I present results on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on Milwaukee Instapoets' discourse and publication patterns (second research question). Finally, I present results on Instapoets' dominant themes, as well as the effects of the city's sociodemographic composition and racial/ethnic/gender identification on their work (third and fourth research questions). Results presented here derive from the ten (10) interviews with local Instapoets described in the previous section.

Instapoetry and 'Platformization' in the Context of Milwaukee

As discussed in the above review of literature, Instapoetry is a relatively new phenomenon that, while it has been expanding rapidly in the United States and other countries, is not popular everywhere (Manning 2020; Paquet 2019). The main problem I

faced to study the current Milwaukee Instapoetry scene was determining what an Instapoet is. As Pamela, a Latina Instapoet in her 30s told me, "Other kinds of poets [written-word and spoken-word poets] may also use social media, but Instapoets are the ones whose poetry-related activities primarily take place online." Pamela's statement is interesting as she suggests that, as a poet, using social media is not enough to be an Instapoet, rather, Instapoets are fully immerse in the online world in producing and distributing their work. When trying to recruit Instapoets for this study, it was extremely difficult to find individuals who fit in Pamela's conceptualization of Instapoet. As Chapters I and II have demonstrated, Milwaukee has historically had an extremely rich poetry culture, and particularly over the last few years, it has grown considerably. Throughout the ethnography presented in Chapter II, I was constantly trying to inquire into the Instapoetry scene through conversations with spoken-word poets, poetry promotors, local literary organizations, and other actors within the local poetry field. They would mention some names (some of the ones I interviewed for the present study), however, the local Instapoetry scene did not seem to be as rich as other forms of poetry in the city. Thus, based on this pattern, and given the fact that the practice of Instapoetry was not recognized among other communities as popular in Milwaukee, it is possible to assume that Instapoetry is a relatively uncommon practice in the city (as some of the Instapoets I interviewed also suggested).

While the relative unpopularity of Instapoetry in Milwaukee was an unexpected pattern, and embodies an ambitious research path to pursue in the future, my interviewees suggested some ideas that could be related to it. When I asked Theresa, a Black Instapoet in her 30s about the current situation of the Milwaukee Instapoetry scene, she said: "well, you know, if you have several open mics and poetry nights in every neighborhood, why do you wanna exist online?" Similarly, William, a white Instapoet in his 40s said, "As far as I

know, I am the only Instapoet in this area [his neighborhood], you know, we have Riverbar[27] [a bar with weekly poetry nights], CafeWest [a coffee shop with weekly open mics], and MilwaukeeLit [literature-based non-profit organization] … I'm a strange kind of poet." As William points out, the poetry scene (in this case spoken word) in his neighborhood is very rich. There are many spaces where poets can go perform, read, promote, and/or commercialize their work within blocks from their residences. This makes social media a secondary platform for some poets as they already belong to poetry communities where they can have face-to-face interaction with other poets and promote their work. Theresa's and William's statements are interesting as both are implying that in places (like Milwaukee) where poetry scenes are rich, poets tend to be less prone to invest time and resources to build and develop their careers in virtual settings (i.e., social media) as they participate in diverse poetry-related activities in person. Of course, there is not enough evidence to assume that this particular pattern could explain the relative unpopularity of Instapoetry in Milwaukee. However, it can be a clue for a future investigation that incorporates a wider and more diverse sample.

One of the central findings of this study is related to the concept of 'platformization' (Nieborg and Poell 2018; Tomasena 2019). Out of the ten (10) Instapoets I interviewed, only two (2) have also published their own work in traditional channels like books, literary magazines, anthologies, etc. (Table 4). While these publications have also presence in non-virtual communities, most of their activity as poets and current publications take place virtually. However, among the other eight (8), six (6) aim to publish a poetry book in the future and have used social media (Instagram) to accumulate symbolic

27 Real names of these venues/organizations were changed to guarantee the participant's anonymity.

and social capital[28] to launch a more successful career in a more traditional channel (i.e., editorial industry) (Bourdieu 1993, 1996; Nieborg and Poell 2018; Tomasena 2019). A good example of this is Zachary, a Black poet in his 30s who has been an Instapoet for over two years, and has a considerably large fan base from the United States and other countries. Regarding his career as Instapoet and his use of the platform, he said:

> I have almost a thousand followers. I post every day…I write a poem first and I select two or three lines that I think represent the essence of the poem. I put it there and people start commenting…I am sure that when I publish my book, it's gonna be very successful among the community I have created there [Instagram].

Even though Zachary is primarily an Instapoet, his main goal is to publish a book (he told me that he has been working on it for about a year) and using his influence and popularity on Instagram to push his writing career. The fact that 60% of the Instapoets I interviewed have similar goals and are using Instapoetry as an instrument to achieve them, provides an insight of a central characteristic of the Milwaukee Instapoetry scene: Instapoets appear to be more interested in publishing in traditional (physical) forms and use Instapoetry as an instrument that assures the potential success of their literary projects. Thus, it is not about Instapoetry itself, it is about what Instapoetry can give them to succeed in non-virtual settings (i.e., bookstores, poetry festivals, poetry awards, etc.).

The Effects of Covid-19 on Milwaukee Instapoetry

The Covid-19 pandemic had a substantial impact on cultural consumption, as well as community life. Once the pandemic hit, cultural and artistic events migrated to virtual

28 This finding is very similar to Tomasena's (2019) study of the phenomenon of BookTube. Just like in his study, 60% of the Milwaukee Instapoets I interviewed attempt to transplant symbolic and social capital accumulated through their performance on social media to other industries (in this case, the editorial).

settings. For example, as I exemplified in Chapter II, most local spoken-word poetry organizations and communities started to do their readings, workshops, and festivals via *Zoom*. Even though the virtual format prevented individuals from interacting in person, it also allowed poets to reach audiences that otherwise would not know their work. One of the objectives of the present study is to analyze if (and if so how) the Covid-19 pandemic modified Milwaukee Instapoets' discourse and/or publication patterns, as well as if there were specific events during the pandemic directly associated with the potential change (second research question).

Seven (7) out of ten (10) participants reported that the pandemic influenced their poetry at the thematic level. For example, Donald, a white poet in his 30s told me: "I would say that my main themes are love, relationships, things of that nature, but when Covid hit, I started posting poems about isolation, death, and other themes related to the pandemic…I really felt that my poetry changed." Similarly, Pamela told me, "I usually write about isolation and sadness. In the pandemic I started using hashtags like #Covid19, #CovidSucks, #CovidPoetry, and people reacted pretty well…I gained lots of followers during the quarantine." Both examples illustrate that either through the exploration of Covid-related themes, or linking their poems with Covid-based conversations/tendencies within Instagram, the pandemic had a resonance in their work and/or the way they presented it on the platform.

Regarding patterns, or format of publication, there is not enough evidence to support that the pandemic had a direct effect on this particular area. Out of ten (10) Instapoets, only one (1) reported that intensified her publication frequency. This pattern is particularly interesting as, while it would make sense to believe that poets would increase the number of poems posted or the frequency due to the relative free time that the pandemic

brought, they decided to keep their usual patterns for different reasons. For example, Donald explained: “you know how algorithms work, if you are not constant or interrupt your usual rhythm of publication, Instagram kicks your butt.” According to what Donald believes, and what he explained me in the interview, it is very important for content creators to understand the algorithms that govern their platforms. If an Instapoet has been posting a poem everyday between 4:00 pm and 6:00 pm, Instagram has learned such pattern and knows that due to the consistency of that activity, that user deserves to be more visible through the searches associated with the hashtags that a given poem is linked to. However, if that creator breaks that pattern, he/she could lose what he/she has won. For this reason, although Donald had more free time to write and post during the quarantine, he did not modify his publication patterns. Another example is Anna, a Black poet in her 30s who kept her usual pattern for a different reason: “When Covid hit Milwaukee and we had to be home for months, I decided not to spend a lot of time using social media. You know, I have a one-year-old and I rather spent time with her. I just kept publishing a poem every three days or so; when I opened my account, I started publishing once a week.”

Besides having more time to write and create, the Covid-19 pandemic also embodied an opportunity for some Instapoets to explore other languages, formats, and ways to communicate with their audiences. One example of this is William, who during the period he was in quarantine (around two months), experimented with a non-conventional form of Instapoetry. Every week he went for a walk and took a photo of an object (i.e., a piece of garbage on the floor, a bicycle, a plastic bag, a box, etc.) that could connect him with another person during times of isolation. Once he took that photo, he would write a poem on how a given object could connect him with someone else who was also isolated. Instead of posting a usual Instapoem (image with the poem), he posted the photo with the

whole poem written in the description of the photo. This project, according to him, allowed him to feel closer to his community (in the Southside of Milwaukee) and to document his experience through photos and poems. After that period, he kept posting his poems as usual. This is an example of how the flexibility of the platform and Instapoetry itself allows poets to experiment with their own work, and use different tools to reach new audiences.

Urban Experience and the Construction of the Self in Milwaukee Instapoetry

As Paquet's (2019) and Manning's (2020) studies have demonstrated, Instapoetry is a space where individuals tend to be focused on writing pieces that represent and reinforce their identity, as well as a practice where self-representation is performed. In fact, Paquet (2019:296) has gone beyond and suggested that Instapoetry "combines poetry and self-help literature." Results derived from this study are aligned with these works' findings as nine (9) out of ten (10) of Instapoets I interviewed reported that most of the poems they post in their accounts are closely related with their own individual experiences and reflect specific parts of their personalities and identities. Also, 50% of them mentioned that most of their poems are associated with negative or traumatic events that they experienced in the past. For example, Marissa, a Black woman in her 30s shared with me a story behind one of her most recent poems: "I wrote a poem about how I was scared to be inside Target after the Walmart shooting that we had in Texas[29] like a year ago…you know, I grew up in a tough part of the city; I am extremely scared of shootings." Marissa's case is extremely powerful because it is through a short poem that she externalizes a deep preoccupation and something that she is profoundly scared about. Marissa also told me that a vast majority of the poems she writes and posts on her account (which is private) are related to her

29 She is referring to a mass shooting occurred in El Paso, TX on August 3, 2019, where a gunman killed 23 people and injured other 23 inside a Walmart store.

experience as a Black woman and single mother. In this sense, she believes that her poems have helped people empathize and understand the obstacles she faces in her daily life: "someone reads my poem and says to me: ‘oh I didn't realize just how much anguish a Black single mother could have, or you know, whatever, and it's just like, well, this is our life." Marissa also told me that, inspired in the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, she wrote and posted a poem on this event, which gave her exposure beyond her own audience as she linked it with the ongoing conversation on this crime using hashtags like: #GeorgeFloyd, #BLM, and #JusticeForGeorgeFloyd. While this analysis does not show robust evidence of the influence of specific events taking place during the pandemic on Milwaukee Instapoets’ work, Melissa’s poem on George Floyd’s murder, and its resonance on Instagram is a good example of how Instapoetry is being used for non-artistic ends (i.e., protest, resistance), and how the platform’s tools allow poets to reach wider audiences and connect with their communities through their poems.

Another example is Emma, a white woman in her 30s whose poetry primarily focuses on exploring her experience as a woman through the objects she uses in her everyday life. She describes the core of her work as “archeology of a woman’s life through the artifacts of her life.” Through Instapoems inspired in objects ranging from her books, sunglasses, and even more intimate ones, she narrates her life as a woman in the city, and also denounce diverse forms of gender-based inequality, and reflects on what it means to be a woman in her context. Emma’s poetry clearly illustrates what Manning (2020:270) has suggested on female Instapoets particularly:

> [W]omen’s use of Instagram to disseminate poetry can be seen to disrupt the patriarchal regulation of expression in two ways: firstly, and simply, by placing their interior lives into a public sphere via Instagram, and secondly, due to the use

of a digital dissemination method, which places their work into the typically white-male dominated sphere of internet.

As mentioned previously, recent studies on Instapoetry have found that this form of poetry tends to be used predominantly by females, and has become a powerful tool for them (see Manning 2020) to construct and develop their identity and to resist against diverse forms of oppression and gender-based inequality.

Unlike written or spoken word poetry, Instapoetry tends to be hyper condensed due to the format set by the platform. This represents a challenge for Instapoets as they are forced to write short poems capable of transmitting their ideas or feelings, sometimes in two or three lines. This format also prevents them from providing extensive descriptions of places or spaces, as well as details about their relationship between the narrative voice of the poem and the subject, place, or situation it is portraying. While only two (2) participants reported writing poems specifically on the city, the majority of them said that their experience *in* the city is fundamental for their poems (just as in the case of Marissa, or Donald's quarantine project, for example). Thus, unlike my analyses of written and spoken word poetry (Chapters I and II) where it was possible to analyze and interpret poetic representations of the city, in Instapoetry we find poetic representations of personal experiences, sometimes spatial, and other times emotional. Even with participants' acknowledgement about the importance of the city in their writing, Instapoetry appears not to be a rich source of data to explore urban phenomena. However, since Instapoetry's thematic territories tend to be circumscribed within personal experience, identity, resistance, and self-representation (and most of those are shaped by the urban and sociodemographic context), the analysis of Instapoems and Instapoets (as this study

reveals) can be critical to understand diverse ways in which the local environment influences the cultural production, as well as the format and content of it.

DISCUSSION

The exploratory nature of this study has allowed me to identify important patterns and information about the practice of Instapoetry in Milwaukee. The first one, and most surprising, is that based on results derived from this analysis, Instapoetry is not very popular in the city. While there is not enough evidence and data to provide an explanation to this phenomenon, results suggest two paths that should be explored in the future. First, given the richness of the poetry culture in the city, poets are less likely to start a career in the social media as they practice their poetry within cohesive communities where interact in person with other poets and members of the audience. This particular pattern is extremely interesting as it shows that, just in the middle of the digital era when most of people's interaction with each other takes place online, there are communities and art systems that prioritize face-to-face interaction and community building in spite of the multiple benefits that using social media as a primary platform to promote their work can bring (i.e., exposure to wider audiences, immediacy, monetization of their work, etc.).

Second (and related to the first one), due to this pattern (the rich local poetry scene), in the context of Milwaukee Instapoetry tends to be used to propel a career outside of social media (in traditional channels). To understand this second pattern, the concept of 'platformization' (Nieborg and Poell, 2018; Tomasena 2019) is useful to explore how poets use Instagram as a platform to accumulate social and symbolic capital that can be transferred to other settings (i.e., when publishing a book or performing in public) so that a given individual assures success in the non-virtual setting. The fact that this pattern was

observed in most participants is an indicator that there might be a relationship between the configuration of the local scene and the way poets use social media (in this case Instagram) for artistic ends.

This study also reveals that the Covid-19 pandemic, which modified most aspects of social life since it hit in the early 2020, impacted Instapoets' work primarily at the thematic level but not in terms of their publication patterns. It is interesting that even when the pandemic made some people's time more flexible and modified their ways of life, most of them decided not to modify their publication patterns either for personal reasons or beliefs about algorithms (this particular aspect deserves much more academic attention in the future). Also, while the impact of meaningful events taking place during the pandemic (i.e., the death of George Floyd and the attendant protests, the presidential campaign, etc.) had a relatively low resonance in Milwaukee Instapoets' work, their personal experience in times of physical distance and isolation infiltrated into their work modifying its general thematic composition or the ways they link their work with ongoing conversations (via #hashtags) within Instagram.

Regarding the intersection of Instapoetry and identity and self-representation, results derived from this study are consistent with what previous studies have shown. First, data analyzed and discussed above reveals that Instapoetry is a space where, particularly, marginalized groups and minorities (racial, gender, ethnic, etc.) find a powerful tool to perform, develop, and reinforce their identity (Manning 2020; Paquet 2019). Similarly, this study has revealed that even though with relative unpopularity, Milwaukee Instapoets are aligned with the general aesthetics, codes, and conventions of Instapoetry (i.e., nostalgia; old-fashioned typographies, images, and filters; self-help-related poems, etc.) (Grubnic 2020; Khilnani 2021).

CONCLUSION

Recent literature on Instapoetry has revealed important aspects about its social and artistic use, as well as its aesthetics and visual characteristics (Adek and Satria 2019; Grubnic 2020; Khilnani 2021; Manning 2020; Paquet 2019). Most studies on Instapoetry have drawn on secondary data or provided examinations of characteristics of Instapoetry itself. However, there is little research done on Instapoets. By analyzing Instapoets through an ethnographic approach, this study attempts to widen the current research agenda by incorporating an analysis of the poets themselves instead of only focusing only on what they produce. Besides its potential contributions to literature on social media in general, and Instagram in particular, this study, as it is circumscribed in Milwaukee, also provides important insights about the local Instapoetry culture, its intersection with the sociodemographic composition of the city, and with the diverse identities that are performed/experienced through it. Analyzing the current Milwaukee Instapoetry scene not only builds on literature on this phenomenon in diverse contexts, but also builds on the previous two chapters that analyze diverse forms of poetry looking at different traits within the same socio-spatial context across time.

There is still so much to do. First, it is critical for future research projects to focus on the phenomenon of 'platformization' in Instapoetry. At least in this study it has been demonstrated that most Milwaukee Instapoets are using the platform to accumulate social and symbolic capital to transfer it to another platform/industry. By studying this phenomenon in other contexts, it would be possible to explore its roots and implications in the consumption and production of digital literatures. Also, further studies need to be done on the impact of the multiple gender and race-based inequalities on the use of Instapoetry and Instapoets' discourses. Finally, due to the nature of this form of poetry, mixed methods

can be used in order to generate a wider view of the phenomenon by incorporating quantitative analysis, as well as qualitative approaches, including techniques used in digital humanities.

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CONCLUSION

Exploring the vast and complex territories of the Milwaukee poetry scene was a fascinating and rewarding experience that showed me angles of poetry that I had never imagined. Throughout this journey I had the opportunity to read and analyze poems published decades before I was born, attend dozens of readings and poetry events, talk with poets and poetry promotors, and witness the multiple ways in which poets and the city coexist and shape each other. I had never been as close to the poetic phenomenon as I was when I conducted the three studies that this dissertation comprises. Just as the very first exposure to poetry (in the museum when I was a child), every time I interviewed a poet, enjoyed their performances, or read a poem in the newspapers or Instagram, I experienced a profound poetic experience; that is probably, at the personal level, the highest reward of doing this research. In terms of the outcomes of this dissertation, the three chapters derived in results that build on four bodies of literature that are extremely relevant within the discipline: the connection between cultural production and the social environment, place-making, art-based communities, and the effects of technology on artistic performance and cultural products.

As the three chapters of this dissertation illustrate, poetry is embedded in social life, manifests in different ways, and it is used by individuals as a vehicle for different ends depending on the context. While there is a long tradition of bucolic poetry, it is also embedded in cities and closely tied to their internal dynamics and history, and as this study has also shown, poetry is powerful tool that allows us to study urban and social phenomena. The connection between poetry and the city takes place in different forms and at different degrees, however, it is always there, and the study of such connection (and its central

actors) can unveil (as this project has demonstrated) important traits about social and urban life.

Chapter I has demonstrated the viability of studying a historical period or a process of social and institutional change through the analysis of poetry produced during that time. Apart from being a rich source of information about a given period or process, poetry also gives us the opportunity to understand patterns of cultural production and consumption, as well as the cultural landscape of the time. A remarkable pattern found through this analysis is the fact that while the multiple events taking place between 1967 and 1973 that brought diverse kinds of social and institutional change influenced the construction of poetic structures, 'love' and 'death' appeared to be the primary themes on which poets focused. This pattern embodies a starting point for a future research project fully focused on the thematic nature of poetry and its relationship with current society. This chapter also showed that poetry is also a tool of historical preservation through which it is possible to explore a city's material and social history. This chapter builds on existing literature on historical periods and processes drawing on newspaper poetry (Askew 2014; Chalamanda 2001; Mhina 2014) and more specifically the study of society through underground newspapers (Gazit 2010). The methodological approach I used in this study can be replicated by scholars to study a wide variety of phenomena through the lens of poetry in the future. The study of newspaper poetry, as well as similar archival materials, can be beneficial for sociological approaches to art, culture, and the city.

Apart from exploring the functioning and structure of the Milwaukee spoken word poetry scene, Chapter II has provided evidence of the strong communitarian component that the practice of spoken word poetry entails. Through the categorization system of "Poet-City Interaction" (Figure 5), this chapter shows the multiple ways in which these two

elements interact both at the discursive and community level. This particular distinction is extremely useful as while it is clear that there is a mutual influence of poetry and the city, this system shows *how* it happens. Probably the most important outcome of this chapter is the one related to the community dimension of poetry. Through the testimonials of the individuals interviewed, it is possible to see that the practice of spoken word poetry is not only reduced to artistic purposes, but rather, it embraces other ends such as activism, neighborhood-level organization, and socialization. From the three formats of poetic expression that this dissertation analyzes, spoken word poetry is the one that has been more explored in social sciences and humanities, however, more work needs to be done to understand the effects of the use of spoken word poetry for communitarian purposes among other marginalized groups such as refugee communities, women of color, and undocumented immigrants in the American context, for example. This chapter builds on literature focused on the community dimension of spoken word poetry (Chepp 2016; Isler et al. 2015; Johnson 2017; Somers-Willet 2005, 2009), as well as literature on the effects of spoken word poetry on racial/ethnic performance identity (Aterianus-Owanga 2015; Biggs-El 2012; Flyn and Marrast 2008; Jones 2011; Noel 2014). Methodologically, this study shows that the use of diverse ethnographic techniques to fill gaps in the data is a useful approach for phenomenological studies. In this case, the extensive data I gathered through participant observations complemented the interviews I conducted with members of the scene. The outcomes of this study benefited from the techniques I employed to collect and analyze the data; this is something that should be considered in future research.

Finally, Chapter III has explored a new form of social media-based production, distribution, and consumption of poetry: Instapoetry. While Instapoetry has been instrumental for thousands of poets around the globe to reach new audiences that otherwise

could not be exposed to their work, this investigation in the context of Milwaukee shows a very important pattern: Milwaukee Instapoets primarily use this platform to acquire social and symbolic capital (the phenomenon of platformization; see Nieborg and Poell 2018; Tomasena 2019) as a platform to launch their career in the traditional setting (written or spoken word poetry). This finding shows that even though several artistic communities and disciplines use social media as their primarily platform, in the context of Milwaukee, that has a strong poetry culture, the main goal of these poets is to be recognized in in-person communities and local poetry groups. Since the study of Instapoetry is recent in academia, there have been important contributions to the study of this phenomenon (i.e., Khilnani 2021; Manning 2020; Paquet 2019), so much more needs to be done to understand phenomena like self-representation and resistance through Instapoetry, the community creation process within the platform, and the connection between Instapoems and ongoing conversations or trends within the larger Instagram community. Additionally, further studies should devote particular attention to the potential contention between traditional forms of poetry (i.e., written poetry, spoken word) and social media-based ones like Instagram. As some of the literature reviewed in this chapter suggests, Instapoetry tends to be perceived as a "lower" form of poetry by some critics and writers—although this pattern is not particularly visible in the outcomes of this research. Thus, the study of this phenomenon embodies a good opportunity to enlarge the sociological analysis of virtual/social media-based arts, their conventions, use, and understanding of them.

Aware of the limitations of the three studies I present in this dissertation, I firmly believe that, apart from making the contributions I have pointed out above, it also contributes to unearthing the voices of multiple individuals that have used their poetry to express their feelings, concerns, and describe their daily life and socio-spatial context. The

outcomes of this dissertation emerged thanks to the individuals who shared their experiences with me, the people who make possible that the poetry culture is alive and growing in the city, and the ones who leave their testimonials in poems written many years ago. This is work was about hearing those voices, trying to understand them, and translating them into data that is relevant for the discipline and the questions that guided my analysis.

Poetry, as one of the oldest ways of communication, human expression, and social action, is a very complex and vast world to explore. In the context of Milwaukee, as this project shows, poetry can be found almost anywhere in the city. So, I acknowledge that the chapters presented are only a limited attempt to understand certain areas and dynamics within it. Of course, talking about the context of Milwaukee, the study of poetry has so much to give us as social scientists, and is an open window to explore multiple social and urban phenomena. As a sociologist and poet, I will continue to conduct research on this fascinating topic to try to understand a little more about the enigma of this genre and its relationship with the social and urban worlds. To keep understanding the voices of those individuals who speak the language of gods, the one they use to communicate with flowers.

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APPENDIX A

Pre-interview Questionnaire for Spoken Word Poets

Please respond to the following questions by placing an x mark (X) in the answer box that corresponds to your response and/or fill in the blank where indicated.

Participant ID: _____

1. **What is your gender?**
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Other: _____
   - ☐ Prefer not to say

2. **Which category below includes your age?**
   - ☐ 18-20
   - ☐ 21-29
   - ☐ 30-39
   - ☐ 40-49
   - ☐ 50-59
   - ☐ 60-69
   - ☐ 70 or older
   - ☐ Prefer not to say

3. **Which of the following categories best describes your race/ethnicity? Check all that apply.**
   - ☐ Asian
   - ☐ Black/African American
   - ☐ Hispanic/Latina/o
   - ☐ Native American
   - ☐ Pacific Islander
   - ☐ White
   - ☐ Other: _____
   - ☐ Prefer not to say

4. **What is the highest degree or educational level you have completed? If you are currently enrolled in a program, please mark the highest degree received.**

- ☐ Less than high school degree
- ☐ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- ☐ Some college but no degree
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Graduate degree
- ☐ Prefer not to say

5. **What is your current employment status?**

- ☐ Employed for wages:_____(occupation)
- ☐ Self-employed:_____(occupation)
- ☐ Unemployed and looking for work
- ☐ Unemployed but not currently looking for work
- ☐ A student:_____(degree/major)
- ☐ Military
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Unable to work
- ☐ Prefer not to say

6. **How long have you been living in the Milwaukee area?**

- ☐ I have lived here my whole life
- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years
- ☐ Prefer not to say

7. **In which area of the city do you live?**

- ☐ North Side
- ☐ South Side
- ☐ East Side
- ☐ West Side

- ☐ Downtown
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Prefer not to say

8. Indicate which of the following problems you consider to be the most serious for Milwaukee <u>(Choose up to 3):</u>

- ☐ Climate change
- ☐ Corruption
- ☐ Economic inequality
- ☐ Environmental pollution
- ☐ Gender inequality
- ☐ Gentrification
- ☐ Gun violence
- ☐ Housing/residential segregation
- ☐ Immigration
- ☐ Inadequate education
- ☐ Political polarization
- ☐ Public health
- ☐ Poverty
- ☐ Racism and discrimination against minorities
- ☐ Unemployment

9. How long have you been writing poetry?

- ☐ Less than a year
- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ 10-20 years
- ☐ 20 years or more

10. Have you published your work?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If so, please indicate in which platforms you have published your work in the past. Check all that apply:

- ☐ Self-published book
- ☐ Book with a publisher
- ☐ Anthology
- ☐ Electronic anthology
- ☐ Literary magazine
- ☐ Literary journal
- ☐ Local newspapers
- ☐ Alternative weeklies
- ☐ Blogs
- ☐ Other: _____

11. How long have you been performing your poetry in public readings, open mics, and/or poetry slams?

- ☐ Less than a year
- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ 10-20 years
- ☐ 20 years or more

12. Are you part of any specific poetry/spoken word community?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If so, please feel free to provide more information about such community (e.g., name, where and how often you meet, do you perform any activist activity? etc.)

13. Do you regularly post your work on social networks (e.g., Facebook, Instagram [Instapoetry], twitter, etc.)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

14. Do you have any public social network profile (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) in which you regularly publish your work?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If so, please feel free to share information about the platforms you use and the frequency with which you publish your work.

APPENDIX B

Questions Guiding Interviews with Spoken Word Poets

Section 1: Poet's Career and Experience in the Field
1) Tell me about your story in the poetry field. • Why did you start writing poetry? • When? • Where? • How was your transition from written- to spoken word poetry or vice versa? What happened first?
2) How often do you participate in poetry readings/slams? What kind of events do you prefer? Open mics, readings with invited/featured poets, slams? • Why? • What is the difference between these two kinds of settings? • Have you experienced any kind of contention between poets and/or members of the audience?
3) How did the local spoken word poetry scene change in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic? • Did you participate in any virtual reading/slam/festival? Why? • What are the pros and cons of virtual poetry events?
4) What is your view of the local spoken word poetry scene? • How large and diverse is it? • Has it change since you started to perform? • If so, how? • Who are the main actors of the field (e.g., organizers, venue owners, poets, etc.)?
5) Do you think there is a hierarchy in the spoken word poetry field? What are the mechanisms through which poets become famous/well-known? What makes a spoken word poet recognized/admired by his/her peers and audience?
Section 2: Poetry's Role in Community Building and Identity
6) How important is poetry in your life? Has poetry or experience in the poetry scene played an important role in defining your identity and the person you are today? • If so, how? • Why?
7) Base on your experience in the field, do you think that spoken word poetry can help develop or strength community ties and their identity? • If so, how? • Could you give me an example (in the local context)?

8) Do you think that your work has contributed to the cohesion or identity of any of the communities/groups you belong to? • If so, how? • Why?
Section 3: Dominant Themes in Poets' Work/Performance
9) Which topics/thematic areas are the most recurrent in your work? Why do you write/perform about those topics? • e.g., personal, political, social issues? • Why do you write/perform about them?
10) Do your gender and/or racial/ethnic self-identification play an important role in your work/performance? • If so, how? • Why?
11) Do the main problems that Milwaukee faces like segregation, poverty, health, etc. influence or are somehow present in your work/performance? • If so, how? • Why? • Could you give me an example?
Section 4: Non-Artistic use of Spoken Word Poetry
12) Do you use spoken word poetry for a non-artistic purpose such as activism, education, etc.? • If so, how? • Why?

APPENDIX C

Codes and Concepts Used for the Analysis of Interviews with Spoken Word Poets

Number	Code	Description
1	[ST_01]	Poet's story within the field
2	[RA_02]	Poet's career as a performer
3	[SC_03]	Perception of the scene's response to Covid
4	[PC_04]	Personal experience during Covid
5	[MS_05]	Perception of the current Milwaukee poetry scene
6	[CY_06]	Presence of the city in poet's work
7	[US_07]	Unique aspect of Milwaukee that influences the poet
8	[MM_08]	Meaning attributed to local identity as a poet
9	[PP_09]	Role of poetry in poet's personal life
10	[CM_10]	Perception on the community dimension of poetry
11	[CB_11]	Perception on the benefits that poetry brings to community
12	[TM_12]	Central themes in poet's work
13	[GR_13]	Role of gender and racial/ethnic identification
14	[PI_14]	Influence of local problems
15	[NA_15]	Non-artistic use of poetry (i.e., activism, education, etc.)
16	[SM_16]	Use of social media
17	[PR_17]	Poet's present and future projects

APPENDIX D

Analytic Memo for Observations

Venue	**Date**

Format

☐ In person

☐ Online

Event Information/General Description

Approximate number of poets participating: _____

Approximate number of members in the audience: _____

Predominant theme(s) in poets' performances (check all that apply):

☐ Death/loss

☐ Life/existence

☐ Love/romance

☐ Motivation/self-esteem

☐ Nature/beauty

☐ National identity/patriotism

☐ Religion/spirituality

☐ Sexual/erotic

☐ Social problems

☐ Community/collective identity

☐ Human rights/equality

☐ Other(s): _____

Additional comments

Observations by poet/performance

Poet/ performance	**Key terms, performative aspects, subjectivity and performance, audience response**
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
[…]	

Additional comments:

Follow-up needed:

☐ Yes _____

☐ No

APPENDIX E

Pre-interview Questionnaire for Instapoets

Please respond to the following questions by placing an x mark (X) in the answer box that corresponds to your response and/or fill in the blank where indicated.

Participant ID: _____

1. **What is your gender?**
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Other: _____
   - ☐ Prefer not to say

2. **Which category below includes your age?**
   - ☐ 18-20
   - ☐ 21-29
   - ☐ 30-39
   - ☐ 40-49
   - ☐ 50-59
   - ☐ 60-69
   - ☐ 70 or older
   - ☐ Prefer not to say

3. **Which of the following categories best describes your race/ethnicity? Check all that apply.**
   - ☐ Asian
   - ☐ Black/African American
   - ☐ Hispanic/Latina/o
   - ☐ Native American
   - ☐ Pacific Islander
   - ☐ White
   - ☐ Other: _____
   - ☐ Prefer not to say

4. **What is the highest degree or educational level you have completed? If you are currently enrolled in a program, please mark the highest degree received.**

- ☐ Less than high school degree
- ☐ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- ☐ Some college but no degree
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Graduate degree
- ☐ Prefer not to say

5. **What is your current employment status?**

- ☐ Employed for wages:_____(occupation)
- ☐ Self-employed:_____(occupation)
- ☐ Unemployed and looking for work
- ☐ Unemployed but not currently looking for work
- ☐ A student:_____(degree/major)
- ☐ Military
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Unable to work
- ☐ Prefer not to say

6. **How long have you been living in the Milwaukee area?**

- ☐ I have lived here my whole life
- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years
- ☐ Prefer not to say

7. **In which area of the city do you live?**

- ☐ North Side
- ☐ South Side
- ☐ East Side
- ☐ West Side

- ☐ Downtown
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Prefer not to say

8. Indicate which of the following problems you consider to be the most serious for Milwaukee <u>(Choose up to 3):</u>

- ☐ Climate change
- ☐ Corruption
- ☐ Economic inequality
- ☐ Environmental pollution
- ☐ Gender inequality
- ☐ Gentrification
- ☐ Gun violence
- ☐ Housing/residential segregation
- ☐ Immigration
- ☐ Inadequate education
- ☐ Political polarization
- ☐ Public health
- ☐ Poverty
- ☐ Racism and discrimination against minorities
- ☐ Unemployment

9. How long have you been writing poetry?

- ☐ Less than a year
- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ 10-20 years
- ☐ 20 years or more

10. Have you published your work?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If so, please indicate in which platforms you have published your work in the past. Check all that apply:

- ☐ Self-published book
- ☐ Book with a publisher
- ☐ Anthology
- ☐ Electronic anthology
- ☐ Literary magazine
- ☐ Literary journal
- ☐ Local newspapers
- ☐ Alternative weeklies
- ☐ Blogs
- ☐ Other: _____

11. How long have you been publishing poems through Instagram?

- ☐ Less than a year
- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ 10-20 years
- ☐ 20 years or more

12. Are you part of any specific local/non-local Instapoetry community?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If so, please feel free to provide more information about such community(ies)

13. How often do you post poems in your Instagram account?

- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Twice a week
- ☐ Three times a week
- ☐ Four times a week
- ☐ Five times a week

- ☐ More than five times a week
- ☐ Prefer not to say

14. Approximately, how many followers do you have in your Instagram profile?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

15. Do you use other social networks to publish your poems?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If so, please feel free to provide more information about your activity as a poet and presence in other social networks

APPENDIX F

Questions Guiding Interviews with Instapoets

Questions
Section 1: Poet's Career and Experience in the Field
1) Tell me about your story in the poetry field. • Why did you start writing poetry? • When? • Where?
2) How was your transition from traditional forms of poetry to Instapoetry? • How and when did it happen? • How important is Instapoetry in your life?
3) Tell me about the local Instapoetry scene? What is your view of it? • How large and diverse is it? • When and how did it emerge? • Has it change since you started publishing your poems via Instagram? • If so, how? • How different Milwaukee Instapoetry is from other cities/regions?
4) Is there any community or level of organization within local Instapoets? Is there any organization/group through which you interact?
5) Have you ever supported any cause and/or social movement through your work and/or activity on Instagram? • If so, how? • Why?
6) Do you usually use additional visual or audiovisual resources (e.g., photos, videos) when publishing poetry on Instagram? • If so, which ones? • What is the relevance of them in your work? • Do you make them? Tell me about them
Section 2: Effects of COVID-19
7) From your view, did the social distancing measures adopted in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other changes we have experienced since then, modified your Instapoetry work? • If so, how? • Why? • What changes do you see in the post-Covid Instagram poetry scene (both in Milwaukee and abroad)?

Section 3: Dominant Themes and Identity
8) Which topics/thematic areas are the most recurrent in the poems you publish on Instagram? Why do you write about these topics? • e.g., personal, political, social issue, love, life, etc.?
9) Do your gender and/or racial/ethnic self-identification play an important role as an Instapoet? • If so, how? • Why?

APPENDIX G

Codes and Concepts Used for the Analysis of Interviews with Instapoets

Number	Code	Description
1	[ST_01]	Poet's story within the field (poetry in general)
2	[CR_IP_02]	Poet's career as Instapoet
3	[CV_IP_03]	Instapoetry and Covid
4	[PE_04]	Personal experience during Covid
5	[M_IP_05]	Milwaukee Instapoetry scene
6	[CM_IP_06]	Community and Instapoetry
7	[ID_IP_07]	Individual identity through Instapoetry
8	[IDP_08]	Performance of identity through Instapoetry
9	[AC_IP_09]	Activism and Instapoetry
10	[MKE_IN_10]	Presence of the city on Instapoems
11	[GR_11]	Role of gender and racial/ethnic identification
12	[AV_IP_12]	Use of audiovisual materials in Instapoetry
13	[SM_O_13]	Other social media used
14	[TH_14]	Dominant themes in their publications

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EDUCATION

Currently	**PhD Candidate, Sociology** University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. *Dissertation:* "The Poetic City: An Analysis of Milwaukee Poets and their Interaction with the City." *Committee:* Dr. Jennifer Jordan (chair), Dr. Ingrid Jordt, Dr. Aneesh Aneesh, Dr. Marcus Britton (Expected graduation: Spring 2022)
2019	**Preliminary Examinations**: Urban Sociology and Cultural Consumption *Committee:* Jennifer Jordan (chair), Aneesh Aneesh, Marcus Britton; Social Stratification *Committee:* Marcus Britton (chair), Gordon Gauchat, Kent Redding
2016	**M.S., Sociology** (Summa Cum Laude) University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, TX. *Thesis:* "Ethnicity and Poetry: A Systems Theory Approach to Contemporary African American and Mexican American Poetry." *Committee:* Dr. Igor Ryabov (chair), Dr. William Donner, Dr. Salvatore Restifo
2014	**B.A., Mass Communication** Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City.

RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Cultural Sociology; Urban Sociology; Sociology of Literature; Literary Geography; Ethnography; Social Stratification; Consumers & Consumption; Digital Humanities

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Articles

Forth.	**Paniagua Guzmán, Antonio.** "How do Detectives Survive their Novels in Chicana/o Detective Fiction and Mexican Narcoliterature? Positionality, Survival, and Literary Universes in the Works of Rudolfo Anaya and Élmer Mendoza. *Diálogo.*
2021	Vélez, William, and **Antonio Paniagua Guzmán**. "High School Student Experiences and Impact of a College Preparatory Program in Puerto Rico During the 1960's." *Centro Journal* 33(3):166-200.

Book Reviews

2022 **Paniagua Guzmán, Antonio.** Review of *Imagined Romes: The Ancient City and its Stories in Middle English Poetry* by C. David Benson. *Literary Geographies 8*(1):99-102.

Encyclopedia Entries

2022 **Paniagua Guzmán, Antonio.** "Anti-Marijuana Campaigns in Popular Press" Pp. 17-18 in *Marijuana in America: Cultural, Political, and Medical Controversies,* edited by J. Hawdon, B. Miller, and M. Costello. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

2022 **Paniagua Guzmán, Antonio.** "Latin America" Pp. 168-169 in *Marijuana in America: Cultural, Political, and Medical Controversies,* edited by J. Hawdon, B. Miller, and M. Costello. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2016-2017 **Editorial and Research Assistant**
University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley
Duties: Assisting editors in the review process, serving as the liaison between multiple authors, and formatting
Handbook of Disaster Research, 2nd Edition (ISBN: 978-3-319-63254-4)
Editors: Dr. Havidán Rodríguez (UAlbany-SUNY); Dr. William Donner (UTRGV); and Dr. Joseph Trainor (UD)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2018-2020 **Lecturer**
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Duties: full responsibility for course design and implementation

Social Change (online), SOC 325, **Spring 2022** (50 students)
Social Change (online), SOC 325, **Fall 2021** (48 students)
Social Change (online), SOC 325, **Spring 2021** (49students)
Social Change (online), SOC 325, **Fall 2020** (51 students)
Social Change (online), SOC 325, **Summer 2020** (36 students)
Social Change (online), SOC 325, **Spring 2020** (34 students)
Social Change, SOC 325, **Fall 2019** (46 students)
Social Change, SOC 325, **Spring 2019** (52 students)
Social Change, SOC 325, **Fall 2018** (33 students)

2017-2018 **Teaching Assistant**
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Duties: responsible for assisting students with assignments and grading

Research Methods (online), SOC 365, **Spring 2018** (Dr. Celeste Campos-Castillo)
Research Methods, SOC 365, **Fall 2017** (Dr. Noelle Chesley)

Additional Teaching Experience

2018-2020 **Instructor**
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, "Upward Bound" pre-college program
Duties: full responsibility for course design and implementation

Introduction to Sociology (online), **Summer 2020** (13 students)
Introduction to the Spanish Language (online), **Summer 2020** (9 students)
Introduction to Sociology, **Summer 2019** (16 students)
Introduction to the Spanish Language, **Summer 2019** (6 students)
Introduction to the Spanish Language, **Summer 2018** (9 students)

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Conferences

2021 "The Socioinstitutional Landscapes of Contemporary US-Mexico Borderland Detective Fiction." Annual Meetings of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), Virtual Meeting (May 26-29).

2021 "Spoken Word Poetry and Community Life: An Analysis of the Milwaukee Spoken Word Scene." Annual Meetings of the Midwest Sociological Society (MSS), Virtual Meeting (March 18-21).

2020 "Poetry and the City: Analyzing Post-Industrial Cities through the Unheard Voices of Newspaper Poetry." International Symposium: Representing Urban Change: Gentrification and Displacement in Literature and other Media. Uppsala University, Sweden [virtual meeting due to Covid pandemic] (August 21).

2020 "Seeing Milwaukee Through the Lens of Poetry: A Literary Ethnography." Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association, Alternative Virtual Engagement Event (August 10-13).

2020 "Analyzing Milwaukee's Urban and Social Change Through the Lens of Poetry." Annual Conference of the Center for the Advancement of Humanities (CFAH), Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI (February 14 & 15).

2019 "Color-based Economic Inequality in Mexico." Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association, New York City, NY (August 10-13).

2019 "The Effects of Culture and Economic Prosperity on Mexicans' Attitudes towards Central and South American Migration." Annual Meetings of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), New York City, NY (August 9-11).

2019 "Art, Bohemia, and Economic Growth: An Analysis of the Post-Great Recession Midwestern Economic Recovery." Annual Meetings of the Pacific Sociological Association, Oakland, CA (March 28-31).

2019 "The City as a Poetic Object: Analyzing Five Decades of Poetic Representation of Urban Space in a Midwestern City" Annual Meetings of the Chicago Ethnography Conference, Northwestern University, Chicago, IL (March 16).

2018 "Hate Crime and Minority Population: An Analysis of Economic Threat." Annual Meetings of the Southwestern Social Science Association, Orlando, FL (October 10-12).

2017 "The Poetic Construction of Ethnic Identity: The Case of Contemporary Chicano Writers in South Texas." Annual Meetings of the Wisconsin Sociological Association, Milwaukee, WI (October 20).

2017 "Ethnicity and Poetry: A Systems Theory Approach to Contemporary African American and Mexican American Poetry." Annual Meetings of the Southwestern Social Science Association, Austin, TX (April 12-15).

Invited Talks

2019 "Critical Thinking and the Sociological Imagination in an era of Big Data, Fake News, and Digital Communication." Annual Alpha Kappa Delta Induction Ceremony, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, (April 11).

AWARDS AND GRANTS

2021 2021-22 UWM Graduate Student Excellence Fellowship (GSEF) ($2,500)
2021 Midwest Sociological Society (MSS) Annual Meeting/Membership Grant ($75)
2021 Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Travel Grant ($150)
2020 UWM Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies (CLACS) Travel Grant ($140)
2019 UWM Student Appropriations Committee (SAC) Travel Award ($468)
2019 Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD) Student Member Research Travel Grant ($400)
2019 UWM Graduate Student Travel Award ($500)
2018 UWM Sociology Graduate Student Travel Award ($150)
2018 UWM Graduate Student Travel Award ($500)
2017 UWM Chancellor's Graduate Student Award ($1,000)
2016 M. Jean and B.R. Stewart Endowed Scholarship ($500)
2016 John and Alma Ruby Van Ramshorst Scholarship ($500)

SERVICE

Associations

2020-2021 **Committee Member**
Membership Committee, Consumers and Consumption section
American Sociological Association (ASA)

Student Organizations

2019-2020 **Vice-president**
Graduate Student Sociology Association (GSSA) (Student organization)
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

2017-2020 **Vice-president**
International Teaching Assistants Community (ITAC) (Student organization)
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

University

2020-2021 **Committee Member**
Graduate Student Representation Committee (GSRP) (Academic committee)
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

2020 **Member**
Online and Blended Teaching Program (OBTP) Communities of Practice (CoP)
UWM Center for Excellent in Teaching and Learning

2017-2019 **Graduate Student Representative**
Department of Sociology
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Major Fair)

Conferences

2021 **Session Chair**
Annual Meetings of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) (session: "Narratives of Violence: Biopolitics, Borderlands, and Detective Fiction" [original session title in Spanish]) Virtual Meeting (May 26-29).

2021 **Session Presider**
Annual Meetings of the Midwest Sociological Society (MSS) (session: "New Communities, New Directions, and New Research in Theory and Discourse") Virtual Meeting (March 18-21).

2019 **Moderator**
Annual Undergraduate Research Symposium (session: "Arts and Society")
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI (April 5).

SOFTWARE SKILLS

NVivo, STATA, SPSS, Qualtrics

HONOR SOCIETIES

Alpha Kappa Delta

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

American Sociological Association (ASA)
Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS)
Latin American Studies Association (LASA)

LANGUAGES

English, Spanish (native speaker)

REFERENCES

By request