THE WOMAN'S VOICE IN *UNYAGO* ORAL POETRY: A CASE STUDY OF SWAHILI- SPEAKING CLUSTERS IN KISUMU AND ITS ENVIRONS

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of Unyago songs (poems). It investigates the structure of the songs and their socio-cultural contexts. Among other related issues, the study examines Unyago as a Women's specific institution for initiation.

The location of the study is Kisumu Municipality and its environs. The informants are Kiswahili speaking clusters, and the research methodology includes a feminist literary framework,the ethnographic theory, participant – observation and unstructured interviews.

The major finding of this study is the Unyago is a theatrical stage,in it there is the performance of songs, dances and conversations;in it women's desires, perceptions of themselves, their sexual and gender identity, and their own lives are expressed;the male gender, sexual politics and relationships between men and women are revealed. We discover that the Unyago performance encompasses art and life and that the two are inseparable.

Ultimately, the findings establish that, through Unyago rituals, girls change and mature into women who in turn acquire their gender identity.

The social interactions opportuned by Unyago, empower the women to exert control over their lives and that of their society as a whole. This empowerment gives them what the thesis calls a **voice**, the **voice** is identifiable as a process that starts with the girls' puberty, through all the Unyago and Unyago-related ceremonies like **dari ya**

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

In this study we visit Swahili-speaking groups in the Kisumu District of Nyanza Province-Kenya. Kenya is divided into eight administrative provinces; Coast, North Eastern; Eastern, Central, Rift Valley, Western, Nairobi and Nyanza (see map I). Each province is further subdivided into districts. In total, Kenya has 66 Districts.

Nyanza Province lies around the southern shores of Lake Victoria. It covers a total of 12 Districts: Kuria, Migori, Gucha, Nyamira, Homa Bay, Suba, Rachuonyo, Kisumu, Nyando, Bondo and Siaya (see map 2). Linguistically, Nyanza province is often divided into two main parts: Luo Nyanza and the Kisii Nyanza. The Luo speakers occupy most of Nyanza province. In fact, they are to be found in almost all the eight (8) of the said districts.

At the time of this research, Kuria and Suba districts were being curved out of Homa Bay and Migori districts. Bantu speakers, the Abasuba and Abakuria, inhabit the two new districts. Whereas all has been well for Kuria as a distinct cultural entity, the situation has not been the same with Suba. According to Kembo Sure (1997:7), the niggling question today is whether there is still a distinctive cultural group called the Abasuba. Kembo Sure's findings are that at least linguistically, we can confidently argue and

empirically show that Olusuba (the Suba Language) is an autonomous language not genetically related to Dholuo at all.

Our research population speaks Kiswahili, which is of Bantu origin. The linguistic environment is such that it is surrounded mainly by Dholuo speaking Nilotes and the Kuria, Suba and Ekegusii speaking Bantu groups. Linguistically therefore, our research sites are such that, one finds a population that speaks both Luo and Kiswahili with ease. This rare scenario can be attributed to the concept of **kuswahilishwa**, literally translatable as **swahilisation**. The practice dictates that any person marrying a **Mswahili** must undergo rituals and ceremonies that acculturate one into a Mswahili. Culture is embedded in language and therefore as suitors learn it, they have no choice but to acquire the language as well. This scenario however accounts only for the acquisition of Kiswahili. Regarding Luo, we can only assume that the overwhelming exposure of the Waswahili to speakers of Luo has contributed to their knowledge of Dholuo language.

According to findings by a diverse category of researchers such as historians, anthropologists, colonial administrators and missionaries among others, the original home of the Luo (Jo-Luo), was somewhere in southern Sudan in the region now occupied by the Shilluk. From here, they began their long migration southwards, driven by hunger and war. As they migrated, some settled in Acholi and Padhola areas of Uganda while the rest moved to the shores of Lake Victoria and spread along the shores to Kisumu and Kano plains. Later, others settled in parts of South Nyanza through Rachuonyo (Ogot, B.A. ed 1986).

Economic activities in Luoland basically consist of fishing, farming and petty trade especially of cooked food. Within Kisumu District, rice and sugarcane are grown for cash. Much has been written of the socio-cultural affairs of the Jo-Luo. Much of the literature revolves around their migration, oral traditions, belief systems, such as, witchcraft, *chira* and *chora*, social institutions such as courtship, marriage, levirate relationships, polygamy among others (Millikin, 1906; Pritchard, 1965;Owuor, 1967; Hay, 1976; Were, 1986; Obote, 1992; Oduol, 1992; Suda 1993).

The Jo-Luo are the main inhabitants of Kisumu District. However, much of this district – and especially its headquarters in Kisumu town is cosmopolitan. The central business district is dominated by Asians of Indian origin. This is the same community that mainly resides in the high-income residential areas of Kilimani and Milimani. Other language groups such as the Kikuyu from the Central Province of Kenya, are to be found, although in small numbers, working alongside the Abaluhya, Kalenjin and other Kenyan communities in wage employment within Kisumu town. Our study focuses on a unique population in Kisumu district. It targets pockets of Swahili-speaking people found in specific dwellings (herein referred to as **clusters**) within Kisumu District. Such clusters include Kaloleni, Manyatta *ya Arabu* (Mosque), Kibos and Bandani (see map 3). The inhabitants of the clusters, like many others within Kenya, are a specific breed of **Waswahili**. They are not the original stock of **Kiswahili** speakers, the Wangozi, but remain Waswahili.

The **Wangozi** were found at the East Coast of Africa around Mombasa, Pemba, Kilwa, Lamu, and Zanzibar. The East Coast of Africa is locally referred to as **Uswahilini**. The inhabitants spoke a Bantu language so far linguistically proven to be very close to such languages as Kiluhya, Kikamba, Kitaita and Kikuyu to mention but a few. The language the **Wangozi** spoke was known as Kingozi (Abdulaziz, M. 1979; Mbaabu, 1987; Mwai, 1988).

Due to the strategic geographical position of Uswahilini, contacts with visitors from the outside world, especially from maritime nations, took place. Visitors to Uswahilini came from diverse cultures and highly influenced the **Wangozi** and **Kingozi,** their language. But it was the advent of the nations of Arabic-speaking people and their religion, Islam that greatly affected the **Waswahili**. **Kingozi** borrowed terminologies from Arabic. The Arabic- speaking people intermingled with the **Wangozi** through intermarriage. The immigrants became indistinguishable from their environment within a few generations. Thus , through a unipolar process, a new Arabic/Islamic –African culture emerged (Abdulaziz, M. 1979). This culture was the one to be labelled **Uswahili** and its practitioners, **Waswahili.**

Discussions on the origin of Kiswahili have never reached a conclusive point. In summary, two theories have often been expressed. Some scholars assert the view that **Kingozi**, which bore Kiswahili, was originally the tongue of one of the tribes occupying a small region of the Lamu coast of East Africa opposite Zanzibar. A German linguist who has been lecturing and conducting research in Kenya for many years still accepts this traditional view that Kiswahili is just one of the Bantu languages of Kenya. According to him Kiswahili came up between 700 and 800 C.E (Nurse, Derek – 1985).

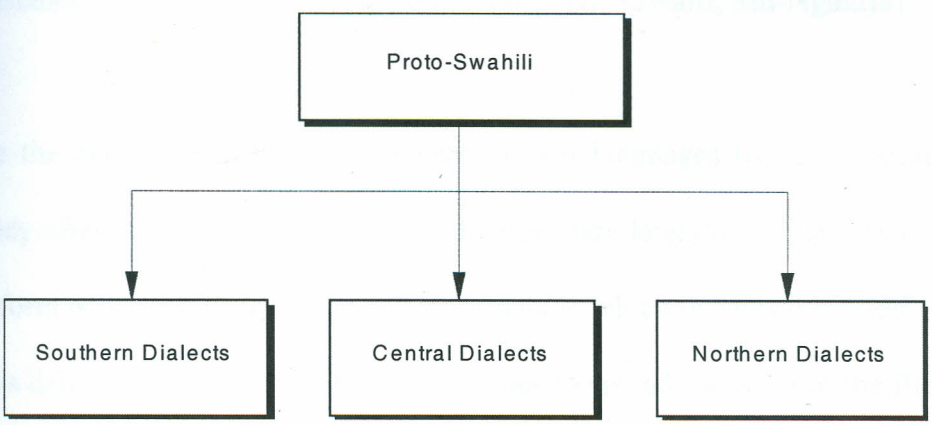
The second view is that Kiswahili is a mixture of Arabic and one or several Bantu languages. The argument concurs with two of the sociological standpoints on the origin of the Kiswahili ethnic group. European linguists such as Johnson and Bloomfield propounded views taught to generations of Kenyan school children that Swahili came into being as a bastard language spoken by bastard children of Arabs and Bantus.

History has it very clearly that Swahili is a combination of more languages than one, the major one being Arabic. When Arabs came to the East Coast of Africa before the exploitation era and consequently colonised it, they had no way of communicating with the indigenous people they met. Gradually and inevitably they tactfully combined what of their languages they could with the ones being spoken there-the result-Swahili. Some of the most prominent words in the language owe their origin to Arabic: - **salamu, salama, chai, lakini.**

Swahili possesses a considerable number of borrowed words, most of them stemming from Arabic. Basic vocabulary shows only few borrowings with numerous words from African cultures. Kiswahili has also been influenced in its grammatical structure by foreign languages only to a small degree. The application of the comparative method indicates that on the basis of its regular phoneme and morpheme equivalents the language unequivocally proves itself to be of Bantu origin, and that there exists no justification for calling it a mixed language. In fact an examination of Swahili and Arabic words reveal clearly that the basic matrix is Bantu and words from African languages and Arabic are merely superimposed in this matrix.

The term Kiswahili is used in reference to a variety of dialect clusters. Dialects like **Chi-miini** spoken at **Borara** in Somalia, or **Ki-Hadimu** spoken in southern Zanzibar, would be, as they are today – unintelligible, to one another and to members of other clusters.

The dialect of Kiswahili can be divided into three major clusters – a northern, southern and a central one as illustrated below.



The Northern cluster encompasses the dialects of the communities living around Lamu and Pate on the Northern coasts of Kenyan (**Ki-Amu, Ki-Shela, Ki-pate, Ki-tikuu**), which have together been labelled the **Bajuni or Ki – Ungunja.** The dialects of **Borara, Chi-miini** and the **Kisiu** also belong to this cluster.

The central cluster has the dialects of **Vanga (Ki-vumba)** and **Mtangaata (Ki-Mtangata)** located on the southern Kenya and northern Tanzanian coasts respectively. To these must be added the various dialects of Pemba, and the two major rural dialects of Zanzibar **(Ki-Tumbatu and Ki-Hadimu).**

The southern cluster comprises the dialects of the Tanzania coast south of Bagamoyo including the island of Mafia, and the dialect of Zanzibar town, which was subsequently chosen to be the standard form of the language. Others are the 'bridge' dialects in and around Mombasa (**Ki-Mvita, Chi-Jomvu, Ki-Ngare** with **Chi-Chifundi** further to the south), which share some Northern and some central features. The dialects of the Comoro islands, however require separate grouping **(Ki-Nzwani, Shi-Ngazija)**.

These are the main coastal dialects acquired as first languages by their speakers, even though they often use the standard form as their primary language. The evolution of the standard form of Kiswahili language was one arena in which debates prevailed for a long time. This debate arose after missionaries, anxious to spread the word of the Bible in the Moslem -dominated coast of East Africa, started to translate the Bible into Kiswahili.

The missionaries arrived to find the Arabs already settled. The Arabs had already done some writing, but in the Arabic script. Before the arrival of Reverend Doctor Ludwig Krapf in 1844, there were hardly any Kiswahili texts in the Latin/Roman scripts. Dr Krapf, a German, started a Mombasa based British Church Missionary Society (CMS) and learnt Kiswahili using the Arabic script. He then translated the Bible into Kiswahili using the Latin/Roman script. This translation was based on the Mombasa dialect – **Ki-Mvita**. With time, Dr Krapf had to leave and thus handed over the translations to his assistant, Rev. Rebmann. . Krapf had already done a translation of the gospels according to Saint Luke and John. Later Krapf compiled a Kiswahili dictionary in the same dialect.

Another missionary, Reverend . Edward Steere of the Universities Mission to Central Africa (U.M.C.A.) carried out a similar translation exercise. Bishop Steere however, did his work in Zanzibar. He arrived in 1865 after Krapf had already done some work. Steere started compiling chapters, which he called, "*collections for a handbook of Swahili as spoken at Zanzibar*".

Bishop Steere then used the Zanzibar dialect – **Ki-Unguja.** In his preface, Bishop Steere argued that what . Krapf and Rebmann had written was nonsensical to any student of Kiswahili. This statement aroused anger in Krapf and in the preface to his dictionary, he responded saying that what he had done was very much in line with Steere's own recommendations. Krapf concluded that, the grammar and vocabulary he had used were

from the best Kiswahili dialect because he felt that Ki- Unguja was not only unintelligible, but also adulterated by Arabic.

This controversy raged for quite some time. It spread and other missionaries joined. Some fell into Krapf's camp, which defended **Ki-Mvita (Ki-Mombasa).** The majority joined Bishop Steere. This was so because, most of them had only lived in Zanzibar and therefore found **Ki-Mvita** difficult to understand. It is in this way that Ki-Unguja started gaining ground against **Ki-Mvita** as the standard Kiswahili dialect. Despite other spirited debates and committees set to belabour this issue, **Ki-Unguja** was selected as the Kiswahili standard. This is then the acceptable dialect for academic work. The orthography in the transcription of the song "texts" in our thesis is in this dialect.

The spread of Swahili-speaking traders into the interior and subsequent need for a lingua franca in areas like towns of great linguistic diversity has led to the emergence of a number of upcountry dialects. Most important of these are those spoken in parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo known collectively as **Ki-Ngwana**. The contact between Asian and European settlers has come up with (**Ki-Setla**). In the contemporary society, the youth has come up with a mixed language of mother tongue plus English plus Kiswahili (**Sh-Eng**). This category of dialect is to be found alongside the standard Kiswahili inside and in areas surrounding our study sites.

There have also been unconcluded debates on the origin of the term Swahili and on the derivation of nouns such as **Mswahili, Uswahili, Uswahilini** among others. However

there is linguistic evidence to the effect that the addition of prefixes is a common feature in Bantu languages. Although the root of the word Swahili could have been Arabic Swahili, other linguistic activities could have been derived from Bantu and thus the unipolar process could have gone even further.

The population in our study is not the first generation –**Wangozi-** nor the second – **Waswahili**-, but could be the third. Their history takes us back to the East Coast of Africa and then to the interior. The maritime traders earlier referred to, started off from the Coast to the interior for diverse purposes. Whereas some traded on slaves, others were interested in elephant tusks among other items of international trade at the time. Along with these traders, some **Waswahili** also travelled. After trading in the interior, some of them remained and set up clusters and mosques. Others fathered children with female members of upcountry communities. The products of these relationships settled and developed into generations of speakers of Kiswahili.

The above-described person is assumed to be the major inhabitant of the interior clusters, which are our research sites. The main unifying factors for these people should be observed as their language, Kiswahili, **Uswahili** their culture, and their adherence to one religion, Islam. In our research sites we come across people assimilated from various surrounding Kenyan communities especially the Jo-Luo.

Another category of the inhabitants is of Nubian origin. According to the *New Vision* of *Friday April 16th 1999*, Nubians are believed to have originated from the Sudan. They

had run away from the Sudan due to civil strife, migrated to Uganda, and settled and intermarried with Ugandans. Later, with the encouragement of Captain Lugard, the Nubians in Uganda joined the army. This made them move throughout East Africa and specifically Kenya. From thence, the Nubians have spread to diverse places in Kenya and more so Kibera in Nairobi and the Western part of Kenya which neighbours Uganda.

Hitherto many Nubians live next to Swahili speakers in the clusters visited. They share a language – Kiswahili, Islam and cultural activities, hence their being part of our target population in the research..

The study examines women-specific ritual songs in the Kiswahili language as sang by our target population in Western Kenya. Through a reading of songs by women in their rituals, the study investigates the dualism between men and women in the said communities in the clusters. Through a thematic and formal analysis of the women's poetic creations (**Nyimbo za Kike**) collected during this study, we understand how the people harmonise the male/female distinction into a social whole.

The songs analysed were collected as female soloists of Bandani, Manyatta ya *Arabu*, Kibos and Kaloleni, clusters led young and old women in singing. Others were recorded during a **Dari ya Mwanamwari** performance by the Bismillahi women's group of the Manyatta ya Arabu (Mosque) cluster and also during two **Dari ya arusi** performance in Kaloleni and Kibos clusters respectively.

A Note on Orthography

The song "texts' quoted in our thesis are all in the standard Kiswahili earlier discussed. To a reader not familiar with the pronunciation, this table will be useful. In some cases, the pronunciation deviates from the conventions of the International Phonetic Alphabet (I.P.A). In such cases, a close- sound representation is given. The research on the phonology of Kiswahili has revealed that this language has twenty five (25) consonantal phonemes and five (5) vocalic phonemes. Kiswahili Allophones are infinite for they depend heavily on the first language of the speaker (L1) and also the linguistic environment of the Allophones Standard Kiswahili has the following alphabet, which is formed from the transcription of the phonemes of this language.

Number	Spelling	I.P.A Symbols	Pronunciation	Examples of words
1.	A	(a)	Aa	amana
2.	B	(b)	Be	beberu
3.	Ch	(c)	Che	cheche
4.	D	(d)	De	debe
5.	Dh	( )	Dha	dhamira
6.	E	(e)	Ee	eneo
7.	F	(f)	Fe	fenesi
8.	G	(g)	Ge	gereza
9.	Gh	( )	Gho	ghorofa
10.	H	(h)	He	hema
11.	I	(i)	Ii	imani
12.	J	(j)	Je	jembe
13.	K	(k)	Ke	kengele
14.	L	(l)	Le	leso
15.	M	(m)	Me	mende
16.	N	(n)	Ne	nene
17.	Ny	( )	Nye	nyenyere
18.	Ng'	( )	Ng'o	Ng'ombe

19.	O	(o)	Oo	orofa
20.	P	(p)	Pe	pembe
21.	R	(r)	Re	rekebisha
22.	S	(s)	Se	sembuse
23.	Sh	(s)	She	shemeji
24.	T	(t)	Te	tete
25.	Th	( )	The	theluji
26.	U	(u)	Uu	uchumi
27.	V	(v)	Ve	vema
28.	W	(w)	We	wembe
29.	Y	(j)	Ye	yeye
30.	Z	(z)	Ze	zeze

(Source: Kapinga M.C, 1983 :11)

Problem Statement

Studies on gender roles and the status of women have advanced rapidly in the past two decades. Regarding the Swahili-speaking society, our literature review observes a series of articles and research reports exploring various dimensions of the characterisation of women. The studies all seem to share an explicit recognition that women in Uswahili practising societies occupy a secondary and inferior position to that of men (Mbughuni, 1979; Strobel, 1984; N'tarangwi,1993).

In attempting to understand the status of women in this society, scholars have adopted one of a number of theoretical bases that have been utilised to shed light on the status of women world-wide. These scholars have only gone as far as an exposition of the existence of two separate and sharply differentiated social worlds; men are said to inhabit the public world of politics , religion and scholarship, while the women are confined to the private sphere of the home. Implicit in this dichotomy of public/male, private/female

is the assumption that power, viewed as belonging in the public/political domain, is a monopoly of men and that women, being confined to the domestic sphere, are therefore powerless.

Although societies the world over are assigned roles and status on the basis of gender, there is a variation from society to society in the social significance of these roles in the construction of gender identity and the status differential that accompanies the assigned social roles as well as the meaning that the resulting sexual asymmetry assumes within a specific cultural context. In the Uswahili practising society, within its patrilineal and patriarchal culture and Islamic ideology, sexual asymmetry assumes an extreme expression marked by a formal segregation of women, covering their heads with a veil and their relegation to the "private" sphere of the household.

The above scenario is the springboard for our study. As attested by our literature search hereafter, the factors contributing to this extreme asymmetry have already been explored in case and field studies in recent years. Still the analysis of institutions that facilitate effective interactions between the specific gender and the successful relationships between both men and women remains under- researched. This study complements the case studies and field visits carried out on the Waswahili women by presenting an investigation of **unyago:** a woman's socialisation institution. The research assumes and isolates **unyago** as a major determinant of interactions between women and the relationships between men and women in our target population. This is a standpoint not yet taken in any studies done here before. The present draws attention to the central fact

that **Uswahili** practising men and women live in one world, no matter how much it seems to be separated into two domains from an outsider's point of view (see N'tarangwi,1993). Our study focuses on the cross-gender power relations in terms of **"the negotiated order"** in this society. We assume that the men and women in this society, as they interact, continually negotiate rules that define and circumscribe the positive relationships and that power therefore is not limited to its "universal" formal aspects but must be viewed from the very society's standpoint. The underlying question that remains unanswered by earlier studies therefore is how women learn to influence their men so as to achieve set social objectives.

Viewed from this perspective, the segregation of men and women in this society need not necessarily imply the restriction of women or their disempowerment. It becomes relevant to recognise that despite the existence of segregated social worlds and the implication that there also exists differential distribution of social knowledge, according to gender, women and men's social structures intersect at many points without any intervention by a regulatory agency to make a wholesome of a society. Thus, men and women are seen to operate within different but complimentary spheres, which are equally important and necessary for the continuity of the social order.

Our study concentrates on the women's sphere in the **Uswahili** practising society. Significantly, the study undertakes an investigation of a women's specific institution – the **unyago.** First, this study carries out an ethnographic investigation of **unyago**, a women's specific rites of passage. Second, it is a content analysis of the songs performed during

the rituals involved, their meanings and the practices surrounding them. It is hoped that this intensive look at women's interactions with each other through oratory will reveal their perception of themselves and the female versus male power relationships in this society. The main assumption in this study is that because the **unyago** is a women's only institution, then it is one of the best contexts through which to understand women in the Swahili-speaking society. Further, we assume that all the **unyago** poems are sung by the women in the cluster visited. These poems therefore have many voices. The voices are from various female dramatis personae. Through the articulation of these songs therefore, women in the society express individual and collective feelings, attitudes and beliefs. The younger women are also made acutely aware of the life ahead of them. The positives and the awkward situations of womanhood are disclosed to them. The **unyago** setting is therefore seen as a ritualised display of shared emotions by women. The poems are seen as an unveiling, a disclosure of enclosed texts in the inner selves of the older women to the younger ones. Through the poems in this cultural context there is the revelation, the vocalisation of what it means to be a woman in the Swahili-speaking society. The assumptions of this study are therefore summed up in the words of Paul Zumthor in his *Oral Poetry* that "Oral Poetry gives voice its absolute dimension, gives human language its over-brimming measure" (1990:210).

The oral poetry performed by our target population should therefore be manifestations of its creators' lived experiences, feelings, desires and thoughts. The foregoing are lodged in the persona's linguistic structures, which emerge during vocalisation, and are realised phonically in voice. In this study, the voicing is seen as a symbolic behaviour, the

reproduction of the inner life, affections and emotions. In our search, the environment of this voice is taken to include the paradynamism of words and communication of intense emotions without speech.

For this reason, the study provides information about the songs, dances, conversations, testimonies, comments, interjections and any other communicational aspects to be realised during data collection.

Objectives of the Study

The first objective is to inquire into **unyago**, a women specific cultural activity among the *Waswahili* who are our research target community. Significantly, the study seeks to witness and record rituals traditionally restricted and assigned to women in Swahili-speaking communities. Through investigative discussions regarding the rituals, the research attempts to determine whether **unyago** rituals divide or unite men and women. The second inquiry is in to the content, and involves analysis of the songs, dances and conversations produced during the ritual performances; their meanings and the practices that surround them. Finally we analyse lived experiences of characters shaped or in the process of being shaped by the cultural meanings that circulate among members of the female gender in their everyday lives.

The objectives lead to the following research questions:

- Are there women specific rituals in the clusters visited?
- What songs, dances and conversations can be observed in the process of these rituals?
- What messages do these linguistic structures help convey as regards acquisition of a gender identity for the female members of this society?
- What features of performance can be seen to be contributing significantly to the expression of gender/power relations in our target population?

Literature Review

Gender related studies in Literature in the Kiswahili language bear witness to two major facts: that most written literary creations in this language are predominantly authored by male writers and this is especially so with prose, and that the literary output of the women from this society has been scanty (Mbughuni, 1979; Matteru, 1982). The argument continues that, due to this scenario, the portrayal has been biased, leaving the image of women negatively stereotypical and unrealistic.

Some of the studies argue that lack of extensive writing by women in this society may be attributed to various factors. Certain scholars observe religious and socio-cultural factors as a major constraint. They state that the teachings of Islam relegate women to subordinate positions. Islam has been said to teach against academic progression of women. General reference can be made to such comments by Mahdi Hauwa in Women

and the Family in Nigeria (1985: 59-64) and Dennis, L.C. (1979) among others. As regards Islam and the **Waswahili**, Strobel in her contribution *on Women in Religion and in Secular Ideology* in African Women South of the Sahara (1984:98) observes that the ideology of women's subordination has been transmitted in diverse ways. She notes the use of female puberty rites to teach female obedience in traditional and Islamic societies. Strobel specifically mentions the **Utendi wa Mwanakupona**, an epic poem in Kiswahili, recited by women in virtually all religious and cultural gatherings.

Biersteker Anne in her discussion *Language, Poetry and Power*: a reconsideration of *"Utendi wa Mwanakupona"*, found in *Faces of Islam in African Literature* (1991:59) also observes that this particular epic is "the canonical Swahili text to be authored by a woman, and which deals with the theme of wifely virtue as defined within the contours of patriarchal Islamic ideology." However, Biersteker is quick to point out that although these are teachings towards submissiveness, there is an underlying empowerment within them.

Endless debates have raged on whether it is the Islamic religion or the indigenous **Wangozi** culture that is responsible for the current position of women in the **Uswahilini** culture. For instance, Ireri Mbaabu (1987:7) observes that **Wangozi** society was matriarchal and thus women were held in high esteem until the introduction of patriarchy through **Uswahili** and the subsequent subordination of women. Biersteker seems to agree with this notion too. On the other hand, Trimingham, J. J. (1980:5) argues that the

instructions given to a female child at adolescence that upholds wifely obedience and submissiveness were present in the culture practised by the **Wangozi.**

Some other studies have suggested that there is evidence of the presence of protest literature against the unrealistic portrayal of women in Kiswahili literature (Mbughuni, 19799; Mulokozi, 1982; Matteru, 1982). For instance, one scholar (N'tarangwi, 1994) has argued that such attempts by women in this society to give a realistic portrayal of themselves has been silenced, since they do not conform to the dominating patriarchal social set up. Thus, women have been creating a literature of their own in reference to their own social position. This leads to a dichotomous literary trend – male and female. He goes further to explain that due to this distinction, such concepts as women's songs – **Nyimbo za Kike** and **Nyimbo za Kiume,** exist.

Most of the scholars mentioned above also make reference to women specific rituals. Some refer to general female rites (Strobel, 1984; Biersteker, 1991), while others refer to rituals only in passing. But in general, our view registers the presence of such rituals and notes that they need to be researched on. The **Tamwa** magazine, ***Sauti ya Siti,*** which is a very popular Tanzanian women's publication, had an article in its January-March 1995 issue entitled *African Culture* that briefly looked at how upcoming adults in certain African societies are prepared through traditional rites of passage such as the women's specific ritual – **unyago.**

Scholars such as Mulokozi mention **unyago** as a distinct female sphere and go no further to elaborate on its function. A few, such as Mbughuni, note that there is need to look at women's creations, especially those that can be found in women-only rituals and activities. Mbughuni however, does not recommend any of those of which **unyago** should be one. It is only Matteru who suggest that any dissenting voices of women could come out in genres of oral literature used specifically by women.

Matteru mentions sub-genres such as lullabies, domestic songs, or even **unyago** songs. The *Tamwa* magazine also informs its readers that the **unyago** institution has songs that are used for socialisation. But one of the write-ups looks at the **unyago** as an institution that could be described to illuminate what women say about their lives. This is what our study sets out to do. It unveils the **unyago** rite of passage and especially literary creations in it.

Theoretical Framework

At this labile moment in the history of feminist thought, this research makes an attempt as a feminist qualitative study. This section starts off with a brief review of progressive feminists theory. It then presents the models of qualitative research to be used in this research endeavour and concludes with a justification of the integration of feminism and qualitative research in the study.

In this study, **feminism** is seen to embrace all endeavour made towards highlighting the recognition of the systematic discrimination against women on grounds of gender and a commitment to work towards change (Tsikata, 1991). According to this definition, scholars and activists engaged in the gender/women's issues are invariably feminists in that they are all committed to changing the prevailing gender disparities that have proved oppressive towards women. Gender, in this study, is taken to mean the "socially constructed and culturally variable roles and responsibilities that men and women are assigned in a given society" (Meena, 1992).

We emphasise here therefore, that there are many feminisms, hence many views, some conflicting, some supporting each other (Devault, 1993; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley and Wise, 1990, Tong, 1989; Atkins, 1989). However, those many voices share the basic outlook that it is important to centre and state research problems around women's diverse situations with the aim of realising social justice for them and their own images of themselves.

In Literature, feminist literary scholarship has two major responsibilities. First, feminist literary artists have to write about being a woman, and describe reality from a woman's point of view, or a woman's perspective. Second is that a feminist reader is one who reads and considers how women characters are portrayed, and what is said about them in a literary text. It is due to these two postulations that the feminist literary scholar has not only been giving new perspectives to texts by women artists, but has also been reconstructing and discovering neglected works by women.

Feminist literary criticisms could, therefore, be defined as the interpretation of literary works from a woman-centred point of view of texts about women and by women. This criticism is traceable to the revival of women's movements during the late 1960s. Through the resultant women's liberation activities, new modes of literary criticism biased towards women – **gynocentric –** come into play and with them the deconstruction of earlier frameworks that were male-centred and male-authored – thus **adrocentric** or **phallocentric.**

One cannot speak of a single feminist literary criticism. In the essay "The Critical Guilt: Alternative Authority in Feminist Criticisms." Torsney argues that:

> *Although the underlying impetus for various schools maybe similar- to recognise and valorise the female experience in reading, writing and responding –the permutations are various, making the feminist critical field resemble a pieced quilt (Atkins, G.D et al 1989 :180).*

Writing on Feminism and the African novel, Frank Katherine agrees with Torsney's general view when she states that;

> *It is a mistake, in fact, to talk about feminist criticism as if it were a single, codified and critical methodology. In reality, there are a number of feminist criticisms covering a broad spectrum from the sociological, prescriptive and polemical to the formalist, rarefied and aesthetic.(Jones, E. et al 1984: 35).*

But the underlying impetus of the various schools here is similar, hence in conclusion, Torsney asserts:

Behind the batting, that which gives the quilt its utilitarian substance, is the insulting material that each piece of the top shares in common with each other piece (Atkins, ibid)

In African literature, the alternatives in feminist literary criticisms have given attention to the place of women as literary artists and subjects. African commentaries stimulated by this approach have sought to answer questions, such as:

- What image of women is projected in oral and written literatures?
- In what measure has this portrayal been changed or maintained?
- Are women literary artists different from male artists?

In these questions, one can observe two distinct modes of feminist literary criticism; the feminist reader and the feminist author.

The mode of feminist readership offers readings to texts and considers the images of female characters and any omissions or misconceptions about women in criticism. In essence, this criticism seems to be stating thus: **look at the portraiture of women in such and such a literary work.** As regards Swahili literature, most of this criticism has concluded that for a long time female characters have been unfairly treated (Matteru:1982, Mbughuni: 1979). A general label for this has been the **stereotypical** feminist literary criticism. Under this, images of women in literature have been classified and the feminist readers speculate on their effects on the general reader. The conclusion

is that female characters are often portrayed in a negative light. These images are found to appear in diverse versions ranging from the **stupid virgins** to that of the **femme fatale.**

The stereotypical portrayal is traceable in both oral and written African literatures (Davis in Anyidoho: 1985). Oral narratives, songs, proverbs, riddles and sayings bear substantial evidence of this. African writers have been found to have propagated the images further. This mode of criticism has had a major impact in literary circles the world over. As regards African literature, there has been the churning of academic essays, chapters, books and thesis on **"images of women in....** Authors who have already undergone critical appraisals are also revisited under the gynocentric approach. Female and male authors are challenged with revisionist criticism that aims at a fair assessment of their portraiture of female characters.

But the most intriguing move was that of the creation of new images. Readers with the feminist eye now turned into authors and either created completely new stories with a conscious effort at destroying the negative image or even revisited narratives that had been transmitted orally for generations. In the Kenyan setting, observable activities were in the holding of a workshop whose output was a book, Our Secret Lives, and texts of original and/or revisited narratives by the Kenya Oral Literature Association (KOLA). KOLA is an independent association of Kenyan researchers, professors, lecturers, teachers and artists who are interested in oral literature and culture.

But the feminist **stereotypical** critical mode cannot go unchallenged. For one, it only deals with texts that bear a negative portrayal of women characters regardless of redeeming positive traits, however minimal they are. This leaves readers of such critical works asking questions such as: what of positive images of women, are there any? And if there are, how are they?. What roles do such characters play in a work of art? How comparative are such characters to the negatively portrayed ones?. All these questions and many others in regard to the positive portrayal of women remain ignored by the stereotypical school of thought. Further, it is not clear whether women who are known beyond doubt as the custodians of creativity especially as regards orature, accept these negative stereotypical images or whether they struggle in any way to refute them through their own creations, especially in women-only circles. The stereotypical criticisms are also often more descriptive than evaluative and with little reference to the aesthetic criteria.

Endeavour in **feminist authorship** revolves around the history, style, themes and genres of literary creations by women. In essence, this mode deals with the main question of difference: What is the difference between women's and men's writing?. And can women constitute a distinct literary group?.

Several academic literary critical works have come up with illustrations of how various denominators give women's creativity a distinct appearance. Such denominators are such as, the natural sexuality – **biology -** and how it affects the themes women create about; or **linguistics -** such as, is speaking, reading, writing, narrating or even singing gender marked?. Or even the **social context,** that is, does culture, class, race, nationality, roles and

responsibilities affect one's creativity, such as, for instance, the images employed? All these have been said to dictate what each gender creates. They can all be summed up under **natural** and/or **cultural** markers. **Biology** is said to affect the themes that each gender involves itself in. For instance, the portrayal of the mother - child bond (maternal instincts) has been observed in women's creative works. Also as dictated by biology, a woman artist would write on menarche - and – menopause-related problems with more ease, commitment and vividness.

Research has also shown that the **social context** of a certain character of a particular gender tends to dictate the language its members use. Thus one's linguistics can be gender bound, since gender refers to the roles and responsibilities given to men and women in a given society. One's language is therefore informed by socialisation. For instance, the encounters in hunting, the most common animals during hunting control images in the literary creations of the men who hunt. The most dangerous to handle and the most conspicuous in any way will be found in their creations. Similarly, women will create images that revolve around their societal roles and engagements (Jones, E.D et al eds. 1984; Biesele, M.1993;).

Our study borrows from these arguments. We are interested in finding out how the natural sexuality of the women in the Swahili-speaking society dictates the messages contained in the songs that they sing within their socially defined context, --the **unyago** context. We also seek to find out how culture has control over the themes, style of dances and images used by women in this society. These denominators have already been referred to in our literature review. We have observed how religious and secular codes have been utilised to

present expected differing behaviour between men and women. These dictated propositions lay out clear-cut differences which means that this society is divided into two seemingly separate compartments: male and female. However we are interested in how these two compartments manage to live together, how they negotiate their power relations and thus live harmoniously. Since, our literature review testifies to the fact that it is the female gender that this distinction does not seem to favour, we visit the research area and sample out categories of women-only performances especially the songs and dances within **unyago** and find out what women say about themselves, their men, their relationship with them, thus their **voices**.

Methodology

Analysis of interaction is central in feminist research. Feminist researchers have used a variety of qualitative styles, but share the assumption held generally by qualitative researchers that interpretative human actions, can be focus for research. This leads to the argument that "qualitative research is an umbrella term describing a number of methods that may be used to explore the subjective experience of people in their daily lives. The essence of qualitative research is to discover the meanings and assumptions underlying human behaviour." (Mayan, M., 1996)

In this study we use a menu of qualitative paradigms that enable us to fully understand **unyago** poems from the women's point of view, the emic perspective. The paradigms also assist in the examination and interpretation of the meanings behind the poems, related

behaviour and experiences in the context in which they occur. Consequently, we also describe these contexts.

Our methodology also includes ethnography and phenomenology. Ethnography involves writing about people and their real lives. It is a process of learning from a research subject. The product of ethnography is also people-centred. The individuals whose lives, experiences and behaviour are interpreted should be able to relate and recognise themselves, or even form ideas on how they may wish to change the behaviour. To achieve the process and ends of ethnography, this study employs participant-observation and conversation techniques.

Phenomenology is the in-depth exploration of a person's experiences. The researcher not only visits the context of the poems, but goes further to investigate other layers of this context, the women's perception of it and the hidden meanings in it – **maana ya Kindani.** The end product is a description of **unyago**, the poems in it and what we learn from the people about them.

The study thus utilises qualitative research paradigms to carry out an ethnographic analysis of the **unyago** social structure. This involves the in-depth analysis of interviews with men and women, **oral testimonies** from women and girls who have undergone or are undergoing the **unyago** rituals and interpreting the mass of experiences critically. It is hoped that this intensive look at women's relationships and interactions with each other will reveal aspects of female-male relationships lodged in linguistic and conversational structures - hence

voices. This calls for participation and observation by the researcher into the veiled lives of women. Our study endeavours to investigate whether **unyago,** as a social interaction which has often been labelled powerless and without agency, empowers women to exert control over their lives and how this impacts on the female - male relationship in this society.

Using qualitative paradigms as already stated and described, the research starts with the creation of a rapport with the opinion leaders such as women group leaders, imams and others as appropriate. The resultant snowball effect leads to individual singers instructors and the neophytes within the same cluster and where necessary adjacent ones.

A total of four clusters are visited. These comprise **Kaloleni, Manyatta Arabu, (Mosque), Bandani** and **Kibos.** All these are within Kisumu Municipality. **Unyago** activities beyond the four clusters, but within Kisumu, are also visited in order to verify data collected from the four principal research sites.

Kaloleni is the pilot research site. The research starts here and further contacts are stimulated through snowballing (the site is selected as the pilot because meetings with a women's troupe from here led to the research curiosities addressed in this thesis). Focus group discussions (FGDs) are held with girls and women. The researcher observes and participates in all the goings-on. Household and individual interviews with families and key informants are conducted. All these are either tape-recorded or written down later as may be appropriate.

The songs and related data are freely translated from Kiswahili into English. However, and where necessary, Kiswahili and English versions of data are strategically juxtaposed to ensure essential meaning is retained.

The study attempts a content analysis of songs performed during women's rituals from a feminist literary standpoint. Aware of women's exclusions and silences in various realms in this society, the researcher uses qualitative paradigms.

Unyago is conceptualised as a process of social institution continually created, shaped and known by women who are within it. The approach largely helps dissolve the researcher-respondent, subject-object or even self/other distinction, thus operating as a deconstruction of traditional research. **Feminism** is used as a resource to guide data gathering, understanding and interpretation. The respondent's experiences are therefore an interpretation in need of further interpretation. Our study not only reports on song texts and experiences but also subjects them to feminist literary analysis. Thus, by the end of it all, the study reflects a double **voiced** text: the respondent and interpretative feminist **voice.**

The research presents individual **voices** through **verbatim statements** from respondent's **personal experiences,** and **testimonies** and the **songs**, collected through **field visits, focus group discussions** and the **collective voice** identifiable during performances by various groups.

A major assumption in this study is that the women's desires are elicited and repressed, projected and introjected through the various discourses in women specific rituals. The term desire here is taken to include a number of issues. Such issues comprise passions, the mischievous and mysterious contributions of the subconscious, libidinal resources now squeezed out by adult socialisation, and the sexuality and sexual politics of cultural life and its reproduction and representation. We have already labelled the messages in their **songs, conversations** and **dances** as **voices.**

To summarise the assumptions of the methodology, this study is largely founded in the question of the voice. More specifically, its concerns include how voices of respondents are to be listened to, with what authority and in what form. An assumption which is supported by the literature reviewed is that the poems sung by the women could be a seat for suppressed hidden and enclosed forces evoked in order to empower women and allow them to discover and express their deepest selves. Ultimately, and contrary to a number of preceding studies, the approach highlights the woman's symbolic behaviour of voicing in Swahili literature (**N'tarangwi, 1994, Matteru, 1982, Mulokozi, 1982 and Mbughuni, 1979).**

The Context of the Songs

The major phenomenon to be investigated in this study is **unyago** poems. Our aim is to collect and attempt a critical literary analysis of songs by women in Swahili-speaking communities in Kisumu and its environs. In this study, examining the context of this

phenomenon is paramount because, as identified in the methodology, the context and other intervening variables arising from the context determine the behaviour itself. To do this, the researcher has to visit and participate in women specific institutions in the research sites. These institutions bear rituals that are performed by women only and are thus women-specific. Generally, the institutions are divided up into two, **Dari ya Mwanamwari**, the ritual of the virgin, and **Dari ya Harusi,** the ritual of the wedding. The respondents labelled these institutions **unyago.**

As indicated in the methodology, this study visits **unyago** with an ethnocentric focus. Special attention is paid to the objects, words, gestures, sounds and other aspects which constitute the rituals in which the poems are embedded. This is carried out with an open mind. From the insiders' perspective, **unyago** encompasses all the indigenous knowledge acquired by a girl child in our research population, from the onset of puberty up to a week after the wedding day. During this period, the female child receives a number of teachings that range from devoting hours of her life to make-up, new recipes, sweet words to please her husband, the feminine walk, tone and even new sex techniques. This is the definition of **unyago** that the study adopts. We make phenomenological assumptions that posit that behaviour or a phenomenon can be fully understood from the insider's point of view, otherwise known as the emic perspective.

Traditionally, in the Swahili society, indigenous education is given to both boys and girls. The learning starts at a very tender age. Young children are often with the mother, hence it is her duty to mould their behaviour and manners. It is from this early age that the norms

and values of the society are instilled in the upcoming generation. In olden days, the boys were supposed to be moulded into the kind of man in the community expected - **Jando**. However, after the onset of Islam, only instructions for girls continued whereas, the **Jando** was hampered by the immersion of adolescent boys into Islamic teachings.

During visits to households, it was observed that as boys grow, they tend to keep out of the houses. On the other hand, the girls tend to get closer to the mother and are usually indoors. Fathers are virtual absentees from the households. They are observed sitting in groups at specific central points either discussing, playing draughts and/or chewing - *khat*. Discussions touching on the absence of men in homes illuminate the fact that during socialisation, a male child is conditioned by his parents to keep as far away from the house as possible. Informants explained that *"Any man who hovers around the house is prone to being a laughing stock. It is said that his wife has bewitched him"*. On the other hand an upcoming Swahili girl is subjected to a wide range of physical and moral teachings towards domestication.

Instructions for the female child starts informally through observation and imitation. She observes what her mother and other women around her do:

> *Indeed by the time she is formally instructed, she has learnt how to dress by veiling; how to walk and behave. She also knows that women in this society apply make-up, perfumate their bodies to the extent of overdoing it and also has an idea of recipes and other domestic activities.*

But at the onset of puberty, a girl child- **Mwanamwari**- sets on a new journey in her life through formal instruction. A traditional instructor, **somo/kungwi,** fulfils the role of transferring knowledge and skills acquired throughout generations to the young girl. The **kungwi/somo** usually identifies her own candidate as the girl grows. The **Kungwi** could be an aunt or a very close companion of the girl's mother. Soon after the onset of puberty of the **Mwanamwari**, the **kungwi**, who should be a successfully married woman, takes it upon herself to instruct on household chores, wifely duties and obedience and domestic matters. The girl and everybody else now knows that she is no longer a child. Menarche has transformed her to **womanhood.** This is the beginning of **Dari ya Mwanamwari**, the ritual of the virgin.

During this ritual, the girl is taught 'feminine' tasks and by the end of it, she emerges a marriageable woman **Mwanamwari wa Unyago.** The ritual involves the secluding of a girl which is symbolically an attempt to bury her childhood and transform her into a woman. The ritual can therefore be described as an in-between state which transforms a girl from an unproductive state to a sexually active one. This rite therefore enacts symbolic rebirth into adulthood, a process by which the community passes on knowledge and ritualised metamorphosis for its young female adults.

During the enclosure, women folk have the opportunity to disclose their innermost selves to the upcoming women. The training is theoretical and practical. The **kungwi** keeps close to her candidate and verbally sanctions her whenever she makes an undesired move. For example, she might command her to sit well. For the practical training, the **kungwi**, who

should be a graceful walker, an agile dancer and a good cook acts as a role model to the candidate.

The **unyago** experience is riddled with symbolism. A good example is the seclusion. During the initiation period, the young girl is usually put into a room in her parents' house or at a curtained corner in her parent's house. This symbolises her death and ritual rebirth into the community of adults. Training in symbolic dancing and singing takes place here. Songs bearing **'wasia'** or messages to instruct especially on the marital relationship are used. A common song during this research was **'wasia'**. In this song, the girls, especially in the second phase of **unyago**, are instructed on faithfulness in marriage.

The candidate is also instructed on how to take care of her body in a symbolic manner. She is taught love and to take care of her body. The body is massaged daily. The **Kungwi** is the masseuse. She puts the girl in suitable different positions and proceeds to aid movements of the limbs and joints. She strokes, pinches and kneads her candidate's body with a lot of abandon and commitment. By this means, any sign of obesity is removed from the girl's body. She is also prepared for all types of dancing, especially in the marital chamber. Ability to dance in the marital chamber is foreseen as the symbol of the girl's victory through her body. The girl is also careful on how to take care of her body, especially during the days of menstrual flow. She is warned to keep away from boys before marriage. She learns to dance (including the dance on the marital bed) to exercise by rocking and swaying, and to sing. The dancing movements are tests of skill; some relate to domestic chores, and others to sex and graceful walking.

Throughout the seclusion period, the initiate is tested. She has to do the exercises and show off her dancing skills and is introduced into the symbolic marital language. Sometimes the initiates compete in an open arena. However only **kungwi** and women relatives are present. Drumming and clapping to the rhythms accompanying well-known women's songs take place. If an initiate's performance is not up to the expected standard, she is punished through pinches, beatings, abuses or even by being laughed at. This is in an attempt to teach her that life is full of suffering.

At the completion of the first phase, the initiates are washed by their - **kungwi**, a symbolic action indicating movement from the **'womb', the enclosure** to the rest of the world. After this, the girl can enter the second phase of **unyago**. The second phase is **Dari ya Harusi,** the ritual of the wedding. This is in preparation for the girl's wedding day. Ideally, this should take one to three months depending on how fast the candidate learns. The candidates are usually aged between fourteen and sixteen years. During this stage, the earlier instructions are re-emphasised. In the words of the instructors:

> *At this time the girl is at the prime of her age. She is enclosed and well fed to acquire the ideal shape of a woman,* ***Mwanamke Halisi****. Also, the girl is more or less in a fattening room. She is indeed very well fed. Sometimes, she is even bathed by the instructor who also with the assistance of other women teach her how to beautify herself through smoothening of her skin. This is done by rubbing it with white chalk, curry powder, ashes and Heena. The body is massaged everyday* ***"kumsinga"****. At this stage actual body movement meant to accompany sex during marriage are re-emphasised. Alongside these movements there is also the deliberate acquisition of endearing voice, tone and diction meant only for the marital partner. All these are meant for*

cultivating a good relationship with the husband. Through these songs, the girl is taught graceful movements. After this training, reckless walking is not womanly. The songs are highly rhythmical and she should use them during her household chores to avoid clumsiness.

The dancing styles also differ. For instance, there is that which should make the girl's waist very flexible **"chakacha"** and that which makes her move pleasurably during love-making, **msondo. Chakacha** is danced in an upright position and **msondo** in a lying position. Generally sexual practices like the bed dance are carefully taught for they are believed to drive the husband wild with lust, while knowledge of herbs, **miti**, and correct spices, to keep him faithful and sexually active by awakening his desires, when low, are disclosed.

The candidate's ability to swing the waist, **kukata kiuno,** can be said to be a ticket to marriage. Whoever acquires the skill faster, gets a suitor sooner. This is because word about her flexibility and agility goes round and soon, her hand in marriage is sought. Apart from this, the initiate is instructed on self-cleanliness and ways of enduring hardships without complaining; silent endurance **"ajitahidi kunyamaa"** is often emphasised.

This phase culminates in the wedding ceremony after the girl acquires a suitor. Weddings are community affairs. They involve the extended family and friends as well as the neighbourhood. During this research, the two wedding ceremonies attended had visitors not only from the other clusters in Western Kenya, but also from Kibera in Nairobi and even from the Coast. The wedding lasts between four and seven days and includes the preparation and decoration of the venue by women and of dishes such as, **'pilau, mchuzi rojo' kachumbari**, among many others. The preparation is alongside a good deal of fun

especially from **vugo (wedding songs)** and **chakacha dances**, which are performed throughout some of the nights. All these activities are strictly women's affairs; the singers, the dancers, and the instrumentalists are all women.

The seventh day of the wedding marks the ceremonial presentation of the bride in public after the consummation of the marriage, **kutoleza nje.** During this ceremony, the **kungwi** is particularly happy because her candidate has gone through the most sensitive part of her training -**'kuvunja ubikira'**, breaking the virginity. This rite is sensitive because it has to be performed in a very careful manner so as to preserve signs of her retention of her virginity until the wedding day. These signs **(blood)** are to be exposed to all women guests present in the ceremony. Sometimes, some **kungwi** are so excited that they carry the white, blood tainted sheet along lanes and small squares in the cluster. Other relatives accompany her to the entertaining beat of song and dance. On this night, the bride is prominently positioned in the square or street often fenced to accommodate the ceremony. She is clad in the best clothes her family could afford, adorned with jewellery, and with her hands, arms and feet, decorated with ***heena*** patterns. Unmoving, she has to sit like this for hours for all to admire and praise.

The guests arrive in groups from different clusters. They are all clad in **"bui bui"** sooner or later to be discarded to expose new dresses and **heena** decorated limbs. Perfumes fill the air and mix with the cooking aromas. The band to keep the occasion warm and moving is positioned at a strategic point . As the evening unfolds, the band and wedding guests get more and more involved with the songs and music; the women join in the refrain of the

seemingly very well known songs. They also get up to show off their dancing skills and new clothes. Prizes are also given to the bride and the singer (s). Men have their own celebration with the bridegroom, away from this venue but on a much smaller scale. The celebration reflects the sex division in this society such that it is not possible for a female researcher to visit the male version of the wedding.

Unyago is destined to be a continuous acquisition of skills and knowledge to the female child. It involves both theoretical initiative and practical modes of socialisation. Its curriculum is philosophically based on preparationism and functionalism. It is expected that whatever the neophyte acquires during the instructions, is practised during marriage. The candidate is expected to meet the expectations of a good wife so that the husband should never have reasons to complain.

In the pre-colonial days, all the above was done without constraints. However, with the influx of Arabs and Europeans in Kenya, the Swahili way of life has changed and so has **unyago.** According to the elderly informants, in the early days, initiates had an enclosed/secluded period of three to six months (3-6) which was enough to enable them learn and acquire various skills and then, they were expected to marry immediately afterwards. Also, during the first phase, the girls underwent a small surgical operation on their genitalia, **'sunni'** circumcision - the cutting of the tip of the clitoris. This is not the case today. Education in the western mode has had an impact on the practices and attitudes towards female circumcision. It is not possible to seclude girls for a continuous three months. Further, girls of twelve and fourteen or even sixteen are now considered too young

to marry. In fact there is hardly any seclusion. This has led to the concept of "**Mwanamwari wa mfereji**" instead of " **Mwanamwari wa Unyago**" -virgins/girls of the tunnel - common passage and not of the **unyago** rite passage.

But these initiation rites cannot lose their label of indicating boundaries between young and old, child and adult and male and female. They also enhance female solidarity that despite changes in **unyago**, men have not penetrated it as yet. Observing the population in this study, the researcher noted this rite as a clear venue for female solidarity and female expression. It is in them that the voices in the following chapters were realised. These voices had a particular label. Although the researcher asked for **unyago** songs, the most common label was **"nyimbo za kimasomaso"," songs of eye to eye"**. The songs enable women to come face to face or "eye to eye" with their lives.

The discussions that follow attempt to explore the meaning(s) of these encounters. The ensuing chapters are critical evaluations of the songs collected in our research sites. The songs are discussed in relation to how they throw light on various aspects of the experiences of women in the Swahili-speaking society.

All the soloists who led in the performances were recorded as having very strong Swahili backgrounds in that none of them had undergone swahilisation, but both parents were **Waswahili**. All of them were also **Muslims.** They were well-known singers in their clusters since most informants mentioned them as the soloists they liked best. However, this researcher would find it unfair to leave unmentioned one such songbird, the late Amina

Bakari who was the ignition to the proposal for this study. The researcher met her during a fund raising function in 1993, in which she performed to the appraisal of all present. The researcher later made an appointment with her but before this research could be hatched and her singing recorded, she passed away.

During this research, ten tapes of songs were recorded. However on transcribing them only about twenty songs were realised. Most of them were found repetitious. In fact some of them did not have more than one or two lines. This is a notable feature in oral performance. In a call-response pattern, a soloist would sing one particular line and her audience would respond in unison. The soloist would often fluctuate her voice but the words would remain the same. Sometimes, the soloist would simply ululate or even clap to the rhythm and the audience would join in the chorus. Or at times, the instruments would just go on as the soloist spoke to somebody, but the chorus would come in on cue. Thus, the instruments that range from drums, cymbals to jingles are beyond accompaniment and become "speech surrogates." They would initiate speech clapping, thumping. Ululation also accompanied the songs. The women also used gestures, especially facial and hand movements and always danced to the **chakacha** rhythm, sometimes very provocatively.

This kind of performance would go on for a long duration. Translating a session into writing leaves a transcriber with a very short text - (see appendix - song texts). Also, as this researcher moved from one research site to the other, identical songs were often performed, at times, only the names of persons to be praised or castigated would change. This interferes with the transcription. By the end of the research, it is obvious that the

transcription has done little justice to the poem in that in it one cannot integrate things like the tonals and gestural movements. Additionally, though the performances would seemingly have many songs, the transcriber ends up with quite a small number in comparison to the performance session. Further, some of the performances only have long durations of drumming and clapping with interjections. These are important features of performance, the meanings of allusions, jokes and other aspects of the research situation. But they cannot be recorded on paper for the researcher's audience.

Summary of Contents

The introduction of this thesis covers the target population of the study, the problem, Literature review, theory and objectives. In it we also unveil the **context of the songs**. The **unyago** institution is explored from an ethnographical perspective. The study highlights the significance of this context as a social setting for the expressive genre of song and therefore goes further into quoting the voices of informants who express its meaning.

Chapters One to **Four** investigate the songs during different phases of the **unyago** institution. Herein, an attempt is made at categorising the songs into various **voices** namely; **Kilio-Kitamu, Kejeli, Wasia** and **Wasifu**. This classification should only be taken so for discussion purposes otherwise, between the categories there are many underlying linkages. The original Kiswahili terms for these voices are retained so that the indigenous voice is heard directly and not through translation.

Chapter Five, the **Umbuji** in **unyago,** emphasises the dynamics of oral poetics of the **unyago** poems discussed in the preceding chapters. In it the orality and literariness of the poems is expounded on.

The last section covers the summary, conclusions and recommendations for further research. The **unyago** rite of passage is a mark for polarity between men and women. Yet the literary creations classifiable under it, exemplify how its very dialectical structures forge towards coexistence.

CHAPTER ONE

THE KILIO KITAMU VOICE

The English equivalent for **Kilio Kitamu** is bitter-sweet cry. **Kilio** is a cry out of suffering. It is often an expression of pain, anguish or sorrow. At face value, the dramatis personae discussed in this chapter appear to be doing exactly this. **Kitamu** is a reference to sweetness and joy. In the songs discussed in this chapter, the sweetness and joy is subterranean. Those already familiar with Kiswahili culture and idioms are aware of the use of ambivalences. Demonstrations of common ambivalences in Kiswahili language are such as **asali chungu** (bitter honey) and **mahaba matungu** (bitter love). These common ambivalences in Kiswahili seem to be pessimistic. Unlike these common ambivalences, the **unyago** poems suggest hope. Whereas bitter honey and bitter love suggest suffering after enjoyment, our poems express suffering that lead to joy and victory.

Kilio Kitamu poems are performed during the rites for the wedding preliminaries. These rites include betrothal, inspection of spouse, negotiations for dowry, the ceremony of the downy payment, fixing the wedding date and **kuvunja ubikira.** During these days, the pain of not knowing the spouse, the anxiety at having to leave childhood and join a strange household, the anxieties of facing the frightening roles of wifehood and motherhood are expressed by the girl. This is **kilio.** But on the other hand, young women are prepared for this. They have the rites of transition that take time, energy and space to cultivate. For the girl, as well as the women surrounding her especially her mother and her **somo,** these

wedding preliminaries should therefore be more than welcome. But this joy is subsumed in the literal lamenting tone of the songs. This is why during the performance of the poems analysed hereafter the researcher observes some pain or bitterness in the gestures, words or interjections. The lamenting comes from two different dramatis personae, the bride herself, her mother or her **somo.**

According to the social norms in this community, although women have the responsibility of moulding a girl towards an ideal woman with the major aim of preparing her for marriage, these women have no right to choice of partner. The girl's mother cannot play any part, nor can the girl herself. This is a male domain. Additionally, no woman can also decide the rightful age for her daughter's marriage and neither can the daughter. This is also a male prerogative. According to the informants, when a young man has the intention of seeking the hand in marriage of a particular girl, he courts her through a go-between; **mchenga**. This go-between seeks the consent of the girl's father. The marriage contract is arranged by the parents of the boy and girl. The contract assumes that both are strangers and it excludes love as a basis for marriage. However, although the negotiations involve the parents only, the future bridegroom is at least aware of who he is to marry, but the girl might not be told anything about her suitor. Some of the elderly women in the focus group discussions expressed the fact that they met their suitors on the day of the consummation of their marriage - **kuvunjika ubikira**.

In this society which is the environment of **unyago,** it is unheard of for a woman to participate in a marriage contract. The girl could be a minor or even in school. She might

not even like her suitor who could be her age-mate, an elderly person or even a man thrice married and divorced. The girl has no clear channel through which to protest. This must be why there are poems composed to express bitterness.

A good example is**"mwanangu bado mdogo,"** translatable to **"my child is still too young;"** the persona is the mother of the young bride. In a sorrowful voice, the women in the target population express how they are of the opinion that a certain girl is too young to be a bride. **"Tamleaje mwanangu we?"**, "How will you bring up my daughter?", the persona asks the bridegroom. In the eyes and experiences of her mother, the girl is unripe for marriage and what she needs is a mother to nurture her future, not a husband. The persona expresses the fact that there are some activities the daughter was carrying out that needed completion, hence she argues:

Mwanangu bado mdogo
Mwanangu bado asoma
Mwanangu bado kipusa
Mwanangu bado mbichi
Mwanangu bado mchanga
Tamleaje mwanangu we!

My child is still too young
My child is still at school
My child is still beautiful
My child is still unripe
My child is still too tender
How will you bring up my daughter

The diction employed by the persona here clearly demonstrates the tenderness and immaturity of the girl; **mbichi, mchanga and mdogo** are lexical items that refer to a child

who is still growing and developing, both physically and psychologically and not ready to be anybody's wife.

'Bembea **mtoto'** can be translated as **" rock my baby"**. This poem exemplifies what **mwanangu bado mdogo** and **Tamleaje mwanagu** we have just discussed. In this song, the mother pleads with her son-in-law to continue nurturing her daughter since she is still a baby, too young to look after herself let alone a husband.

The mother says that the thought of what the daughter is going through sends her crying. This experience must be making her recall the days she went through the same:

Kilio wanilisha
Wanikumbusha mtima

You make me cry
You remind my heart

Mwana huyu ana mambo
ananiumiza roho

This child has problems
She stabs my heart

The title of this poem is borrowed from the response given to the above lines from the soloist. The performance is dialogic. The soloist sings in a mournful voice. The audience also responds in a similar tone. When the mother utters such words as **kilio, choma roho, sona roho,** the audience feigns pain, sorrow or even interject in a cry.

To one familiar with this culture, it is possible to observe a veiled function of these three poems. The bride is young and, therefore, might be suffering pain. Her mother could be anxious for her, but it is an achievement to acquire a suitor at such an anxiety-rising age. During research, one notes that it is a belief that attractive girls are usually married early in puberty. It is the girl who takes long for her hand to be sought in marriage that becomes a laughing stock. This is one area in which the ambivalence in the poem is easily noted. It is painful to marry when a girl is young, but at the same time it is an achievement for the same girl, her mother and her **somo.** Hence the anxiety is engulfed in the joy of marriage. The words used such as **mbichi, mchanga** and **mdogo** enhance the retention of the virgin state which is also part of the victory.

In another song, the persona is the bride who was crying. This is in **"Mama mwanangu, mama"**, 'mother, my mother, mother'. As this opening line illustrates, it is a cry of pain. This song is sang during the consummation of marriage. The women imagine they are the ones going through the breaking of their hymen- **kuvunja ubikira**. As the struggle continues in the marital chamber, the waiting women express what the girl must be going through. It is as if due to the said encounter, the girl is calling her mother to rescue her from pain that emanates from all her body parts. The persona calls her mother:

Mama Mwanangu Mama - mama!
Mama Mwanangu Mama - mama!
Kiuno - chauma
Tumbo - lauma
Kichwa - chauma
Paja - lauma

Mother, my mother, mother - mother!
Mother, my mother, mother - mother!
My waist - it pains
My stomach - it pains
My head - it pains
My thigh - it pains

This list of aching parts of her body go on and on. The women express this tonally, through facial expressions, hand gestures and movement of the body. As the soloist mentions various body parts, the respondents indicate them. From the performance, it is observable that the persona is in pain because her body is now ripe for the experience. The encounter needs a more ripe candidate who can endure it all. Because of this, after the successful completion of the encounter, the **kungwi/somo**, has to massage the bride with hot salty water. According to the informants, this experience leaves a woman bleeding and crying due to the tenderness of her body. But what must be making it even worse is that there has to be a repetition of the experience. This takes place an hour after the massaging. During the first stage, the man is instructed by the **kungwi/somo** on how to break the hymen without ejaculation; he has to withdraw as soon as the hymen is broken to allow virginal flow and help taint the white sheet on which the girl lies. It is believed that if the young man ejaculates, **"his water will push the blood to the girls stomach and it will take days to come out and therefore no one can tell whether the girl had retained her virginity or not"**. The second experience is said to help clear the remains of the hymen. If this is not done "the place will develop into a wound and next time penetration takes place, it will be very painful to the girl."

The paradox between suffering and joy is observable here. The bride does not sing; the women awaiting the consummation do so for her. They dramatise and fantasise the pain, yet very soon they will be carrying the evidence of the virgin state across the narrow streets. It is their flag victory. Though gained through pain – **kilio** – it is a joy to be hold – **Kitamu.**

A good poem should move its audience toward realisation of the songs' functions. By now, one cannot help observing what the intended purposes of these poems are. The poems have two vital functions. The first is that they are supposed to win sympathy in a sad and suffering situation. The words and gestures observed by the researcher strongly highlight this. The effect of the songs on the audience is easy to observe, for they grimace at the memory of pain encountered during the first sexual experience and relive some of their experiences in marriage, through erotic tonal variation.

On the other hand, the poems have yet another hidden role –the **Kitamu** function. The poems are therapeutic to the women. To the woman, they act as outlets for the frustration and a channel for declaration of feminine victory. They are a vent for suppressed powers. To the women, therefore, these poems provide a channel for the articulation of some absolute form of truth that the women can never be at liberty to express in more ordinary ways. For instance, the poem **chauma** in where the bride is the dramatis persona is special in this case. The women sing, dance and achieve an erotic reminiscence and revisit of their first sexual encounter. It is a painful beginning, hence a **kilio.** On the other hand, it is a sweet and rewarding experience – **Kitamu,** that leads to the utility of the **unyago** skills acquired through their **somo**, a beginning of their victory.

CHAPTER TWO

THE KEJELI VOICE

Kejeli is a concept rather than a term. Kiswahili words used to define it include; **kusimanga, kusumbulia** or **kusema maneno ya dharau.** It encompasses such English literary terms as satire, sarcasm, and mockery. Perhaps the closest English literary term is schadenfreud. **Kejeli** is therefore a literary umbrella expression whose general aim is to ridicule ideas, people or institutions in an amusing manner. In making what is being described as laughable, a literary artist also aims at informing. **Kejeli** does not necessarily have reforming, punitive or moral intentions. It is teasing laughter at one undergoing some specific and some essential life experience. It never causes pain to its user. The user enjoys the text without any apology. The most important aspect of **kejeli** is the joke that tickles the user and makes her (user) part of the on-going activity. The joke must not be lost. Without it everything goes. In the **unyago** performing communities, women do not speak freely and openly. The woman therefore uses **kejeli** as a tool that allows her to utter the unspeakable with impunity. The **kejeli** gives the woman a licence to attack, unmask and laugh at one who the society expects her to hold with extreme submission if not awe- her husband. The woman's observations are at variance with her husband's outward appearance and societal expectations. A lot of things happen and are uttered through **kejeli**, behind the veil of seeming subservience and mealy mouthedness.

To her society, the woman in our research sites is supposed to be secluded and silent. She should not criticise her husband or any other socially accepted issue. In this category of songs, we observe **unyago** giving the woman a chance to evoke laughter about her marital partner. In this chapter, we also observe the persona ridiculing various audiences. For instance, the persona laughs at her husband, his financial incapabilities and thus his inability to care for her as expected by the society. She also laughs at her husband who is not worth his salt in the bed-chamber. Even the choice of a husband is satirised. Loose tongues that speak about some girls being unmarriageable are laughed at on the wedding days of their victims.

To exemplify all these forms of **kejeli,** six songs were recorded. An example is the persona who laughs at her husband's financial incapability and cries:

Mama wee mama wee
Nakwambia mama wee
Mme huyu hatuwezani.

My mother, my mother
I tell you my mother
This husband we cannot cope

The society expects the man to provide for his wife, and so does his wife. But he has failed to do so. The wife unmasks this when she declares that he is a beggar, a trait not regarded as masculine in this society. The persona explains that the husband leaves a lot to be desired. He has nothing. All they have in their marital dwelling is borrowed.

According to the informants, this could be either a song fictionalising a situation where a husband is extremely poor, lazy, or totally unprepared for marriage. The bride goes ahead to list the borrowed items:

Kitanda - cha kuazima
Godoro - la kuazima
Shuka - za kuazima
mto - wa kuazima

The bed - it is borrowed
The mattress - it is borrowed
The sheets - they are borrowed
The pillow - it is borrowed

Thus, all the items in the bed-chamber are borrowed. The soloist would continue listing items moving from the "bed", the "wardrobe". From the song we learn that traditionally the husband is supposed to be the sole provider and hence when he cannot measure up to these expectations he is laughed at.

The women-specific rites give the wives an opportunity to express their inner, enclosed selves through song. The **unyago** poems also give them a license to attack, unmask and laugh at issues that touch on the relationship between a couple. For example, the sex performance of either of them is quite personal. As we have already noted, whereas the girls receive instructions on sex techniques, the men do not. On the other hand, husbands in this society are beyond open reproach, whether they perform well or not. During initiation, the woman is instructed to feign pleasure through specific rhythmic body movements that should heighten sexual pleasure for the man. The woman is supposed to mentally sing some songs that assist her in these body movements. She has also been taught endearing

words to utter then. In other words, women in this society have learnt how to give their bodies to their husbands and not necessarily their souls. This is not to be unmasked to her husband and that is why the women have designed songs that are against the male factor in a sexual relationship. There are songs they sometimes dance to as they silently sing to help them in their actual body movements and faked pleasure. An elderly **kungwi** expressed in a near whisper, "when you dance the belly dance, you control your body and a man will enjoy. In our culture, enjoyment of the encounter relies on the woman."

An example is **"Kisu chako hakikati"** that is your **"Your knife does not cut"**. In this song, we come across a female persona who expresses sexual dissatisfaction quite graphically. She sings that her partner's **knife** is **blunt** and therefore his attempts at **cutting** are not only useless, but also destructive to her **meat.** An analyst cannot help noticing the domestic images borrowed here. The women draw a clear analogy between a sexual encounter and their cookery.

The persona goes further to advice her addressee that it is not a must that he **cuts** her. To the persona, the attempts to prove his capability at **cutting** are scandalous; it makes him look ridiculous. To her, it is devalues his maleness. The society and herself believe he is a hero in cutting. The persona suggests that instead of him trying to do something, he is incapable of doing and thus exposes his weakness. He should just refrain from sex completely. She attacks (**anavamia**):

Kisu chako hakikati
kisu chako hakikati
Usiniharibie nyama x 2
Si sharuti nakwambia
Si lazima
Tete -te- naona waniandama
Hakikati, usiniharibie nyama

Your knife does not cut
Your knife does not cut
Do not spoil my meat
Do not spoil my meat
It is not a must I tell
It is not compulsory
Tete - you I see you are
Still after me
It does not cut, do not
spoil my meat.

The persona continues to ridicule the man's involvement in this endeavour which he seems unable to manage:

Ewe mpalia nyasi x 2
Mbona mambo ya kulema?
Hakikati, usiniharibie nyama

You brought the grass together (prepared me)
How come you cannot manage now?
It does not cut, do not spoil my meat.

The persona seems to have been against the action. But the male partner must have lost his temper and even threatened to kill her. Even after she has accepted his wish, he proves incapable. She graphically recaptures the various steps he has undertaken. First he has pleaded and begged, but she refuses. Then he gets angry and threatens her. But after her acceptance, his performance is disappointing to the recipient:

Ulinipigia goti
nakutaka kuniaua - Ahaa
Hakikati, usiniharibie nyama

You knelt before me
Then you nearly killed me
Ahaa
It does not cut, don't spoil my meat.

The power of persuasion was so strong that it brought the man into extreme behaviour. It moves him from pleading **"pigia goti"** to threatening **"taka kuniua"** yet when she yields, he can not meet his obligations and satisfy her obligations. Evidence from the poem shows that when the girl has yielded to have sex with the man, he has already lost his power of arousal. He has used all his power to seduce her. Now it is the girl's turn to laugh at him.

The persona once again reminds him that he should not assume that to prove his manhood he has to have sex with her whenever they are together:

Kila ukiuona mti
Si lazima uupande
Hakikati, usiniharibie nyama

Whenever you come to a tree
It is not a must that you climb it
You climb just like that but
It does not cut, do not spoil my meat

The persona does not fail to express the disappointment such a performance has on a woman. The man prompts the act, yet his performance is not only poor, but irritating too. She is left to wonder, what does one do:

Nina maradhi ya moyo x 2
Sina dawa ya kutibu x 2

I have a sickness in my heart x 2
I don't have any cure for it x 2

During the performance of this song, one observes that the women undergo a sensual enjoyment rather than a pleasure in the inner self. This is also the one song found in virtually all the samples of all the target population visited. The respondents dance and gesticulate to express an innermost relief. They also interject, ululate and jeer in deep understanding and appreciation of the soloists' words. They thump their feet as they respond in the chorus with a lot of vigour and excitement. As they perform, the women convey an erotic current through their bodies. It is an ecstatic dance that sees the women loosening themselves. The poems seem to break the tender maternal voices and erupts into an effervescence of repressed sexual energies. By the end of each performance of this poem (for this poem was performed over and over again), there is a release of an enclosed hidden force in the women which evokes voice more than language. We observe an approach of the fantastic at the point of performance. The human reason of the women loses control and their most profound emotion as individuals acquires the fullest opportunity to express itself, to be projected.

The song **"Usiutie mapengo msumeno wangu"** can be literally translated as **"Don't break the teeth of my saw"**. In meaning, the researcher finds it very close to the former. The symbols are borrowed from carpentry. **Msumeno** is a saw and if used on a bad and rough surface, its teeth lose their sharp ends. Thus, the saw can no longer be used effectively to

cut wood. In this context, **msumeno** is used to refer to the sharp **(kunolewa)** flawless sexual performance of a woman. According to discussions with informants, the women's set weapon is sharpened. Through **unyago** her sexual ability and techniques are well prepared. She would therefore want to exercise the knowledge acquired on a good surface. From this poem, it seems that the surface she has now, her husband, is rough and thus will only end up breaking or interfering with the acquired skills. The persona does not leave the issue at the level of laughing at her **surface**, but goes further to make suggestions to her partner. She says that instead of him interfering with the effectiveness of her **saw**, he would rather just leave her alone. She argues that in case she cannot contain the urge to use her "**saw**", she can as well use the **mdude** on her own. This particular symbol gave the researcher some difficulties. What did the women mean? According to the informants, it means that the male partner's participation is so ineffective that the female partner could manage on her own if her male partner just could release his **mdude - instrument** to her.

But how would she use it? The persona here was demystifying sex. She borrows further images now from her domestic arena. She believes that the action is as simple as **kukaanga - "frying"**. She explains that if this is all that sex holds, she can easily do it to herself. In this outlook, the male sexual organ is thought of as just a **cooking stick** that simply turns the food. For such an activity one does not have to be very conscious of what he is doing. To the persona, this is what her partner has reduced sex to. Her song goes:

Usiutie mapengo msumeno wangu
Kama huwezi kereza nitakwenda zangu
Kama nataka karanga

N'ngakaanga na ule mdude
Na ule mdude - na ule mdude
N'ngakaanga na ule mdude

Do not break the teeth of my saw
If you cannot be plained I will go away
If I my wish is just to fry
would fry with that instrument
With that instrument - with that instrument
I would fry with that instrument.

As this poem is being performed, the researcher observes most of the meaning and interpretation through the presence of women's bodies and the manipulation of gestures. They use their hands as they illustrate what the instrument means and demonstrate the **frying** action. The frying is enacted when the right hand is used as the **instrument** and thus a cooking spoon and the left hand as the pot of food that needs stirring.

Another poem in this category of satire is **"sitaki mzee"**. In this song, the persona who is a wife reacts against her elderly husband:

Sitaki mzee
Asiyeweza kazi x 2
Nataka kijana
Ndiye mwenye mambo
Ndiye awezaye

Kusukuma chombo
I don't want an old man x 2
I want a young man
who can manage 'things'
He is the one who can
manage to rock my boat

The persona who was never given the chance to choose her marriage partner now laughs at her elderly man. She does not only dislike him for his age (**sitaki mzee),** but also because he cannot perform his husbandly duties -**"asiyeweza kazi"**. Her preference would have been a younger man who can steer the boat into motion. Thus, the composer now borrows from the maritime environment. The image of the boat is used here to illustrate the sex act that is supposed to be started off by the man. This use of imagery could either have been carried from the coastal region or even from that of Lake Victoria. This song was collected from the Kaloleni Cluster.

The persona satirises the partner further. He, unlike other men, hovers around the house. In fact it is the woman who seeks to walk out and carry out some minor chores, which are supposed to make the man feel lonely and leave the house. This can further be read in the image of the **fagio (broom)** that she borrows from the neighbours. She intends to sweep him out so that she can acquire her space – her freedom in the house. But, she comes back to find him moody and is thus an irritant to her:

Huyu mume gani
anipaye taabu x 2
Ukija nyumbani
Wamkuta hapo
Naenda kwa jirani
Kuomba fagio

What kind of husband is this
He troubles me a lot
If you come home
You will find him there
I have gone to the neighbours
to look for a broom.

The woman goes on to explain how she often has to go out of the house to avoid this man who sits around the house. Remember, this is highly castigated in this society. In this society a man is supposed to keep away from the house at daytime. This particular man's behaviour embarrasses the woman so much so that she decides to keep away herself. She laments (**anateta**):

Nashinda kwa duka
Na kwa majirani x 2
Nashinda kwa mboga
Na kwa mabaniani
Kumbe nikirudi
mume kanuna
Hataki maneno
'Lipi la mkewe'

I spend hours in shops
And in my neighbours'
I spend hours at the vegetable market
And at the Indians'
Then when I come back
The man is moody
He doesn't want to find out
"what's wrong with my wife"

Although, this is an old man, he seems not to want to follow the set social norms. He seems to be a man who wants to sit around his home and spend time with his young wife. The wife, although young, dislikes this and laughs at him. She even goes further to satirise his sexual performance. She expresses her feelings that this behaviour is all due to his old age. Maybe if he was young, he would be keeping away from the house.

During the performance of this poem, the women dramatise their disgust through various body movements. They distort their faces, shake their heads in rejection of this husband and express with their hands how the **boat** would be steered into motion. The first quoted stanza here is sang by the soloist and then the audience repeats in unison. After this, the chorus is sang and danced by all. The first two lines **" Sitaki mzee/asiyeweza kazi,"** is sang with a lot of disgust. The lines that follow that express woman's desired the choice are sang to with expressions of appreciation of what a young suitor would do in comparison.

It is not only the suitors who are satirised. Sometimes, the singers castigate some people within the community thorough use of song. One such poem is **"Pole Rukia"** - 'Sorry Rukia'. The poem seems to recollect some people who had already started uttering unpleasant words regarding the current bride. It seems that sometimes it takes long before any suitors come by. According to some informants, when no suitor seems to be coming along to ask for a girl's hand in marriage, she is consistently harassed, pressurised or unpleasantly discussed by the kind of people being addressed in this song.

Pole! Rukia Pole!
Leo amepata wake.
Na wakome wote

Sorry! Rukia Sorry!
Today she has found her own
Let all of them stop forthwith

In this poem, Rukia seems to be a well known rumour-monger as regards the lack of a suitor for the current bride. This song, collected from the Kibos Cluster, involves a bride who has

been once married but has separated with her first husband. This was not before she had got a baby. Such girls, informants explaines, hardly ever get married ceremoniously - **"hawapati arusi"**. However, for this one, luck is on her side. An unmarried man has proposed to her and here is her D-Day. **Rukia** could have been a general name or even a specific one. The researcher received conflicting information here. Whereas others said that Rukia was the ex-husband's current wife, others explained that this was a stock name used in reference to all who thought that the girl had lost her chances for marriage. The soloist takes the audience through a laugh at the 'Rukias' in the crowd:

Eti mlisema haolowi?
Mbona kaolewa
Aie oo howa
Mbona kaolewa

That you said she can't marry?
How come she is marrying now?
Aio oo howa!
How come she is marrying now?

Eti mlisema hapati?
Mbona kampata?

That you said she can't get?
How come she has acquired him?

The soloist, in a very mocking voice goes on listing down the achievements the bride has made despite earlier negative statements by various people. She sarcastically expresses sympathy towards those who were doing so:

Pole! wenye wivu pole
Nasema siku yake imefika

Nalo pendo ni murua

Sorry! the jealous ones sorry
I say, her day has arrived
And her love is wonderful.

As the response comes out, it is very much in league with the soloist's words. The singers sing and dance with the sarcastic voice, especially the word **Pole**! It is projected in such a way that it communicates in-depth feelings of the singers. Women know they are people who have been talking and that this wedding is a lesson to them. They are warned to keep to themselves whatever they thought they could have spoken against this bride. She has now acquired a husband, so any Rukia had better forever be silent:

Hayo matusi ya jana
Leo in arusi hatutayatoa

All the bad words of yesterday
Today is a wedding day,
We won't mention them.

Maybe, neither the soloist nor the audience is aware of any 'Rukia' in the crowd. However, feelings of jealousy are expected. Hard words against a divorced young bride are expected. No wonder then, the artist has to device a way of exposing all this to the crowd present

It has so far been observed that the women express not only what they are currently undergoing, but also what they underwent during their **unyago** days. The songs discussed under this category warn either the bride or the groom on various issues regarding the current experiences they are undergoing or even the future.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WASIA VOICE

Wasia means advice. It entails giving didactic words to someone and also giving warnings or highlighting possible repercussions one will meet if failure to comply occurs. The poems analysed in this chapter answers two questions. First is the definition of marriage. Second is the significance of **unyago.** The meaning of marriage is defined through the **unyago** ritual. The union of the two people as husband and wife is a passage from one state of life to another. Through it, the young man and woman shed their former states, enter a sanctified state and finally reach a new state in which they are united. The object of the union is to enhance vitality, to place their lives on an adult reproductive state. It is a passage from a state of virginity to reproduction. The ritual not only transforms the two, but also puts groups (their families) into a new vital relationship.

The young woman is prepared through **unyago**. The seclusion which breaks her daily routine ushers her into the new state. The seclusion begins the marriage process by sanctifying the girl through putting her into a special isolated state. Each day moves her further into the passage, and intensifies her virgin state. Finally, on the wedding night, with contact with the bridegroom, she starts to leave her former state and embarks on the journey into her merging with the new family. Thus, above all, the marriage is the joining of two persons and the union of the two families. Marriage, therefore, is not a couple's affair. The success of the couple is also seen as the success of their families and by

extension their community. Marriage is therefore extolled because the couple shows their perfect devotion to each other. The husband is the ideal choice and so is the wife. The wife has been taught submission and servitude that make her the ideal wife. If she maintains what the society has taught her through the **unyago** institution, then she will triumph over all threats. There are songs to ensure that the couple, especially the bride are adequately prepared for this. The first category of these **wasia** songs is didactic. Such songs give advice to the newly wedded brides. These compositions reminds one of the *Utendi wa Mwanakupona* earlier mentioned in the literary search. This was a composition by a woman called **Mwanakupona**. It was a "will" poem for it was composed two years before the composer died, but in expectation of death for she was bedridden. She meant it for the instruction of her daughter – Mwanahashima binti Sheikh, who was about to get married. The poem carries advisory remarks on how to avoid trouble in marriage. Although it was composed in the 1850s, it has been used to date in the **unyago** institution, especially in the North-Eastern African Coast. **Other compositions have been created to pass a similar message as that of *Utendi wa Mwanakupona*.** For instance in *Huu ni Wasia*, (this is my advice), the persona gives the instructions of a guardian mother or kungwi/somo. She tells the bride that she has no choice, but to respect her husband. Even when the man is angry and/or harsh to her, she should be polite, console him and apologise for any wrong she might have committed. This is because according to this persona, your husband is always well-behaved unless provoked. The song goes:

Na wewe leo sikia
Mume ni mwenye adabu
Mume akikukemea
Sema naye taratibu
Umwambie, "nimekosa'
nisamehe, nimetubu"

You, listen today
A husband is always well behaved
If he is harsh to you
Talk to him befittingly
Tell him, " I am wrong,
Please forgive me, I have confessed".

The wife is also supposed to know that the husband has the right to punish her. The persona warns her that in case the husband has to beat her, let him never do so, because of **infidelity.** Thus, it can be for any other reason but not this particular one!

Na wewe dada sikia
Mume ni mwenye adhabu
Kaa na mume wako
Upate kusitirika
Heri upigwe kwa lingine
Usipigwe kwenda nja.

And now sister listen to this
A husband can punish
Stay with your husband
So as to have a foundation (security)
Its better you are beaten for any other reason,
than to be beaten due to your going out

These are instructions which a girl is supposed to receive during her wedding day. Similar instructions are also to be found in **"Yu wapi"** or **where is so and so?.** The persona calls **(anaita)**:

Na kungwi arusi
Wote waje hapa uwanjani
Tuje tumfunze mwari malezi ya kizamani

And the kungwi of the wedding
All of them come into the field
We come to teach the virgin
the teachings of the old.
The persona goes on to instruct,
Unapopelekwa kwako
Mama ufike nyumbani x 2
Ukacheke na mumeo
Mama umpumbaze chumbani
Wakaja mandugu wako
Wakaribishe nyumbani.

When you are taken to your home
'Mother' arrive home (be settled) x 2
You laugh with your husband
'Mother' keep him engrossed in the bedroom
When your 'brother' arrive
Welcome them home.

The persona goes on to list down various types of relatives who might turn up and what kind of treatment they all deserve. But the rightful treatment of the husband was repeated over and over again. Even the right words for the husband and tone to be used are re-emphasised here. For instance,

Ukisikia hodi , ushungi uwe kichwani
Huenda ikawa ni mumeo
Mama usimkere moyoni
Kama ndiye "Bwana pita"
Kwa sauti ya huzuni
Mkandekande mabega
mume kachoka kazini.

If you hear a knock

The veranda should be in your head
It could be your husband
'Mother' do not hurt his soul
If he is the one say "Welcome my husband"
in a sorrowful voice
massage his back
He is tired due to work.

Thus, a husband has a specific way of being welcomed home. The wife should be so alert that if there is a knock, she should be at the door immediately, hence the veranda should be in her mind, that is the place for welcoming visitors. If it is her husband, the rightful voice and words should be used. The wife should not only express her sympathy to the husband by using a sorrowful voice but should go ahead to massage his tired limbs.

This particular stanza is marked with ululations and heavy clapping and thumping in agreement with the words of the soloist. The researcher also notes, through observation, that the voices of the married women were easily fluctuated to suit the incoming person. Husbands and their age-mates were welcomed with words of **"pole," " sorry'** whereas female friends were less sympathised with.

Another song that should also fall in this category is **"Bwana Arusi ana nini"**?: It is sang to girls who are undergoing the second phase of **unyago** in preparation for marriage . This song is also sang as the bridegroom enters the bridal chamber. It can be interpreted to be instructing the bride on what to expect or it could even be a mockery to the bride groom:

Bwana arusi ana nini?
Ana mkia x3
Wapataje?
Wapata huu
Akiingia, mkono tembo
Na marere yanabakia
The bridegroom what does he have"
A tail x3
How does it appear (look like)
It is like this
When he gets in
An elephants hand and huge testicles
hang out!

The soloist goes on asking questions to which the response, **a tail,** is appropriate. The women sing and dance to this song more to mock the bridegroom than to teach the bride. This can especially be deduced from the prolonged laughter from the women at the end of every stanza. The **'like this'** is more of a performed aspect than the articulation of the words. By the use of their hands, they indicate the **elephant's hand** or trunk and then illustrated the hanging out of the **marere**. This song is meant to be preparing the girls at least to have an idea of the male genitalia. The language used here is very exaggerated. This kind of language use is called **baalagha.**

The above songs are danced to by mature women only. The addressee is also in her last phase of **unyago**. Earlier she has been exposed to softer tunes that help her understand herself. For instance, in the focus group discussion with the **Dari ya Mwanamwari** neophytes, the researcher recorded a song that was sang by the young girls. The song targets an interesting audience which is yet to be secluded. The girls sang:

Lipi lilitukia ulipoipata mara hiyo
Niliona damu,
Ulihisi nini, ulopiona damu?
Niliogopa
Uliamba nani
Niliamba mama
Alikufanya aje?
Alinituma kwa kungwi.

What happened when you got it that time?
I saw blood
How did you feel when you saw blood?
I was scared
Who did you tell
I told my mother
What did she do to you?
She sent me to the kungwi

This song passes a message to the youngest of the girls. They are being advised on what to do at the onset of puberty and, especially menarche, which transforms her from a child to a woman.

It is observed that in **unyago**, there is a range of teachings, but very important ones. These are all disclosures whose weight depends on the age of the recipients. It also does matter who the performer is. For instance, although young girls could perform to some of the didactic songs, when it came to the sensitive topic of sex, especially highlighted in songs such as **"Kisu Changu"**, the mature women formed a "semi-performance" group that kept away the younger persons. This is especially so when the mature women surround the bridal house or chamber to witness the physical sex struggle that signifies the hidden battle of the sexes.

The second form of **wasia** has songs that warn. The warnings are addressed to either the bride or the groom. The two are warned on various issues regarding their current experiences as they encounter each other sexually for the first time and also on other future encounters.

For instance in the song **" Vumilia Mwanangu" (persevere my child),** a married woman's expenses are clearly evidenced. Here, the persona talks to her daughter who might be forced into complaining about married life. The experienced persona advises the daughter that all she needs is to persevere for she is not alone in the suffering. As a married woman, she has already accepted life with whatever problems marriage carries. The truthfulness and reality of what this song means to the persona is highlighted by the respondents' reactions. The women interject, ululate and express innermost feelings that married life is not a bed of roses; it is a sad part of life, yet one has no choice but to conform to it. By entering into a marriage situation, she has resigned herself to whatever fate goes with it. **Unyago** has already taught her **kujitahidi kunyamaa (silent endurance).** She had better practise it to the full. This is what the following dialogue between the mother or **somo** and the bride says:

Vumilia mwanangu uliyoyataka ni haya
Nyama yote nimezila, mwanangu
Kakubali kuonja

Persevere my child, this is all you asked for
All the meat I have eaten, my child has accepted to taste.

Whatever the daughter is going through now or in the future is not unusual. Whatever meat-**(suffering)** - she is tasting is just but a part of women's life. She has also accepted (**kakubali kuonja).** The persona changes from the mother to the bride herself. How do you manage it, she asks:

Mwailambaje? - kauma
Mwaila ya mwana - kauma
Mwailambaje? - kauma

How do you taste it? - it pains
You swallow about children - it pains
How do you taste it? - it pains.

This stanza reads like it is actually in reference to the first sexual relationship the girl is currently undergoing. The persona seems to be regarding the sex encounter as a procreational activity **"ya mwana".** It could also be in reference to later experiences such as labour pains or child nurturing which is an enormous task and a socially constructed role for women.

Unyago is an institution which society has fashioned to teach these feminine roles. Biology dictates that a woman gives birth through labour pains. Society builds on this through **unyago** where the girl is prepared not only for biological functions such as eased sex and child bearing, but also for nurturing the children and husband. The society values ideal motherhood and wifehood. It has designed ways of transmitting these values, mainly through **unyago.** After the transmission, it is expected that submission to husband will be automatic.

After warning the daughters about what to expect in their womanhood, the women also take the opportunity to talk to their sons-in-law and their parents. This is what the persona is doing in **Nilelee Mwanangu,** translatable as **"Bring Up My Child"**. This title captures the bride as one who is too young to be married off. She is one who needs care and tenderness; she is indeed a child. This is a fact already discussed under the **Kilio Kitamu Voice** in **"Mwanangu bado mdogo"**. In **Nilelee** the persona pleads with the groom to take care of the daughter since she is still a child - too young to look after herself, leave alone a husband and a home. The mother warns the in-laws that just in case they cannot do this or even if they find the task too big, they can as well return her because she can not tire of looking after her. Hence:

Yoyoyo - nilelee mwanangu mie
Niletee mwenyewe mie

Yoyoyo - bring up my child - for me
If you cannot
bring her back to me!

The tenderness and fragility of the girl is illustrated by the activities in which the persona would engage her daughter, just in case she is taken back to her. She enlists them:

Tacheza naye - mie
Talala naye - mie
Taomba naye - mie
Takula naye - mie
Takwenda naye - mie
Takufa naye - mie

I will play with her - me
I will sleep with her - me

I will pray with her - me
I will eat with her - me
I will walk with her - me
I will die with her - me

The persona could thus also be the **somo/kungwi** who, most of the time, is to be found with the girl. She feels the need for the girl to go through some childhood activities, which she seems to have been cut off from by this transitional rite of marriage. The performance of this song is riddled with sadness. This is dramatised through facial expressions and tonal variations. Whether acted or not, the expressions on the women's faces indicate that marriage is for a more mature girl than the one undergoing it.

Perhaps the best warning is sounded to the bridegroom as he goes to the bridal chamber to consummate his marriage. Talking to the men who had undergone this was really revealing. They confessed that this was the most trying section of their marriage. They were tense especially because they knew very little of what was awaiting them. They knew that the bride, unlike them, has been **kunolewa (sharpened)** for this day. As if talking to themselves, they wondered, **wananolewa vipi** (what does this sharpening involve?) **Wanafunzwa kupigana na kusumbua sisi, ama maanake unyago ni nini?** (Are they taught to fight back, to embarrass or what did the **unyago** entail?). The situation is even made worse by the songs that the women sing and the mockery to the groom. One such song was collected at Kaloleni. It warns the groom that there is quite a task ahead. They tell him:

Leo ni leo x 2
Utauona mpambano
kweli si uongo

Today is today x 2
You will witness the fight
It is true, it is not a lie

Since the groom is unprepared, the women tease him and deflate his ego. The song is sang with tonal, facial, and hand expressions that highlight the struggle awaiting the man. Watching the performance, one can sense incompetence in the man and a hidden gender struggle between male and female. **Unyago** equips the female with sexual tactics that make her feel superior to the male partner. Talking to the women, the sex techniques cultivated during **unyago** are a way of empowerment for them. Thus, although **unyago** is designed to teach them subservience and submissiveness, the acquisition of the techniques makes them know how to sustain or deflate a sexual relationship. This is a capacity that the male partners are incapable of. The women clearly state that they often use this knowledge to embarrass their husbands; they **`whip'** them in the bed chamber. The researcher learnt from respondents that this was the origin of the expression **"Kiboko chao"** that which whips men and leaves them beaten and is a common interjection during the performance of this song. The image in this song is neither new to the singers nor performers; it is in frequent usage in their cultural background.

From the performance of this song and interjections of **`kiboko chao, their whip**, it is clear that women have learnt to utilise the whip well. The groom walks into the chamber with a lot of fear and self-doubt especially when the singers warn him:

Alisema - utauona mpambano
kweli si uongo
Hajabadili uwezo na mafundisho
Jana nalipitia kwao akaonya
Aka - akayarudia yote x 2

She said - you will face the fight
It is true it is not a lie
She has not changed her skill and teachings
Yesterday I passed by her and she warned,
She - she went through all the phases x 2

Another example is in the following stanza:

Si rahisi hivi ndugu kupata
Ungalikuwa ushehe
Haki ningejiunga
Furaha - furaha ni ukiwahi
Furaha - enda ndani ukiitafuta

It is not easy (like this) brother to achieve
If it was Islamic scholarship
I swear, I would rather join
Joy - joy is only if you manage
Joy - go in and look for it

Non-vocal communication, that is the use of tonal variation, facial and hand expressions, is frequently used by women in these songs.. It is an accompaniment to the outpouring of ridicule, satire and warnings. The meaning of these songs could be derived from the simultaneous transmission of the poetic messages through performance. Body movements are integrated into the poetics. During the performance of the above, one notes the association of gesture and utterance. The stanzas are performed with a lot of gestures and gusto. When the likes of the above songs are sang, the women jump high to illustrate that it is easy to jump, but the task ahead is not. This jumping, **kuruka,** is therefore compared to a

sexual encounter. Islamic scholarship is not easy; it takes years, yet the persona warns that it is easier to engage oneself in it than in this particular task. It is obvious that such a precursor to a task really interferes with the performer's morale. This should be the very intention of the women. They aim at demoralising the men so that they can later mock, satirize and make them a laughing stock.

From discussions on this, it is revealed that sometimes some young men fail to capture their brides and the **kungwi/somo** who is always on the look-out has sometimes to intervene and give specific instructions. It is at such times that satirical tunes like **"kisu chako hakikati"** or `**usiutie mapengo msumeno wangu**' are performed.

The songs in this chapter expose us to a number of repeated figurative associations that women have generated through time. Through use of symbols in **unyago** songs, the women have acquired a **voice.** The voice, whether vocal or non-vocal, is seen as an outlet for suppressed emotions, feelings and attitudes within them. Through **unyago** songs, it is observable that their **voice** has realised an outlet for springing forth.

The frequency and familiarity of these songs among the women, both singers and audience, make any subsequent listener realise that it is more likely that they should not be taken literally and therefore requires a consideration at the symbolic level. The most immediately striking thing about these words is that they seem to carry a deep meaning. The contextual manipulation of the verbal objects brings about meaning that gives the women a transforming and curative power. They can thus voice their strength. The songs give them

a freedom, an avenue of expression and revelation, a homecoming for themselves. The women possess and withhold the right to use and manipulate the words. Their singing posits an act of authority, an empowerment. On the face value, culture does not seem to allow the women to reproach their husbands. In a seeming dialectical manner, the very same culture gives them an institution through which they perform and protest.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WASIFU VOICE

In Swahili culture, people show appreciation by composing praise poems. Such poems articulate a full portrait – **wasifu** - of the character being praised. Apart from talking about the achievement of the person, the poet highlights the details of the beauty of the character. A good example is the praise poem **Wasifu wa Siti binti Saad** (the portrait of Siti, the daughter of Saad). The well-known Swahili poet Shaaban bin Robert composed this praise poem.

According to informants, most of the songs that praise the bride were originally composed by Siti binti Saad. Siti was a songbird from Zanzibar. An earlier reference to her is in a Tanzanian women's magazine *Sauti ya Siti* (The Voice of Siti).

The **unyago** songs handle a variety of functions for the singer and her audience. Not all the songs carry lamentations, a mockery, a teaching or a warning. In some songs, the women perform songs that use language and lines appropriate to a special depth of admiration. In such songs, the women set out to praise especially the bride. One such song is **"Hongera Mwanangu" - "Congratulations my Child"**. The persona in this song could be the mother, the **kungwi/somo** or any woman who is in one way or the other related to the bride. The persona does not only praise the bride, but also herself. She also deserves some credit for what the girl has become and has managed to achieve. She sings:

Hongera mwanangu eh; hongera
Na mimi hongera eh, hongera
Congratulations my child oh congratulations

This song does not employ any deep symbolic or figurative expressions, but uses socially accepted terms suitable for the articulation of admiration. The meaning of the **hongera** can not be achieved by any English translation. Why does the bride or even the persona deserve praise, one may ask? The womenfolk admire the bride's physical attributes, the suitor she has acquired, and even the ceremony they are going through now. These are all achievements, hence:

Mwana Wajihi
Urembo mwingi
ehe hongera
Wonderful shape
a lot of beauty
oh congratulations

Another stanza says:

Tena kapata
Kidume dume
ehe hongera

Then she has acquired
a bull bullock
oh congratulations.

In yet another stanza, the persona tells us:

Yeye murua
Arusi murua
ehe hongera

She is wonderful
The wedding is wonderful too
oh Congratulations

Once again, this song achieves its effects without much apparent reliance on metaphors and figurative language. However, the emphasis through repetition in **murua,** attracts the literary analyst.

Another song in this category is **"Njiwa Wangu"- "My Dove"**. In this song, the persona sings praises to the bride. This is one song taught within **unyago** to assist in actual body movements in the marital chamber. Its rhythm is appropriate for this. Also after the women pick the body movements, the drum is an obvious "speech surrogate". As it is beaten, women show off their ability to move their bodies provocatively. Their waists rise and fall in rhythm with the drumbeats. They then form a circle and in turns move to the centre. Clapping and drumming alternate with the singing as the woman at the centre displays all her skills. The others ululate, clap and interject. They are highly charged and utter a diversity of erotic expressions such as **hapo (there).** It was during this particular performance that words explicitly related to sex were uttered. At first, this researcher even gave a sexual interpretation to the words of the said song, although the 'owners' insisted it just outlined the duties the girl could carry out with ease within the domestic arena. They sang,

Njiwa wangu atewatewa aha! x 2
Njiwa ehe-aha njiwa ehe wangu
atewa tewa x 3
My dove is flittering aha x 2
My dove, oho-aha, my dove is
flittering x 3

The persona goes on to detail all the duties her **`dove'** can manage. She can perform them so easily that it looks like a bird fluttering; her performance appears natural. The song continues:

Njiwa wangu kupika na kupakua
My dove cooks and serves
Njiwa wangu kuosha na kurua
My dove cleans and washes.

All the duties she carries out receive the choral response of **"my dove is fluttering".** This particular song takes a long time especially because the household chores were many, ranging from the kitchen to even the massaging, loving or even appreciating the husband. Also, the fact that the rhythm is highly appreciated and utilized by the women makes it take quite long.

An interesting song in this category is **kijembe k'ongoka mpini' - " The handle to the Jembe is straight".** It is interesting because, for once, the women took the role of the bridegroom. This was in the bridal chamber during the consummation of the wedding. When the bridegroom goes in a second time, the women are now relaxed and sing in praise of the sexual prowess of either of the two performers. Thus, the persona can either be the bride or her groom. The persona praises:

Kijembe K'ongoka mpini nipatie kibanio x 2
Nimepata dereva ajuaye
Gari langu laenda mbio x 2

The handle of the jembe is straight
Give me the tightener

I have found a driver who really knows
My vehicle is moving very fast x 2

In this song, the persona borrows the images from the transport industry and farming. The handle of the jembe was said to represent the male genitalia. Thus, the man is ready for sex and has even managed to fit himself into the opening in the jembe. This opening must be in reference to the female genitalia. What is needed now is the morale or encouragement to keep on to tighten the handle so that it does not disengage easily from the jembe.

The second image, one of the performers, is a driver helping the owner of the vehicle to move at an exciting speed. The persona is the owner of the vehicle. Because of the acquisition of the vehicle, life to him is rewarding and interesting. This song relies heavily on sexual images. The performers are all carried away. As the soloist sings, the audience ululates, interjects and some even scream in eroticism. One cannot help observing the inherent excitement and experience at this particular time. Such observations are obvious especially during the repeated performance of the following verse in which they seem to have the bridegroom as the persona:

Nimekanyagaa mafuta gari langu laenda mbio x 2
Nimepata mtu mufti ajuaye kazi yake
Nimekanyanga mashine, mwisho
imepasuka
Nimepata Dereva ajuaye gari langu laenda mbio

I am stepping on the gas pedal
My vehicle is moving fast x 2
I have found a good person
Who knows the work
I have stepped on the machine
At last it has burst x 2

I have found a driver who knows
My vehicle is moving very fast.

From this last stanza, one can argue that the dramatis persona is mainly the bridegroom. The women themselves seem to sing with the bridegroom's thoughts and experiences in mind. Other stanzas also highlight this. This is especially so when the persona explains how far and wide he has sought for the right driver.

Having already pointed out that the women have traditionally no role in the search for a rightful husband, we can conclude that the persona is the groom. The women also highlight the fact that they are the ones who are more equipped than their male partners especially because of the **unyago** institution. The male partners are supposed to be learners on the first night for they have had no formal exposure. Therefore, although the women are socially branded `doves', they are not only gentle but can also be difficult to "get". They have acquired an art which men might never understand.

Another image that evidences the persona in this song as male is the **kupasuka** (bursting). This image expresses how an action has taken place until a bag of some sort has burst. This is easily relatable to the masculine climax, which culminates in ejaculation. In fact, this can be seen as one isolated example of the bridegroom being the dramatis persona. Although the dramatis persona may be the bridegroom, praise is definitely for the bride's sexual powers, hence **nimepata dereva ajuae** (I have found a skilled driver).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE UMBUJI IN UNYAGO

We have so far proved that none of the activities of **unyago** exists merely for pleasure. Pleasure is manifest at the visible level, especially of the poems. Deeper, at an invisible level, a latent force is realised. Through this underlying force, the poems reflect an individual and group symbolic behaviour. Due to this latency, the most immediate and striking character of the **unyago** poems is undoubtedly the dominance of elevated expressions, thoughts, feelings, rhythmical flow amidst social reality. All this is summed up as **umbuji** in this chapter.

The closest English term for **umbuji** is creativity. **Umbuji** is derived from the root **umba -** create. This concept, therefore, presents the human being as a maker-creator, one who is able to reproduce life and to pass judgement on its phenomena. **Umbuji** allows human beings to use nature as raw materials for further creativity. In regard to **unyago**, women have their natural body and voice, which they use to create.

This chapter isolates the **umbuji** components of **unyago**. It does not only exemplify how **unyago** bears the poetics, such as, use of heightened language, elevated thought or feeling, but goes even further to illustrate that **unyago** exploits its cognitive and aesthetic functions beyond the normal poetic wisdom. This is especially so because the **unyago** songs are a life experience; they are recorded in a dramatised social context and therefore, have oral

mnemonics accompanying them. These, comprising elements of composition and actualisation, enhance the poetic nature of the **unyago** songs.

The Oral Nature of Unyago

The most important feature of orature are that it is oral and is performed. This assertion is summarised by Ruth Finnegan when she gives three ways in which a poem can most readily be called oral (1) its composition, (2) its mode of transmission, and (3) related to (2) its performance (1977). In what aspects can **unyago** songs be called `oral'?

Composition

The **unyago** songs have grown communally and spontaneously and are therefore inherited by the current `poets' or bearers over a period of many years. But the poets are not simply passive recipients as passers of material already formed. The songs are literally composed both before and in performance. During the visits, it is noted that the poets rely on some skeleton formulae and content handed down orally through the **unyago** tradition, but this is combined in different ways with conscious improvisation. This improvisation is determined by the occasions, settings and audience reaction to specific portions of the songs. The poet can thus be said to be a spontaneous performer-cum-composer.

The above accounts for the widespread existence of variants due to the different degrees of personal creativity by the singers and the responses of their audience. The roles of the poets are therefore not merely to memorise, recall and deliver to her audience. Visits to different

sites give the researcher variegated samples of the same song wherein ululation, accompaniments, interjections and names of individuals punctuate the songs. The significance of the context and the effect on and of the audience leads to increased variations in the songs collected. However, the variations are difficult to highlight in written descriptions for they highly depend on the active role of the poet and audience during actual delivery. This allows us to speak of creation by the poets/performers rather than memorisation with minor variations of a piece composed by others.

During the **unyago** performances, one aspect affected by the nature of the audience was the length. For instance, a poet who wishes to arouse attention repeats lines, words and names. If, for example, a poet knows of a recent case of a **`Rukia'**, she will repeat the name and song very often especially if and when first sang it generates applause. The poets colour their composition on performance according to the audience. During the performance of **kilio** (lament), an observer cannot help but sympathise with the poet. Interjections, voice and words, are improvised to communicate feelings and emotions. The poet easily learns the words, expressions and impressions her audience wants to hear, and keep on repeating them, thus lengthening the performance.

Transmission

In the introductory section of this thesis, we note that the language group of Kiswahili under investigation has undergone a series of movements both historically and geographically. Evidence available explains that **unyago** has a strong **Kingozi** foundation. It originally co-

existed with **Jando,** the male version of socialisation. **Unyago** can thus be labelled a 'survival' from the culture of the original Bantu stock . When foreign cultures adulterated the **Kingozi** culture, a diversity of changes occurred. The **Wangozi** intermarried with the visitors, hence the ascendancy of Kiswahili, Uswahili and Waswahili. Some of these people settled at the coast while others travelled upcountry and settled there. As the movements took place, the **unyago** institution moved and spread. All the **unyago** songs have been circulating to different geographical areas through oral performance. During this research experience, it was realised that even to date the people from the east coast transmit songs across geographical and territorial boundaries. Travellers from the coast arrive in the interior clusters often carrying new tunes. The Tanzanian coast was specifically mentioned as a source of such tunes. Through social transmission, therefore, the Swahili-speaking group has managed to maintain and sustain the **unyago** tradition across time and space.

The spread of the songs has been accelerated by modern modes of communication, especially through storage on tapes. Tapes have allowed those who are distant in time and space from the `authors', to acquire the words of the songs. The recipients of the songs are however not restricted to what they receive but are at liberty to manipulate them to suit the environment that surrounds and dictates their **unyago** contexts. The use of modern technology has had a number of consequences for the sociological nature of the **unyago** songs. Notable is the fact that traditionally the transmission takes place in a face-to-face interaction, where knowledge is practically geared towards maintaining the existing set of social relations. Tradition is maintained across time rather than space. The transition from

a predominantly oral to that of the technical media involves the storage and transfer of knowledge in forms of radio, tapes, video cassettes and newspapers.

Changing the transmission of the songs from a predominantly oral to that of the technical media, has arguably had a democratising effect in that there is a less strident gender boundary. Men, and subsequently others, can now learn the songs through the diverse range of audio, visual and printed media. The modern media therefore offer opportunities to share the songs with those that do not belong to the immediate social gender and/or age locations and thus, make the social knowledge increasingly visible. What remains however, is the invisible social reality that the women share. The female informants view this triumphantly. They point out that their men would never understand the embedded context of the songs. These women explain that it is not unusual for a woman to be laughing at a male-mocking song without the husband realising, `*this is how we have managed them;* ***ni kiboko chao'***, they chorused in a schadenfreudian manner.

Through this field experience therefore, it is clear that, anyone interested in reconstructing historically the original form of the songs would do so through visits to **unyago** contexts at the coast. Through a comparative exercise, it is also possible to decipher the typical or normal aspects of the songs and that which has been a local group's or an individual singer's alterations, to fit own needs.

The songs do not only spread across geographical and historical boundaries but also across ages. The older women sing for themselves. The younger generation of women learns the

songs mainly during such performances. At specific geographical settings, it is observable that the songs seem relatively unchanging, the singers learn them through membership of the **unyago** age and reinforce their knowledge by singing and performing them. The songs are performed through choral singing. The acquisition of the songs and their wide distribution can be closely related to the individual's mastery of particular songs and transmitting them to other clusters through recreation by performance.

Performance

All the **unyago** songs are recorded during performance. What accounts for performance in this study is the actualisation by the poets themselves and the audience involvement. In addition to the manipulation of her voice, the **unyago** poet has at her disposal visual resources such as gestures, expressions and mimicry. The poet does not only sing about her sorrow, anger or ridicule, but also visualizes her emotions. Every muscle of her face is utilised, her voice is emotionally charged and not only could she shed a tear or two but would often lead her audience into doing so too. In most cases, it is observed that the verbal content of the songs under delivery only represent a sample element in a complete embodiment of activities - performance.

During **unyago** performances, expressions are mainly observed during the laments, satires and warnings. In such songs as **"Utauona pambano", "Kisu chako", "Usiutie Mapengo",** non-vocal communication was the most popular with poets. It is an accompaniment to the verbal outpourings of ridicule, satire and warnings. Indeed, the

meanings in these songs can be derived from the simultaneous transmission of the poetic messages through performance. Body movements are integrated into the poetics. During performance, an observer clearly notes the empowerment of the utterances by their association with body gestures.

These visual representations of the **unyago** songs communicate a lot of details. Specifically, an analyst of these `texts' realizes that these non-verbal bodily emphases contribute to the rhythmicality and the unveiling of metaphorical references in the songs. As indicated in the preceding chapters, the women use their hands and this helps an observer in the understanding and interpretation of the songs. An example is the song **"Kisu"**. At the refrain, the women demonstrate graphically what the knife means to them by **"unsheathing"** or uncovering the male organ with the movement of one hand and in a penetrating motion repeatedly, cut the meat thereby represented by the other hand. In a similar motion, the hands are used to represent the **"msumeno"** and the wood.

In addition to the use of the hands and arms, the women use the lower part of their bodies. They sway their waists and gyrate their hips provocatively. The dances are a test of sex dancing skills earlier acquired during **unyago.** An observer is left with no doubt about the need for the seclusion of women from men during these performances. The effect of the satire, lament and ridicule is therefore achieved more by efforts which go beyond the language used; a change of facial expression on the part of the singers to emphasize the deflation of the male ego from the man with innate heroism to a victim. The ultimate effect of the songs rests in what the soloist and audience cum performers do with their bodies.

The songs touch with delight, and the same effect is evident in poetry, which is to touch the observer with pain, excess sorrow and frustration.

Although oral poetry is mainly centred on the poet/performer, the source of effect of **unyago** songs comes from the participation of the various persons present at the scene of performance. Sometimes, it is difficult to distinguish between the performer and audience. The women sing for themselves in an antiphonal performance. Most times the soloist/poet calls the tune and sings through a stanza and the rest answer in chorus. But at times, this process proves difficult to discern. At such instances, it is not clear who belongs to which party, the soloist or the chorus.

The performance also denies anyone the role of observer or audience. One has to be integrated into the totality of the call/response performance. The people are therefore a rich contextual resource that can never be ignored. The poet herself seems to emerge from the audience with ease - and she knows the audience as much as they know her. At times she is part of the audience as the drummer solos with her drums or even a member of the response team becomes a soloist. During other instances, the poet seeks a variety of ways in which to involve her audience so as to enhance the impact of performance. It is because of the closeness with her audience that the poet refers to their immediate environment with which they are all very familiar. A sense of sisterhood makes all of them ululate at the mention of a certain name, word or image. She even refers to some of their names to illustrate beauty, or a particular condition, situation or characteristic. In general, the **unyago** "audiences" are interwoven with the performance and composition. Through choruses, comments, laughter,

ululations and gesticulation, they become, an integral part of the performance. Sometimes the poet is even to be laughed at, corrected or even encouraged and assisted by her audience.

Unyago is thus a theatrical stage. In it, gesture, setting, voice and body presence are projected into the space of the performance. Another contributing element that enhances the body presence is clothing/costume (**mavazi).** This includes coloured finery, hairdos and ornaments that are fully exposed only during the wedding day. On this day, guests arrive in noisy and happy groups. They enter the **unyago** stage clad in **bui-bui (hijab).** As the music gets heated, the bui-bui are discarded to expose the multi-coloured dresses bought purposely for this occasion, shapely body contours, **heena**-decorated lips, ornaments and fancy hairstyles. The women are not supposed to show all these decorations in other days, except to their husbands in their bedrooms. To add to this aestheticism, are the perfume that mixes with the food aroma and permeate the air.

Umbuji in Linguistic Aspects

In addition to their theatricality, **unyago** songs also have poetic characteristics. Oral poetry in particular is supposed to be recited, sung or chanted. For this to be possible, poetry has to have rhythm. All the **unyago** songs have rhythmic movements that make up the performance discussed here before. The songs are all dance tunes. The words in them are closely associated with rhythmic body movements. The words induce a dancing movement in the midst of the ritual. The singers and "audience" make movements in time with the rhythm of the song, drumming, swaying, clapping, twisting, and thumping which in turn

emphasize the rhythmic nature of these songs. In other words, the drama in **unyago** is inspired by the poesy in the language used.

Repetition

Unyago songs also have stylistic features which lean towards the poetic. The most obvious feature is repetition. Stanzas, lines and refrains are repeated over and over again. Repetition provides a mark of variation from stanza to stanza or song to song. This is observable in all the songs discussed in this study. A good illustration is in **Bembea Mtoto**. We find the line **"Bembea mtoto"** being a response to the "audience" whereas, there is still a refrain or chorus as illustrated hereafter.

Bembea mtoto -	**Rock my baby**
Kiswahili	**English**
1.Mtambaji:Kilio wanilisha Kiitikio: Bembea mtoto	Solo:You make me cry Response: rock my baby
2. Mtambaji: Wanikumbusha mtima Kiitikio: Bembea mtoto	solo: You remind my heart Response: rock my baby

Chorus
Bembea eeh x 2 **rock ooh** x 2
Bembea eeh bembea mtoto rock ooh rock my baby

3. Mtambaji: Mwana huyu ana mambo Kiitikio: **Bembea mtoto**	solo:This child has problems **Response: rock my baby**
4. Mtambaji: ananiumiza roho Kiitikio: **Bembea mtoto**	solo:She stabs my heart **Response rock my baby**

A similar structure is found in **Njiwa** and **Ana Mkia** where **"wangu atewatewa"** and **"ana mkia"** are repeated lines, yet there is also a chorus in each of the two songs. This is a feature demonstrated in most of the songs as illustrated below:

Kiswahili	**English**
1. Mtambaji: Mama, Mamangu mama	Solo: Mother, my Kiitikio mother, mother
Kiitikio:Kama mtambaji	**response**: as in solo
2. Mtambaji:: Kiuno	Solo: my waist
Kiitikio:**Chauma**	**response: It pains**
3. Mtambaji: Mgongo	Solo: my back
Kiitikio**: wauma**	**response: it pains**
4. Mtambaji: Kichwa	Solo: my head
Kiitikio**: Chauma**	**response: it aches**
5. Mtambaji: macho	Solo: my eyes
Kiitikio:**yauma**	**response: they pain**
6. Mtambaji: viungo	Solo: my limbs/joints
Kiitikio**: vyauma**	**response: they ache**
7. Mtambaji: mapaja	Solo: my thighs
Kiitikio:**yauma**	**response: they pain**

(Note: presence of pain, sorrow etcetera is evident in the gestures and tonal variation).

Another example with this feature is the song **Mamawe, Mamawe, Mamawe:**

Kiswahili	**English**
1.Mtambaji: Mamawe, mamawe, mamawe	Solo: My mother, my mother my mother
Kiitikio:Kama mtambaji	**response: as above in solo**
2 Mtambaji ah kitanda	Solo: the bed
Kiitikio: **cha kuazima**	**response: is borrowed**

3. Mtambaji godoro Kiitikio: **ya kuazima**	Solo: the mattress **response: is borrowed**
4. Mtambaji mto e! Kiitikio:**wa kuazima**	Solo: the pillow! **response: is borrowed**
5. Mtambaji Shuka Kiitikio:**za kuazima**	Solo: bed sheets **response: are borrowed**
6. Mtambaji Sahani Kiitikio:**za kuazima**	Solo: Plates **response: are borrowed.**
7. Mtambaji vijiko Kiitikio:**vya kuazima**	Solo: Spoons **response: are borrowed**
8. Mtambaji sufuria Kiitikio:**za kuazima**	Solo: pots **response: are borrowed**
9. Mtambaji: sufuria Kiitikio: **za kuazima**	Solo: pots **response: are borrowed**
10. Mtambaj:i mwiko Kiitikio:**wa kuazima**	Solo: cooking spoon **response: is borrowed**

Chorus as earlier above

The list of the borrowed items goes on and on. Repetition is a common feature here.

Sometimes, the whole concept of stanza is based on the principle of repetition of refrain/chorus as illustrated in the song **Bembea eeh bembea mtoto** and in the song **Leo ni Leo - Today is Today** quoted here below:

Kiswahili	**English**
1 Mtambaj: Leo ni leo jamaa Leo ni leo jamaa Atauona mpambano Kweli si uongo	Solo:Today is today friends Today is today friends She will witness the fight It is true, it is not a lie

Kiitikio:Kama mtambaji	response: **repeat as in solo**
2. Mtambaj: Utauona	Solo You will witness
mpambano	**response: A real fight**
Kweli si uongo	**It is true, it is not a lie**
Kiitikio:Kama mtambaji	response: **repeat as in solo**
3 Mtambaj:Jamani mniambie	Solo: People, tell me
yale nitakayoona	what I will experience
nyote ni warongo	all of you must be liars
mwenyewe ni mimi	I am the main person

Chorus

Mtambaj: Leo ni leo jamaa	Solo:Today is today friends
Leo ni leo jamaa	Today is today friends
Atauona mpambano	She will witness the fight
Kweli si uongo	It is true, it is not a lie

This is accompanied by thumping, clapping and interjections. The chorus is often repeated over and over again. At times, the very words of the soloist are repeated in choral. A good illustration is **Huu ni Wasia - This is my Advice:**

Kiswahili	**English**
1.Mtambaji: Huu ni wasia	Solo: This is my advice
mwanangu nakupa shika	I am giving my child hold it
Itunze heshima	Take care of your respect
Uweze kusetirika	So that you can be respected
Mume ni moshi	A husband is the smoke
wa kiko usipowaka	of the `ukoko' tree if it does not glow
hufuka	it spreads
Kiitikio:kama mtambaji	**Response:repeat as in solo**
2. Mtambaji: na wewe leo sikia	Solo: And you listen today
mume ni mwenye adabu	A husband is well behaved
Mume akikukemea	If he is harsh on you
sema naye taratibu	talk politely to him
nisamehe nimetubu	forgive me I confess
Kiitikio:kama mtambaji	**Response:repeat as in solo**

3. Mtambaji: Na wewe leo sikia	Solo: You today listen
Maneno haya nanena	This words I am saying
Usidhani natukana	Don't think I am abusing
Nisemayo leo shika	Whatever I say, take it
Hakika mume ni mume	Indeed a husband is a husband
Hata kama hana kazi	even if he is jobless.
Kiitikio:kama mtambaji	**Response: as in solo**

4. Mtambaji: Leo ni arusi yako	Solo: Today is your wedding day
Tangu juze twaalika	since the day before yesterday we have been inviting
Kaa na mume wako	You live with your husband
upate kusetirika	so as to be respected
Heri upigwe	You had better be beaten
Kwa lingine	for anything else
Usipigwe kwa kwenda nje	than be beaten for going out with another man
Kiitikio:kama mtambaji	**Response: as in solo**

We observe that repetition has a variety of creative functions. It is observed as a mark of progression from one stanza to the next or even change of song. It is also seen as a tool for emphasis. For instance, the song **Pole Rukia** has this as the refrain to ridicule the well-known character. This is repetition of the theme of ridicule. Further, during performance, titles of **unyago** songs are not announced and it is only through the change of a refrain that an observer learns that there is change of song. Thus, the repetition of refrains delineates the beginning and end of a particular song.

Sometimes, songs are sang in a diversity of settings. This repetitiousness is a way of marking a recurrent and hence, popular song. The poet gauges the appreciation of a song from the interjections by her "audience". For instance, the two songs **Kisu chako** and **Usiutie mapengo** are often repeated after each other and seem enjoined to form a song

cycle. This could be so because the two songs carry a similar theme of ridiculing the male ego and therefore delighting the "audience".

In conclusion, we observe repetition fulfilling three major functions. Two of these are manifest functions. But there is also a latent function, which is closely related to performance. This function is also related to the **unyago** institution in general. As a transitional ritual, **unyago** is mainly intended to prepare – **palilia -** the young female for womanhood. The repeated parts of the songs are expected to be used by the girls in future especially to sustain the event of love-making. During performance, repetition enables the women's minds to be pervaded with the emotions they wish to convey. Through conscious or unconscious facial expressions, other gestures and voice modulation, the researcher observes that the women are deeply engrossed. The repeated parts of the song end up precipitating and processing a thick power of incantation capable of transporting the singers beyond the present, place, and space and into hypnosis. Through the repeated items, the women in the **unyago** scenario are inducted into a trance-like state in which they achieve extremely vivid recall of sexual fantasies even to the point where they seem to believe that they are actually reliving their past experiences.

Imagery

The **unyago** songs apparently use language and diction somewhat removed from everyday speech. The language is figurative. It makes descriptions and explanations delightful and pleasurable. For instance, the bride is referred to as a **dove**. The poets build a series of

pictures about the gentle, yet, fulfilling deeds of the bride as illustrated below in **Njiwa wangu atewatewa - My Dove is Fluttering:**

Kiswahili	**English**
1 Mtambaji: Njiwae, njiwa wangu atewa tewa, njiwae x3 **Kiitikio**:Wangu atewatewa	Solo: My Dove, yes, my Dove is fluttering, my Dove **response**: is fluttering

Note: This stanza is repeated over and over again and is therefore a chorus.

Taz.: Ubeti huu unakaririwa kaririwa na kuwa pambio

2. Solo: Njiwae, kupika na kupakua - Njiwae x3 **Kiitikio**: wangu atewatewa	Solo: My Dove cooks and serve My Dove, response: is fluttering
Pambio	**Chorus:**
3. Solo: Njiwae, kutia na kutoa Njiwae **Kiitikio**:wangu atewatewa	Solo: My Dove, putting in & removing my Dove **response**: is fluttering
Pambio	**Chorus:**
4. Solo Njiwae, kupanga na kupangua **Kiitikio**:Njiwae	Solo: My Dove, arranging and **response**: My Dove
Pambio	**Chorus:**
5. Njiwae, kualika na kuaga Njiwae **Kiitikio**: wangu atewatewa	Solo: My Dove welcoming and sending off My Dove **response**: is fluttering
Pambio	**Chorus**

In some cases, special linguistic forms are used. This illuminates a special **unyago** register. The effect of this is manifested in the poet /"audience" responses. The words seem to carry imagery that is felt by the poet and her audience to convey a special depth and meaning. The best example is the **Njiwa** song quoted above. The **"tewatewa"** description arouses a special erotic feeling in the crowd. Another example is in **Sitaki mzee** wherein the `**kazi**' and `**sukuma chombo**' are to be understood in reference to a sexual encounter. These metaphors are in many ways unique to **unyago**.

In **unyago** poetry, it is not unusual for a whole poem to be centred on one sustained metaphor which gives even more depth to the meaning of the poem. One such **unyago** song was **Kisu chako hakikati** directly translatable as "your knife does not cut" This poem moves at two levels. The first level seems to be making a simple description of a common domestic exercise, the cutting of beef, mutton or chicken into small manageable sizes. But the hidden meaning is of love-making, ridicule, disappointment all wrapped up in one song. The song is addressed to a husband who has proved sexually dissatisfying to his partner. The song draws its effectiveness from the extended metaphor of a `knife' that is too blunt and therefore cutting the wrong sizes of the meat and interfering with the attractiveness of the meat. The persona complains that:

Kisu chako hakikati x 2
your knife does not cut x 2
usiniharibie nyama
Do not spoil my meat

This is the refrain of this song, but the soloist introduces the end of her call with `**Kisu'**, so that the word is recurrent in the performance of the song. Yet in the song, another metaphor is introduced, that of a `tree'. The act of sex is also likened to the climbing of a tree. This is illustrated herebelow:

Kila ukiuona mti
whenever you see a tree
si lazima uupande
It is not a must that you climb it

This metaphor is not repeated and even the refrain to it still goes back to the knife. However, it is an enhancement of the fact that sex is not compulsory; it is an art that calls for preparation. In this case, the often repeated metaphor of knife is observed as consummated by the performers. Consummated here is used to refer to a metaphor that seems to be well-known and used by all performers. It has acquired popular usage and everybody in the community knows its meaning. In the case of **Kisu Chako Hakikati**, whereas kisu has been consummated within the **unyago** context, the metaphor of the tree is unconsummated.

A similar extended metaphor is observed in **Usiutie mapengo msumeno wangu**. Indeed the two poems bear the same hidden message that sex should be artistic, not performed in an unprepared manner. However, a look at the shallow level of these poems may confuse a newcomer to the **unyago** scenario. Yet these are the two songs that the women seem to identify closest with. They are repeated over and over again and audience involvement is at its peak. This is the nature of poetry. It may look misleading at the first layer, but maybe

carrying highly figurative messages through rich overtones as illustrated through these ritual songs.

Functional Umbuji

Literature is a social product and must therefore have a social purpose. The **unyago** institution as demonstrated earlier in the introduction, is in itself intended for the preparation of young women for marriage. The curriculum is based on the major objective of the candidates acquiring instructions to be practised later during marriage. It is clear that much of the **unyago** ritual experience is dedicated to sharpening sexual skills in women. The songs' musicality and meaning is meant to reinforce this creation of a woman from a girl child. Practice makes perfect, and the experience in exercising the teachings within the context of marriage increases the communicative efficiency and psychological involvement.

The **unyago** songs are therefore performed for diverse functions; social, psychological and physical. Some are performed for "praise-word" poetic purposes. Such songs bedecked the bride with praises, for example, the song **Hongera mwanangu**. Other songs have didactic qualities. Such songs perform the function of teaching upcoming female adults. In this category we find songs such as **Lipi Lilitukia** and **Bwana Arusi ana Nini?** Through this category of songs, the older and experienced women transfer what they know to the innocent ones.

Poetry, it is known, is often intended to arouse human emotions. This is especially so due to its rhythmic nature, choice of words and dramatic techniques as in the case of oral poetry. This is a special reality in the performance of **unyago** songs in the second phase. The **unyago** songs arouse an overflow of powerful emotions in the performers and the participating audience. During delivery, the exclusive expressive quality of **unyago** songs accomplishes something for the women that could be done in no other way. On the surface level, a researcher observes an artistic behaviour accompanied by dramatic techniques. On the other hand, the social group of married women, as an entity, share a special expression. They experience the songs and find in them an inner patterning. As they dance, the songs stir their emotions, and through them, the imagination by penetrating the deeper levels of consciousness. This transfers them to the hidden invisible context of love-making in which the songs are subconsciously performed.

At the `seen' or visible level therefore the women perform songs at the realm of ordinary reality and purposes. At the `unseen' `invisible' level, performance to the tunes plays a special role, and therefore makes a specific psychological contribution to the lives of the women. The process of performance undergoes a progression. The tempo is transferred from the physical to the psychological which is characterised by the arousal of excitement and release of human emotions. The situation is such that the `unseen' is harmonised with the seen and the physical performance with the psychological attainment of needs. The involvement of the women culminates in the unifying and the bringing together of visible and hidden structures of the women's lives. The women become so charged that they at

times scream, ululate, interject or even weep. What follows this release of emotions was relief, a kind of satisfaction and contentment.

The intratextuality in this songs is complex. The songs carry a striking and deep communicating capacity amongst the married women, a capacity that is able to involve the women at a deeper level than the mere participation in a cultural system. The women in the **unyago** social group act through the expressive form of the oral poems to articulate meanings that can only be shared among them. A researcher is only able to understand this by undergoing a process of transformation. To penetrate this context, the researcher has to lose the self and defuse oneself into the **unyago** world. This is why the use of qualitative research paradigms become important in this ethnographic research. It is therefore the milling process between the revealed and the hidden within the oral poems that reinforces the continuity of the **unyago** institution and the songs therein.

Musicality

Unyago poems are realisable in performance; they are sung. Another area, therefore, in which creativity – **umbuji –** is apparent in the **unyago** poems is their musicality. This encompasses creativity through tonal variation and rhythm among others, which might be described by Western notation in transcription and other analytical techniques. This area is, however, outside the scope of the present study. In deed the musicality of the poem is a fertile area for research.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has taken, as a research priority, the process through which individual women in Swahili-speaking communities acquire their gender identities. It has looked at specific women ritual songs produced during this process in the Swahili-speaking groups in Kisumu Municipality.. The research sites are Manyatta Arabu, Kaloleni, Bandani, Kibos and Nyangori clusters within Kisumu District.

With the **unyago** context as our central focus, we have looked for answers to a number of questions, some of which are:

1. How is gender identity constructed?
2. •Specifically how does one become female in this social setting?
3. •What rites, ceremonies and roles celebrate femaleness?
4. •What views do women subscribe their categorisation to?
5. What women specific linguistic structures, such as oral poems/ songs reveal these views?

The study exemplifies the existing interrelatedness between a number of issues. Paramount is the one observed between literature and social reality. Second is between orature and theatre. Last is the one between performance and empowerment.

Literature and Social Reality

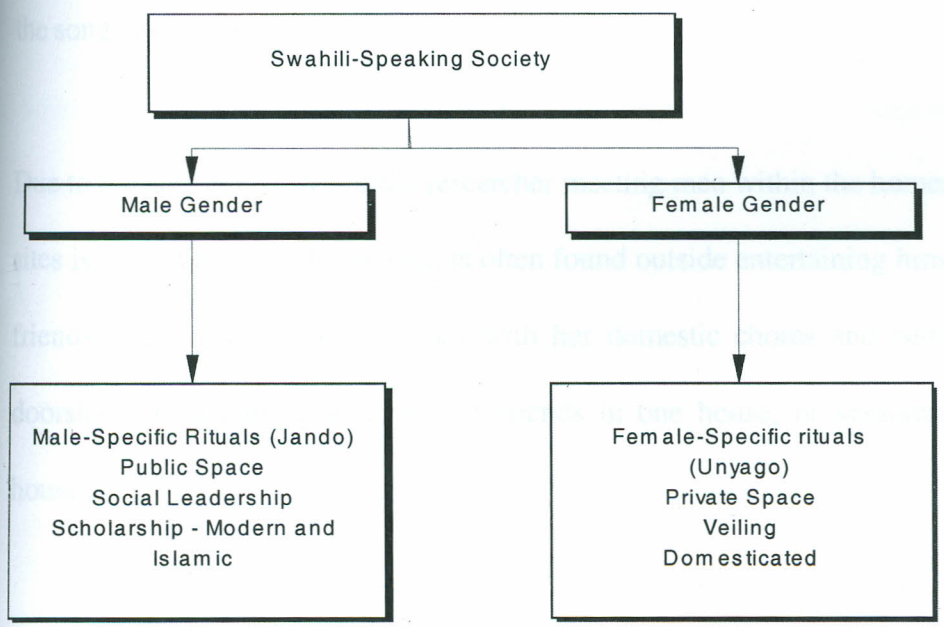
One way of grasping the precise relationship between Literature and society is to analyse the realisation of any given Literature in a specific context. This kind of analysis has not been common. Researchers with primary literary interest have tended to concentrate on thematic and stylistic concerns, while showing little if any concern in the social context or the social reality in the literature. Sociologists and other social scientists have been concentrating on the social groupings but not on their literary activities.

According to our Literature review, what makes this study markedly different from preceding researches is its prioritisation of the social context of **unyago**. It also differs from others in its specific interest in observing the interrelatedness between socially constructed gender dichotomy in the Swahili-speaking society and the performance of literary creations emanating within the distinguished sphere of women. Although earlier scholars (N'tarangwi 1994, Mulokozi, 1982) had already noted the under-privileged status of women in our study population, they however never observed that the socially constructed sphere they acquire which binds them together all the more empowers them to the extent that they anage to negotiate ways of achieving their social goals and objectives.

A category of earlier scholars also discussed protest songs and poems by women without conceptualising them. Literature, is a social product. It is like a fountain head through which society relieves its social tensions. There is an oversight therefore in the works of

most of these scholars. Such scholars make a critique of the poetic products and only mention **unyago,** in passing if at all. This study improves this position by placing **unyago** in its social context.

Art reflects cultural values and behaviour. The **unyago** poems do not only reflect women's experience – *a woman's culture* , within the sacred **unyago** setting - but also the basic biosocial Swahili life. They also reflect the values that animate the general culture of which **unyago** is part. This culture is embedded in the poems, and thus helps shape attitudes towards institutions. One such cultural aspect is the sexual asymmetry. Our findings demonstrate a society with religious and secular codes that present basic propositions regarding expected behaviour. Often, the propositions explicate the relationship between the two sexes and the meaning of being male or female. They lay out clear-cut differences which leave the society to sort out into two compartments; male and female as exemplified below:



Thus, even during the collection and interpretation of the oral poetic creations of this society, the researcher clearly observed gender differentiation. This is because the segregation is so strongly cemented that distinctions can be observed in the participation in cultural ceremonies, attendant to such rituals as birth, marriage and death. In such ceremonies an `impenetratable 'curtain' in the form of space or architecture serves to separate the women's festivities from the men's. During the research, it is notable that this separation continues also in religious activities. In mosques, women are set apart from men. Even in normal daily activities, space separates the two . The women in this society are always encouraged to stay at home. Through the socialisation institutions, girls are discouraged against aspiring for spatial freedom. But her counterpart, the male is socialised to keep away from the domestic arena and to be public. According to the informants in this study, spending a lot of time around the home was seen as a sign of weakness on the part of men. Any man found succumbing to this sets neighbours whispering that he has been bewitched by his wife and is generally scorned by male friends. This is clearly illustrated by the song **sitaki mzee.**

Due to the above, chances of the researcher meeting men within the homes in these research sites is almost nil. While the man is often found outside entertaining himself with his male friends, the woman is always busy with her domestic chores and petty business by her doorstep, or socialising with female friends in one house, or verandas that connect the houses.

Through the analysis of **unyago** songs, this study realises that the **unyago** institution goes beyond femininity. The words and actualisation of the songs through performance enhance a woman's knowledge of herself, reveals to her feminine issues she does not know; her shadow and also about men. Through the songs, the women learn the use of body exhalations and humorous techniques to delay climax and the art of attractiveness to their husbands. Most of the dancing strategies taught here often represent responses to the expectations of their husbands and the general society.

Also, thematic and stylistic distinctions in the songs performed by either gender is clear. Hence the researcher in this society is able to collect the **"Nyimbo za kike"** with ease. The songs belong to women only and are not supposed to be sung within earshot of men at any one time because culture dictates so. Culture also dictates that the songs have specific themes, symbols, rhythm, mode of dance or even instruments only meant for women.

Through this research exercise, we can safely observe that distinctions between men and women go beyond biological differences. We observe that in our study population, biology is used as initial criterion for delineating man from woman. The female sphere goes further to create and shape its members, by establishing specific experiences that are characterised by a complexity only understandable to an insider.

The **unyago** poems reflect a male-female dichotomy. There are songs reserved for women. This distinction is generally a cultural trait. The performers are not able to explain why, but they have accepted the fact that men do not sing or dance to women's song and vice versa.

Orature and Theatre

Next is the relationship between indigenous oral literature and theatre. Mineke Schipper asserts that setting boundaries between oral narratives and theatre is a very complicated endeavour (Schiper: 1989, 82). Our study confirms the inter-relatedness of oral poetry and theatre. As demonstrated earlier, the performance of **unyago** poems carries elements of drama; the performance is a total happening, a holistic art form in many ways. The performer(s) and performing audience are one and the same thing; narrators, poets, Mtambaji, singers, musicians and actors. The women dance and their actions are represented in abandon. The actions range from vocal, hand and head movements, the modulation of voice, the positioning of the body and the extension of the limbs. In general, the body does not fall short of movements directed from performer to audience and vice versa. The **unyago** poems are thus inter-textual. The inter-textuality is logogenic (word-born), pathogenic (motion-born) and melogenic (music-born). Unlike the Eurocentric views earlier expressed by Finnegan (Finnegan, 1998:501) to the contrary, inter-relatedness of **unyago** proves that drama is highly developed in the traditional African context.

Performance and Empowerment

What we witness in **unyago** is total theatre, where everything intermingles; the unconscious, reason, reality, the unreal, the individual, and the group. The creativity of the woman in the Swahili-speaking community is her poetry; she expresses herself

through song and dance. None of the **unyago** poems exists purely for pleasure. The songs are riddled with two categories of symbols, the verbal and the physical. The physical symbols are those that cannot be reduced to vocal actions. These are observable in the use of the body through various movements. Through the symbols, the women reproduce their lives, emotions and affections. The totality of the verbal and physical performances is a reflection of internal empowerment in the performers themselves.

Through the **unyago** world, women are able to poetically express themselves in a very subtle way. They use compacted discourse, which is overloaded with allusive values. The meanings of women's artistic creations are culturally conditioned and remain unsaid to the public. The observer or listener has to have the capacity to interpret them. The song becomes a weapon, as the poetic voice resonates with force. The songs veer from entertainment, to laughter, to accusation and challenge. Hence, through the songs the women have the capacity to laugh and therefore use it for therapeutic relief purposes. And also through the same songs, the women conjure a feminist resistance and coping strategies to a great extent. For instance, although a girl marries at a tender age usually through arrangement, unlike her male counterpart, her nuptial conjugal roles are already clear in her mind thus giving her the power to perform them with ease especially through the help of the songs and dances. Although conjugal discussions/negotiations between husband and wife were obviously not common if any, women acquire songs and poems through which to express themselves, an avenue which men lack. The women are also found holding long relaxed sessions of singing, dancing, discussions and cathartic laughter among themselves which men are culturally denied.

Unyago, and especially its aspects such as song and dance are therefore a manifestation of the vitality and fidelity of women. We note the importance of unyago songs in maintaining sisterhood; the performances are used by the women especially to inspire collective action by uniting them to participate and carry back these actions into reality, more so during love making.

Conclusion

The study observes a definite nexus between **unyago** poetry and the life of not only Swahili-speaking women, but Swahili society in general. Through the poems and their contexts, the women acquire the art of living which comprise loving , the art of marriage, the art of family life, the art of friendship and the art of working. The poems enable up-coming female adults to sharpen skills in domestic chores, sex, walking styles and child bearing.

Also noteworthy is the connection between poems and social reality. Through the poems, the women express aspects of culture and also find opportunities to fantasise about desired social situations that give them security and pleasure.

In a very dialectical manner, we find the poems in **unyago** giving women an avenue to do that which they are not expected to do in normal circumstances. The poems are therefore indicative of inner human symbolism through the Freudian formulation. Power in the

environment of **unyago** is public, therefore, masculine. We observe a powerful side of women being evoked. Through performance of the songs, we see an opportunity arising, for the women to express feelings that have remained suppressed for most part of their lives- in the unconscious. This power, if not released can be psychologically destabilising. The society knows this and opens up a vent through **unyago**. Thus, women express much of what has been suppressed through individual and group creativity and performance. In the dancing and singing, one recognises a strong masculine flavour, a projection of empowerment that serves rather than dominates the women. In this case, the women's femininity, which is undergoing cultivation *–palilia-*, remains a major objective of **unyago** performance; empowerment which is a masculine trait remains minor.

In conclusion, therefore, **unyago** ends up being an intermediation between male and female. During the performance of **unyago** poetry consciousness of femininity is reduced to enable women express forms of vital experiences which language in normal usage is peculiarly unfit to convey; feelings, body motion and emotion. Words that seem normal acquire other meanings. A good example is the use of phallic symbols such as knife and the yonic symbol of meat.

Suggestions for Further Reading

This study can be used as a yardstick for research into other communities. For instance our study can be used as a model for investigation into the consonance between literature

and social realities. Among other possibilities, this kind of investigation may be used to facilitate a comparative analysis in order to ascertain either the presence or absence of initiation institutions similar to **unyago.** Such an analysis would address concerns such as the utility of literary creativity in the institutions and the variance and congruence of such creations in relation to gender, among other issues.

One would also hope that this study may sensitise scholars in theatre and orature. In general, researches in this area would contribute by serving the need to inventorise the contents of indigenous social institutions like **unyago** and derive subjects for theatrical productions. Such inventories and reproductions ultimately contribute to the domestication of our largely unresearched indigenous knowledge that Eurocentric scholars tend to ignore. In particular such researchers stand to benefit college and secondary school drama festivals as sources of basic material for compositions.

In Africa in general and Kenya in particular, the gender debate remains volatile. This has been especially so because approaches often used are detached from local contexts and experiences. Our findings demonstrate **unyago** as an indigenous institution through which gender relations in a Swahili-speaking society are constructed and reconstructed. This approach to the gender debate should generate a number of research curiosities. Scholars interested in the gender issues could use our study as a springboard into investigating the roots of existing gender relations in other local communities. **Unyago** performances carry plenty of music that this study could not focus on. The musicality of **unyago** is, therefore, one area yet to be studied.

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