

**“*Embe Dodo Mbivu Huishi Utamu*”:
Epistemology of Sensuality through
Nyimbo za Unyago (the Songs of *Unyago*)
from South-East Tanzania**

Cristina Nicolini

School of Oriental and African Studies – University of London

656298@soas.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

In this article, I analyse a selection of *nyimbo za unyago*, the songs of *unyago*, which characterise the female initiation rituals into adulthood, from South-East Tanzania. My analysis, which focuses on the teaching about sex, sexuality and sexual pleasure imparted to the young initiands during ritual celebrations, has been conducted through the lenses of semiotics, cognitive linguistics and neuro linguistic programming. After the preliminary structuralist analysis, I examined the possibility of deconstructing fixed interpretations of meaning so as to open up the discourse on different forms of knowledge, conveyed by representational systems that communicate at the level of sub-modalities. Therefore, the aim is to shed light on Afro-centred epistemological perspectives, through an Afrocentric representation of sensuality and erotic pleasure, stemming from the teaching enclosed in the songs of *unyago*.

Keywords: Swahili oral literature; *nyimbo za unyago*; female initiation rituals; songs of *unyago*; sex, sexuality, sensuality, sexual pleasure, erotic, epistemologies; Afrocentric knowledge; metaphors; metonymy; sub-modalities; synaesthesia; rhetoric strategies; epistemology of sensuality; synesthetic epistemology of metaphors; South-East Tanzania.

DOI: 10.23814/ethn.17.21.nic

1. Introduction: *Unyago* Songs

In this article, I am analysing a specific genre, selected among the vast panorama of Swahili oral literature and verbal arts (Finnegan 2012; 1979; 1992; Finnegan & Beidelman 1972; Beidelman 1979; Ong 2002; Rosenberg 2012; 2014; Omari & Senkoro 2018), namely, *miviga za jadi*, the Tanzanian traditional rites of passage or life-cycle rituals, by examining *nyimbo za unyago*, the songs of the female initiation rites of passage into womanhood, performed by maiden initiands led by their *somo* or *kungwi*, the *unyago* instructors (Swantz 1986; Tumbo-Masabo 1994).

The interest on this topic stems from my own experience on the ground in Tanzania, when, in 2014-2015², I conducted my first ethnographic research on “living knowledge”

¹ “A small and ripened mango does not lose its sweetness”. The title is inspired by Makukula’s play “*Embe Dodo*” (The Small Mango, 2015). This seasonal fruit acquires value according to its eye-catching nice shape, its fresh smell, and its flavoured taste (Makukula p.c.).

² I have been awarded fieldwork research grants three times during my student career. Firstly, I was awarded twice during my Bachelor’s (2011-2012) and Master’s (2014-2015) degrees of the exchange student scholarship awarded by “L’Orientale” University of Naples under the bilateral agreement between “L’Orientale” and the University of Dar es Salaam. Then, I had an approved fieldwork during my PhD degree (2018-2019) approved by the School of Oriental and African Languages of London.

(Swantz 2016) through the participant observation experience carried on in the small village of Mtepera. The village of Mtepera with his 437 inhabitants³ covers an extension of 1,105.30 hectares⁴ inside the Selous National Park reserve, located in the Kilwa district (Lindi region) between the Rufiji River and the Tanzanian south-eastern coast. I chose to explore the rites in South Tanzania, because they do not entail any kind of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/FGC)⁵; thus, these rituals provide the maidens with positive images of sexuality and sexual education, which can be also considered an effective form of prevention for sexually transmitted infections (Dargenio & Nicolini 2017).

Precisely, in between the 29th and 31st of December 2014, I attended some ritual performances, performed during the period of *kumbi*, maidens' isolation, as part of *unyago* celebrations, which take place in the district twice a year (December and July according to the harvest seasons). For instance, I attended as participant observer the ritual called *tambiko*, the invocation of ancestors' spirits, performed as an offer to ensure a safe transition into adulthood for the initiands (Mbiti 2010; 2011; Ruel 1997; Swantz 1986; Swantz 1990; Giles 1996). Those spirits in *kingindo*⁶, the native language of the local ethnic group of the Ngindo, are called *Ngongole* (literally guardian angels).

During my participant observation I was guided by Bi Nuru⁷, the instructor who was chosen to lead the initiand maidens from Mtepera as being one of the oldest and wiser women in the village. However, because of the secrecy characterizing the ritual, I was not admitted to the inner ritual celebrations, being myself a white European researcher, but I was able to attend only the celebrations open to a wider public, provided that they are all women. This let me reflect on the changes undergone by those rituals, which traditionally were reserved only to women of the same kinship; whereas, today, as Bi Nuru explained to me, if, during *unyago* season, the maidens from the village are few, all the neighbouring villages joined together. For example, the celebration happens to be celebrated in *Njinjo*, which is the biggest village in the district, where all the maidens come together to be initiated.

Here, I investigate the symbolic language of *unyago* songs and teachings, particularly metaphors and other rhetoric tropes, which are utilised as strategies to educate the young girls about sex, sexuality and sensuality, and which are characterised by pungent satires, obscure riddles, crude allusions, impertinent puns and jokes. The objective will be to demonstrate how *unyago* initiation ritual is a valuable cultural tradition, which mirrors Afrocentric knowledge and wisdom.

³ Population Distribution of Lindi Region by District, Ward and Village/Mtaa; 2012 PHC. Source available at: http://nbs.go.tz/takwimu/Village_Statistics.

⁴ Office of the President Regional Administration and Local Government Annual Report 2016/17 Sector of Lindi Regional Livestock. Source available at: <http://www.lindi.go.tz/app/uploads/public>.

⁵ According to some initiation rites' traditions, it is a practice to leave a sign or a modification on the bodies of the initiated young women, which marks their new social status (Fusaschi 2003). In Tanzania, the practice of female circumcision (*ukeketaji*) or female genital mutilation (FGM), which has been declared a crime in 1998, is practised secretly only in the country's northern regions, such as Dodoma, Singida, Mara, Arusha and Kilimanjaro, on about the 15% of young initiated women (UNFPA 2019; UNFPA Tanzania: <https://tanzania.unfpa.org>).

⁶ Ethnologue: Ngindo [NNQ].

⁷ Bi Nuru was interviewed by the author on the 29th of December 2014, Mtepera village (Kilwa District).

2. *Unyago* Initiation Rituals in South-East Tanzania

*Unyago*⁸ (Mamuya 1975; Swantz 1986; Swantz *et al.* 1995) is the female maturity rite, which marks the transition into adulthood once girls reach puberty. This traditional custom, handed down from one generation to the next, aims to teach the initiands so as to take the right place into their families and the community.

The ritual is divided into three main phases: separation, isolation/transition and incorporation (Van Gennep 1960; La Fontaine 1986; Turner 1967; 1969). The separation of the young initiand (*mwali*) from the community symbolises the death of the inner child; the phase of isolation (*kumbi*) or liminality, which is the most important, is where the initiands “betwixt and between” (Turner 1969) receive the main teachings taught by the leader instructors of initiation (*somo*, *kungwi* or *ngariba*). The instructors are the maidens’ paternal aunt and maternal grandmother, who cover respectively the role of the father and the mother, on behalf of the biological parents of the girl during the ritual celebrations. The period of *kumbi*, which can last from few a days to many months, is exactly when the core teachings are imparted through the use of different performance formats such as singing, dancing, and acting. Indeed, initiation rites (*miviga*) are part and parcel of Tanzanian traditional performing arts (*sanaa za maonyesho za jadi*) (Mlama 1991; Method 2013; Wafula 1999; Acquaviva 2019c). Particularly, the songs (*nyimbo za unyago*) are rich in symbolism and uttered in the native language of each ethnic group and not in Swahili, the national language of the country. In fact, the main purpose of *unyago* is to educate and prepare the young girl for her adult life and all it involves, such as puberty, being a woman, personal hygiene, love, relations with the other sex, marriage, marital life, work in the home, sex and sexuality, faithfulness, maternity and illnesses, also including the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and how to prevent them. Finally, the last phase of incorporation, which occurs at the end of the liminal period, symbolises initiand’s reborn as a full-grown person, who is allowed to re-enter the community through *ngoma za unyago*, the celebration of the initiation ritual itself (Swantz *et al.* 2014; Mulokozi 2011; Halley 2012; Anu 2017; Beidelman 2001; Fair 1996; Tumbo-Masabo 1994; Richards 1956). In addition, songs and dances are, by nature, hypnotic actions that produce “hypnotic suggestions”, which are codes stored inside the unconscious. The effectiveness of these suggestions is granted by the following elements: the transmitters, who are girls’ close relatives; the language, which not only is highly symbolic, but is also the native language of the ethnicity; the situation of liminality; and finally, the delicate period of lifetime experienced by the maidens e.g. the menarche. The hypnotic suggestions remained stored inside the girls’ unconscious, ready to be triggered in the future by a post-hypnotic signal, so as to help the girl to start researching individual solutions to a current problem (Dargenio & Nicolini 2017; Nicolini 2021).

Nyimbo za unyago, the *unyago* teaching songs, which will be examined in the case study, are part and parcel of the rites of passage and exemplify the traditional initiation customs in relation to specific geographic areas in South-East Tanzania. Firstly, the coastal region of Pwani, which includes the districts of Bagamoyo in its northern part, passing through Kisarawe, to Rufiji, which is bordered by the Lindi region in the south. Pwani is mainly inhabited by the Muslim ethnic group of Zaramo whose languages are

⁸ Originally, there was a marked distinction between *jando*, male initiation rites, and *unyago*, the female counterpart of the ritual. Conversely, nowadays the term *unyago* tends to be used more widely in relation to both the male and female initiations. In this article, I keep the focus on *unyago* as the female rite of passage.

both *Kizaramo*⁹ and Swahili. Secondly, the region of Lindi includes the districts of Lindi, Kilwa, Nachingwea and Liwale. The focus will be on the ethnic groups of the Yao, widespread in the districts of Nachingwea and Lindi, and the Ngindo, mainly found in Liwale and Kilwa. The Yao and the Ngindo respectively speak *Chiyao/Yao*¹⁰ and *Kingindo*¹¹ and are mainly Muslims. This fascinating geographical area is rich in history and culture, situated between the Kilwa peninsular – the seat of the medieval sultanate founded by the Shirazi family, as recounted by the Arab traveller Ibn Battuta (1331), with remains found today in the ruins of *Kilwa Kisiwani*, a UNESCO heritage site from 1980, the *Selous Reserve*, one of the largest wild animal parks in the world covering over 54,600 km, and the Rufiji River which crosses the reserve flowing into the Indian Ocean. This area was the theatre of the *Maji Maji War*, led by the charismatic leader, *Kinjeketile Ngwale*, against the colonial domination of the Germans between 1905 and 1907. Finally, Lindi region is bordered in the south by the Mtwara region, which in turn, is the last region of Tanzania bordered by Mozambique. The focus here will be on the Makonde people from Mtwara and Newala districts. The Makonde profess both Islam and Christianity and their language is *Ki/Chimakonde*¹²

Furthermore, according to my research participants, *unyago* is mainly described as an educational tool. For instance, Dr Shani Omari¹³, who is herself a Matumbi from the city of Kilwa, firstly, describes *unyago* as a “wide concept” (*dhana pana*), because it is not only a ritual, which connects both religious customs and literature, especially performing and verbal arts, but it is also an education instrument. In fact, it looks like a “*taasisi* – department” inside a “*Chuo cha Mafunzo* – educational university”, wherein practical knowledge is taught. Then, she emphasises the value of the several kinds of teachings and training, including both theoretical and practical knowledge, imparted during *unyago*, where not only the initiand, but the whole group of participants are usually trained. As Omari reminds: “*usiache mbachao kwa msala upitao*” (Do not leave an old mat (ancient custom) for a mat that is passing (a custom in fashion), Kalugila & Lodhi 1980). Likewise, Prof. Mulokozi¹⁴ agrees that *unyago* is an “educational institution (*asasi*)”, which teaches adolescent girls by means of different performative strategies. He also adds that *unyago* implies philosophical concepts stemming from local ideologies and worldview. However, as Bibi Nuru states, the final objective of *unyago* should be to train respectable and decent women¹⁵. Even though for Tanzanian people the validity of the rituals and their messages is incontestable, those traditions have been fading because of the process of modernization and globalisation undergone by the country. As Omari explains, nowadays, especially for the families who live in urban contexts, it is increasingly difficult to arrange the period of isolation and the celebrations in the villages. In fact, in big cities like Dar es Salaam, some families have unfairly substituted the traditional rite with the modern kitchen party. Therefore, the progressive loss of the rites of passage leaves many young girls without a right guide and proper education during this delicate transition phase. In fact, nowadays for many girls the main sources

⁹ Ethnologue: [ZAJ] Zigula-Zaramo (G.32/33).

¹⁰ Ethnologue: Yao (P.21).

¹¹ Ethnologue: Ngindo [NNQ].

¹² Ethnologue: Makonde [KDE] Yao (P.23).

¹³ Dr. Shani Omari interviewed by the author on the 9th of January 2015, Dar es Salaam.

¹⁴ Prof. Magabyuso Mulokozi interviewed by the author on the 9th of January 2015, Dar es Salaam.

¹⁵ Bi. Nuru was interviewed by the author on the 29th of December 2014, Mtepera village (Kilwa District).

of information are unreliable means like peers and social media or the web (Tumbo-Masabo & Liljestrom 1994; Liljestrom & Rwebangira 1998; Bastien 2009).

Therefore, in the case study I will analyse selected songs of *unyago* with a focus on the teaching about sex and sexuality. In Africa, sex is a practice that is not only a religious obligation and a social responsibility, but also a source of pleasure and self-realisation (Mbiti 2011; Ahlberg-Maina 1994; Tamale 2011; Nzegwu 2011). Those teachings about sex and womanhood, encoded in the songs, will be analysed through the lenses of semiotics, metaphors and metonymies, as cognitive and performative instruments of social representation (Moscovici 2000). Metaphors and metonymies are not only strategies for self-protection and protection of the equilibrium of the community, but also aesthetic adornments (Vierke 2012). Finally, there are “therapeutic metaphors”, which are rich in sub-modalities and synaesthesia “help the others through the looking glass” (Gordon 2017).

3. Case Study: The Metaphorical Representation of Sex and Sexuality through *Unyago* Songs

The “master tropes” (Sapir 1977: 4) are the “metaphor we live by” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), in other words, rhetorical strategies culturally contextualised to understand and represent events and phenomena by which we are surrounded (Crocker 1977; Fernandez 1977). People use metaphors as an “equipment for living” (Crocker 1977: 44), semantic strategies to handle social engagements, and as rhetoric performances to persuade. The use of metaphors is a “way in” (Crocker 1977: 38) or a symbolic activity that actively structures the experience (Crocker 1977: 34).

The “epistemology of metaphors” (Burkhardt & Nerlich 2010) and other tropes is an evolutionary epistemology. In fact, metaphors are the component parts of a knowledge process, which determines not only a cultural evolution, by developing the culture and the social environment in which human beings interact, but a biological evolution of both embodied mind and body, by shaping the ways in which humans perceive the world and interact in their environment (Mac Cormac 1985: 127). Metaphors are an “evolutionary knowledge process” in the sense that language is an instrument for human survival, which mediates between biological and cultural evolution, by adapting it to the environment (Mac Cormac 1985: 149).

The source of social representations is unfamiliarity, and its aim is to familiarise with the unfamiliar: “the source of all representations is to make something unfamiliar familiar” (Moscovici 2000: 37), by means of a set of explanations originating in daily life in course of inter-individual communications. “Anchoring” and “objectification” are the two processes that generate social representations, by moving the unfamiliar to the familiar (Moscovici 2000). Anchoring is the process by which unfamiliar concepts are interpreted with common sense shared values, norms and beliefs, setting them into a familiar context; then, the anchored product that is still something abstract becomes objectified into concrete content. The anchored element, being objectified into a different cognitive reality, generates new meaning.

In the specific case of *unyago*, education about sex, sexuality as well as sexual and reproductive health is imparted through anchoring the new concepts into women’s cleaning and cooking everyday activities and by objectifying them in food, cooking tools, plants and fruits, which in turn, generate new metaphorical meanings and symbols.

Moreover, in ritual, we find performative ritual metaphors which suggest actions that are about to their realization (Fernandez 1977: 104). In other words, the metaphorical plan is actualised in the ritual performance.

In metaphors there is much more culture as shared understanding transmitted through language than just a linguistic tool (Quinn 1991: 57). Embodied metaphors describe the embodiment of flesh and blood sensations. These bodily experiences contribute to the development of human cognition as well as embodied metaphors are part of human’s understanding process (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Quinn 1991: 58). Metaphors are drivers rooted in strong cultural basis, which generate “entailments of pre-existing culturally shared models” (Quinn 1991: 60) and new individual models. I argue that metaphors are an entanglement of both strong cultural basis and endless additions of new meanings and understandings, which are always in evolution. For instance, the notion of “play of tropes” (polytropy): an internal metonymic structure that challenges the authority of the metaphorical domain. This metonymic reordering of the world challenges the structure of the world and struggles over hierarchy (Fernandez & Durham 1991: 209-10).

Furthermore, “metaphonymy” (Goossens 1995) is a linguistic device which interlinks metaphor and metonymy. In other words, the same sign expresses both a metaphorical image and a concept that stands metonymically to the main conceptual domain. The main patterns of interplay between metaphor and metonymy are “metaphor from metonymy”: the experimental basis for the metaphor is a metonymy, and “metonymy within metaphor”: metonym functioning in the target domain is embedded within a metaphor (Goossens 1995: 174).

Finally, another important cluster of metaphor is the “embodied metaphors” (Low 1994), which move the abstract and inchoate lived experience to concrete communication (Fernandez 1977; 1991) for otherwise senseless and unspeakable suffering; embodied metaphors are a strategic language for the expression of suffering (Low 1994: 143). Those metaphors are bodily and culturally produced (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Quinn 1991), which communicate lived bodily experiences, sensations, actions, emotions, and disturbance. Those are the expression of the reality experienced bodily and “the senses of the body” (Low 1994: 157).

According to Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), metaphors are verbal representations of an experience which is unique for each individual (Gordon 2017: 12). People represent their experiences differently in terms of “representational systems”: those sense modalities, which human beings use to know (represent) the world around them. People know (represent) the world through sensory portals of sight, audition, kinesthesia, olfaction and taste. Thus, an effective way to describe experience is using a sensory-specific predicate coming from one of the representational systems (Gordon 2017: 98ff). Since experience occurs at the level of sub-modalities, the experience itself will be represented isomorphically at the sub-modality level. Each of the senses: vision, audition, kinesthesia and olfaction, organizes the information into similar classes of experience, which are called sub-modalities. Sub-modalities can be “*equivalent* or interconnected as a *cross-over*”, which means that a sub-modality in one class is associated with a sub-modality in another class (Gordon 2017: 134-5). Those pairs of “*equivalent* or *cross-over sub-modality*” can be grouped as patterns of synaesthesia (Gordon 2017: 137). “*Synaesthesia* refers to the ability of sensory discriminations originating in one sense modality to evoke patterned perceptual experiences in another

sense modality” (Gordon 2017: 137). Many synaesthesia patterns are learned as culturally important distinctions. The representational systems cross-over at the sub-modality level are incorporated into metaphors. Since most of the sub-modalities are *dimensions* of experience, metaphors can operate *intra-dimensional shifts* of sub-modality or *synesthetic shifts* (Gordon 2017: 140). The effective cross-over from one sub-modality to another is managed when the transition is being made by going from a sub-modality distinction in one system to an equivalent sub-modality in another system (Gordon 2017: 146).

In the following paragraphs, I am presenting an analysis of selected excerpts from *unyago* songs ordered from the northern region of Pwani to the southern region of Mtwara as previously described. The aim is to isolate the main tropes which describe female bodies and sexual activities in the songs which, by passing culture, mould ethnicity-based sexual identities (Tamale 2011).

Firstly, in the Pwani region, the *unyago* leader among the Zaramo is called *Nyalutanga* – the maternal grandmother, and she explains how a girl grows up and reach puberty as follows:

<i>Mmea ukaota matawi na ukawa na mimba, ukatoa maua, ukakomaa, na ukavunwa.</i>	A plant sprouts branches and becomes pregnant It gives birth to flowers , it ripens, and it is reaped
<i>Nyalutanga akaupika mwenyewe na akaleta chakula: “Onja chakula hiki kitamu. Ngoja tukiite mpunga” (Swantz et al. 2014: 81)¹⁷</i>	the leader will cook herself (the flower) and she will bring the food: “Let’s taste this tasty food. Let’s call it a rice plant ” ¹⁶ .

The growing up young maiden is metaphorically represented as a sprouting bud; however, the symbol of the flower contains metaphonymically a metonymy for the girl’s mature womb. Then, the representational systems underwent a synesthetic shift from vision and olfaction, which are related to trees and their flowers, to food testing. Then, the girl is depicted like a rice plant (*mpunga*), which is the basic food of the community.

<i>Mti ukakua, ukatoa maua na kuzaa matunda. Akachuma tunda na kusema “ngoja nilionje”. Anaona ni tamu sana. [...] watu wote hivi sasa wanakula mapapai. Papai linapokuwa freshi linakuwa na utovu mweupe kwa ndani</i>	The tree grows and then it generates flowers and fruits. She will pick a fruit and will say “let me try it”. She will see how tasty it is [...] Everyone right now eats papayas . When fresh papaya has just a small bit of white inside
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¹⁶ All of the translations from Swahili to English are mine. All emphasis added are mine.

¹⁷ All the translations from the original languages to Swahili are by the authors of the collections of songs (Swantz et al. 2014; Mayemba 2014; Mulokozi 2011; Katoto 2016; Amandus 2004).

[...] *baadhi ya mbegu ni nyeusi, na nyama nyekundu,* [...] some seeds are black, and the pulp is red.
Lakini zote zinaishia tumboni, hazitokezi kwa nje. However, every part will end in the stomach, none of them will be lost.
(Swantz *et al.* 2014: 82)

In the song quoted above, the principal analogy revolves around the fruit trees, which generate smelly flowers and tasty mature fruits. The metaphor links the fruit to the puberal maiden, who once ripened can be tasted by a man. Thus, the sub-modalities involved underwent a synesthetic shift from vision and olfaction (fruits and blossoms) to touch (having sex). However, in this song the core symbol is the papaya. Papaya is a metaphonymy made up of a metaphor, which links the papaya fruit with the young girl, who is bodily shaped like a papaya: her upper body is slim, and the waists are abundant as a sign of fertility. In addition, there are two metonymies: firstly, the papayas look like the shapes of two firm young breasts; secondly, the metonymy compares the papaya to the girl’s womb. In fact, the papaya is characterized by three colours: the white parts symbolise milk from mothers’ breast; the red pulp represents menstrual blood, and the black seeds symbolise girl’s pubic hair.

Mti ukakua na kuzaa matunda, matunda yakaiva, ng’oo, ndizi. A tree grows and generates fruits, the fruits will ripe and here is a banana.
Akaenda kuyachuma matunda na akaonja. She (the initiated maiden) will reap the fruits and will taste them.
(Swantz *et al.* 2014: 83)

In the excerpt above another fruit is generated, the banana or male penis, which will be reaped and tasted by the brides. Therefore, the girl is matured to be married and to consume the formal union. The sexual act is symbolically represented by:

“*Tambiko la kutwanga mtama mwekundu na mweupe*” the ritual offering to the spirits that will be performed by pounding sorghum plant and seeds, which are red and white, so as to obtain “*unga wa mtama*”, sorghum flour (Swantz *et al.* 2014: 84-7). The pounding performance is the mimic representation of the sexual act, where women’s blood (the red colour) is united with men’s semen (the white colour). The product obtained – the sorghum flower is the basic ingredient to cook local meals.

Furthermore, another collection of songs consists in “*nyimbo za unyago wa kinyago cha Mwana Nyang’hiti*” (Mayemba 2014: 74), the songs of *unyago* dedicated to *Mwanahiti* carvings. *Mwanahiti* is a carved doll made up of ebony wood, which symbolises fertility. It symbolises the union between a man and a woman as well as Plato’s androgynous myth; in fact, the body of the doll represents a female figure, which ends with a head shaped like a penis. The doll is believed to incorporate magical power and it is one of the worshiped fetishes, together with the bead’s necklaces, which characterise the celebrations. The ritual performances, which also imply a strong feeling of awe for the *mkole* trees, disclose dendrophile tendencies. Indeed, selected trees in Tanzanian culture have sacred status and symbolic value in connection with ethnicity and local identity (Acquaviva 2019a; 2019b).

Huo udugu wenu kama ugali kuleni [...] Our kinship is like eating **ugali** (stiff porridge) [...]
wanajamii wakizunguka na mwiko na sufuria. the clan members are strolling with a **wooden spoon** and a **metal pot** (to stir the porridge).

(Mayemba 2014: 86-7)

Uhai wangu wa bibo, kuiva na kuanguka My life is like a **cashew apple**, it matures and falls.

Chandarua dawa yake ngao The only treatment is a **mosquito net**

Ukimwi unapitia mwao which like a **shield**

Jogoo kucha wika does not let **AIDS** get through

Kisamvu ni kisamvu. The **cock** crows at dawn

(Mayemba 2014: 98)

to peck at **cassava leaves**.

In this song, the sexual act is represented in comparison to the act of cooking stiff porridge, which is stirred up by means of a wooden spoon (penis) inside a metal pot (uterus). A woman is metaphonimically bodily shaped like a cashew apple, the typical product of Mtwara region. The metonymy inside a metaphor symbolises the uterus and ovaries. In fact, the cashew apple ends with the cashew nuts, the union of which looks like the female reproductive organs.

Moreover, this song teaches another important lesson about safe sex. The mosquito nets are a shield like condoms to avoid HIV/AIDS when the bachelor cocks are strolling around looking for fresh cassava leaves to peck.

Sexual intercourses and sensuality are themes in the collection of songs, which were collected by university students, and subsequently analysed by Mulokozi (2011) among different ethnicities including the ethnicity of the Ngindo:

Oh! mwanangu kilichomo nguoni nini mwangu Oh, my daughter what is under your clothes
Kinamelemeta. is sparkling now.

(Mulokozi 2011: 15)

Unyumba ni mapatano na mume wako kubembelezana Marriage is an agreement with your husband to **cuddle and please one another**
hata mkila ugali wa muhogo. But you can also **eat cassava porridge** together.

(Mulokozi 2011: 109)

Ukipika ugali wa mwanamume wako When you **stir the porridge** with your husband

Sugua mwiko wake **Scrub his spoon**

Sugua chungu chako **Scrub your pot**

Fajia na jikoni kwako. **Sweep out your kitchen.**

(Mulokozi 2011: 81-2)

The sexual intercourse is represented by a synesthetic cross-over, which connects the pleasure of touching and effleurage with smelling and testing the stirring up cassava porridge. The sensuality of eating is linked to sensuality and sexual pleasure which arise

by scrubbing, rubbing and massaging together a spoon and a pot. However, eroticism is preliminary sparked by the sensuality of embracing and cuddling.

Even among the Yao from Nachingwea and Lindi (Amandus 2004) sexual intercourses are portrayed by the intra-dimensional shift of sub-modalities that links pounding and grinding sorghum plants with rubbing and caressing bodies.

<i>Wewe mwali, sasa umekua [...]</i> <i>Utatwanga [...]</i> (Amandus 2004: 19)	You, young maiden, are mature now [...] You will pound [...]
<i>Utasaga mtama [...]</i> <i>Ndoa ni kama ukwaju</i> <i>Ndoa ni kama asali</i> <i>Kama ndoa ni tamu, uchungu upo</i> (Amandus 2004: 24)	You will grind sorghum [...] Marriage is like tamarind fruit Marriage is like honey Marriage may be sweet and sour
<i>Nina mdogo wangu mimi [...]</i> <i>Kama unga, mimi</i> <i>Unga mweupe wa mahindi [...]</i> <i>Uzuri wa mwanamke tabia njema</i> (Amandus 2004: 37)	I have my child [...] Like porridge A white corn flour [...] The beauty of a woman is her good character .

Marriage is a sweet and sour fruit like tamarind, and the fruit, generated by mixing and blending a sweet and a sour taste, is a white and pure corn flower, a child, whose existence means the survival of the entire kinship. In fact, the whole clan's survival depends on corn flour production. Furthermore, erotic pleasure arouses from the good character of a woman, who can sexually amuse her husband through the sensuality of her movements.

Finally, among the Makonde from Newala and Mtwara, the celebration of *Chiputo*, local initiation, is led by *Walombo* (Katoto 2016):

<i>Panda mbegu, majira yamefika</i> <i>Tafadhali panda mbegu.</i> (Katoto 2016:101)	Plant your seed, the season is coming Please sow the seed.
<i>Maynigu mwanamke</i> <i>Usipite.</i> (Katoto 2016: 103)	Woman body is like a wasp Yet do not let wasps's sting to penetrate .
<i>Osha uke, osha uke</i> <i>Ukishatoa kidole angalia</i> <i>Ukiona nyeupe, osha uke</i> <i>Ukiona nyekundu, ni mwezini [...]</i> <i>Nyeusi [...]</i> <i>mwanamume ni mgonjwa, mwogope.</i> (Katoto 2016: 104)	Wash your vagina , wash it When you remove your finger look at it If it looks white , wash up your vagina If it looks red , it is menstrual blood [...] If it looks Black [...] Your man is sick , be afraid of him.
<i>Msichana [...] ni chungu [...]</i> <i>kingevunjika.</i> (Katoto 2016: 104)	A girl is [...] like a pot [...] which can be cracked .
<i>Nimepoteza kitu changu</i> <i>Hassani ananipa</i>	I have lost my hymen (virginity) Hassan gave me something

<i>Ninapokiona kitu chake</i>	when I saw his manhood
<i>Ule mtama halisi</i>	the real sorghum plant
<i>Ile raha yote.</i>	I felt plenty of pleasure.
(Katoto 2016: 108)	
<i>Usile, usile wali</i>	Don't eat rice, don't eat rice (the young maidens)
<i>Nimeweka kwa ajili ya mume wangu.</i>	I prepared it for my husband.
<i>[...] Naogopa dhambi.</i>	I am scared of sin (sexual lust).
(Katoto 2016: 109)	

In this song a young maiden is metaphonically compared to a wasp with slim waists, yet wasps' stings are metonymies for penis piercing the maidens. A young girl is shaped like a pot. The pot (vagina) can be cracked by the penis, which breaks the hymen making the girl a mature woman. Sexual pleasure is found in pounding the sorghum. However, the pot must be cleansed; in fact, it can be white, and it means that it has been sowed by male semen, or red, because of menstrual blood, but it can also be black as a warning against sexually transmitted infections. Finally, the woman is like cooked rice ready for her husband. Here the word play is based on the Swahili word *wali* which means both cooked rice and, in the plural (*mwali-wali*), the initiated maidens¹⁸. The tongue twister implies a riddle that hints to spread awareness about the risk of extramarital affairs. Each husband should eat from his own rice plate.

In conclusion, as a result of the examination of the rhetoric strategies illustrated throughout the songs to communicate sex, sexuality and the erotic, I argue that a **synesthetic epistemology of metaphors and metaphonymy** can be diluted. In fact, the representational systems based on human senses works through not only an interlink between metaphor and metonymy, but also intra-dimensional or synesthetic shifts of sub-modalities.

The strong connection between women, sex and food illustrates unavoidably the traditional African view expressed by the Swahili saying: “*mke ni jiko*” – a good wife is like a kitchen stove, or “*amepata jiko*” – he has found a cooking stove/someone who cooks for him, which implies that women's main roles are motherhood and family care. Indeed, cooking is also the symbolism which typifies female initiation rites (Feldman-Savelsberg 1995).

Sexual activity is epitomised by either consumption or preparation of food (Magonya 2019). “The imagery of a devouring vagina joins food, sexuality and dance together in one aesthetic experience” (Nzegwu 2011: 24). The “**lust/sexuality** (target domain) is **food** (source domain)” metaphor can be explained not only because sexual desire materialises from the body like hunger, but also because both sex and food are emotional activities, which are both controlled by the brain limbic system (Magonya 2019). “The sensuality of eating makes it pleasurable”; in fact, in courtship or dating food is seen as prelude of sex (Magonya 2019: 190). Likewise, a married woman is portrayed as “cooking inside food, sex, and children” (Feldman-Savelsberg 1995: 484). The

¹⁸ See also the tongue twisters: *Wacha wale wanawali wa liwali wale wali wa liwali*: Let those maidens of the liwali (former Muslim government representative, or headman) eat the rice of the *liwali*; *wanawali wa liwali hawali wali wa liwali wao*: the headman's maidens do not eat their headmen's rice, Bertoncini 2009: 24).

metaphor of cooking represents both sexual intercourses and childbirth as a strategy to recognise women’s know-hows and agency.

Nonetheless, gendered and sexist interpretations can be deconstructed deferring the meaning to different and dissonant interpretations (Derrida 1978; 2016; Mwamzandi 2011; 2013). In fact, by depicting female bodies and female sexual organs through the fruit-womb symbolism, which is the embodiment of femininity and fertility, women are valued as the goddess Mother-Earth. Moreover, the shapes of the regional typical fruit, which represents the main source of income for the local population, looks like women and wives, who are the source of pleasure and the erotic.

In Swahili classic poems (*utendi*) anthropomorphically shaped trees are aesthetically used as similes associated with women’s body parts (Vierke 2007). Particularly, blossoms and flowers are associated with female genitals as well as fruits are associated with female breasts. The interlinking between the two domains of experience of eating and having sex is represented at the sub-modal level through the image of a man who “sensually testes and smells fruits and blossoms” (Vierke 2007: 30), which are metaphonymies or similes for women’s sexual organs and sexually appealing body parts. Finally, the depiction of women as flowers and blossoms is also a kind of female praise poetry, which celebrates women’s gorgeousness, sensuality and sexual charm (Vierke 2007).

In conclusion, blending and merging body senses, by touching, smelling and tasting, the **synesthetic epistemology of metaphors** demonstrates that sensuality is a way to access knowledge and gain agency and power (Foucault 1998). For instance, Nzegwu’s neologism of “*Osunality*”, which she defines as “African eroticism”, stems from *Osun* the Yoruba female goddess of sexuality, fertility and sexual knowledge, acmes “the morality of sexual pleasure and the erotic” as “a critique of emphasising fertility over pleasure in sexuality” (Nzegwu 2011: 258) despite the “mother-centred logic of African civilization” (Nzegwu 2011: 256).

4. Conclusion: Epistemology of Sensuality: Afrocentric Representations of Pleasure

To sum up, *unyago* is a traditional ritual practice, which addresses many issues including teaching sex that is a practice that covers social, religious and individual roles in African societies (Mbiti 2011, Ahlberg-Maina 1994). The ritual of *unyago* is an epistemic tool which through rhythm, trance, and possession approaches sex and sexuality. The ritual becomes a “cognitive behavioural therapy” (Williams 2016: 24) that makes people more conscious about the multiple dimensions of reality – physical, emotional, spiritual and ancestral – we experienced during sex (Williams 2016: 23). *Unyago* rituals describe sexual practices by means of a **synesthetic epistemology of metaphors**, which in turn, by shifting sub-modalities, transmits to the initiands an **embodied knowledge of self**. This consists in not only the “relationship between bodiliness, food and the kinds of care or enmity that bring it to the body” (Green 2014: 48), but also “**embodied knowledge**” (Senghor 1964; 1971; Udefi 2014) as knowing through intuition, emotion, participation and sensibility.

“**Embodied epistemologies**” (Marleau-Ponty 2013; Butler 1993) imply knowing through the body and bodily sensations, perceptions and stimuli unconsciously. Therefore, I argue that from *unyago* songs an **epistemology of sensuality** can be isolated, which not only teaches how to create pleasure from sex, but it also conveys self-knowledge about

one's own body, emotions and pleasures, acquired via sensorial stimuli, physical sensations, spiritual emotions, which in turn, can be more intimately connected to sexual arousal and the erotic (Araoz 1984: 104-5).

Unyago songs epitomise an Afrocentric representation of sensuality and sexual pleasure. This form of “African eroticism” (Nzegwu 2011) articulates an “**epistemology of the erotic**” (Williams 2016), which aims to operate a decolonisation from western hegemonic paradigms of sex and erotic transgression (Bataille 2017), and to deconstruct the construction of African sexuality made by the myth of Orientalism (Said 1978; Mudimbe 1988; Appiah 1992). In fact, the **Afrocentric representation of sensuality and erotic pleasure**, as knowledge, and accomplishment of individual satisfaction, religious duty, social responsibility, demonstrates the plurality of “African sexualities” (Tamale 2011). Indeed, sexualities in Africa take different shapes and are experienced in different ways according to locality, gender, age, cultural and educational background (Dilger 2009: 132).

In conclusion, even though *unyago* rituals are fading nowadays, I argue that the endogenous sexual teachings, imparted through *unyago* songs, are still a valuable source of knowledge, which contribute to the ongoing process of broadening the epistemological landscape and shifting the centre of knowledge (Mbembe 2021; Thiongo 1993). The investigation on *unyago* songs sheds light on practices, which are drawn from Afro-centred epistemological perspectives, and which foster Afrocentric knowledge (s) and worldviews.

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Prof. Magabyuso Mulokozi interviewed by the author on the 9th of January 2015, University of Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam.

Bi. Nuru interviewed by the author on the 29th of December 2014, Mtepera village (Kilwa District).