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# Walking the Line

## Female Wedding Ngoma in Zanzibar

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#### **Abstract**

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This thesis examines the music of two female ngoma, or music-dance events, that are associated with weddings in Zanzibar: unyago and msanja. Zanzibar is a Muslim island, and there are distinct social spheres for men and women, each with their own norms and expectations with regards to speech, dress, and behavior. Unyago and msanja songs not only represent these norms and expectations; they also negotiate and contest them.

Based on the concept of heterotopia by Michel Foucault, this thesis understands music as an Other space, a space which is both connected to Zanzibari society, as well as existing separately in it and from it. While music as such is not a physical, actual site, it is inextricably tied to, and informs our sense of, space. Moreover, music is able to transform a space into one where different rules apply. Drawing on audio and video recordings made in Zanzibar as well as interviews and informal conversations, this study shows how an engagement with the music, in addition to lyrics and social context, can lead to a more profound understanding of how Zanzibari women play with, and challenge, societal expectations. The performance of, and discourse on, female wedding ngoma allow women to 'walk the line' towards knowledge about gendered expectations, and towards the ability to contest existing power relations at the same time.

*Keywords:* Zanzibar, women, ngoma, African music analysis, sexuality, gender relations, ethnomusicology, heterotopia

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*To my son Olaf*



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# 1. Introduction

## Introducing the topic

“I can teach you how to move,” Furaha says. “Next time you are in Zanzibar, I will teach you how to move. From the hips.” She places her hands on her hips. “When you come home, your husband will be very happy!” she continues. The other women are laughing. To demonstrate the expected progression in my movement skills, Furaha gets up and walks in a straight line from one side of the room to the other, in a straightforward manner, arms held tight to her body, shoulders slightly slumping. Then she turns around and starts to walk the same line in the other direction, but this time in a more elaborate fashion, with suggestive hip swaying. The women are laughing again.

It is January 2020, and we are in the sitting room of Bi Salama, and I have just recorded several songs with three female musicians: Salama, Furaha and Akina. Bi Salama is a drummer and a *nyakanga*, a ritual instructress, in her early sixties, and she has kindly invited me to her house. She lives in Raha Leo, a neighborhood in Ng’ambo in Zanzibar City.

Salama and the other two musicians have just performed several songs and explained the three different kinds of drums used in *unyago*, a female wedding *ngoma* that prepares a young woman for married life. Ngoma is a Swahili term which literally translates as “drum,” but it also has a broader meaning: events or celebrations in which music and dance play a part. Unyago is one of several ngoma that may be organized before a woman gets married in Zanzibar and originally comes from mainland Tanzania, Mozambique, and Malawi, and spread throughout East Africa in the nineteenth century as a result of the slave trade (Fair 1996: 146). Unyago was a custom among enslaved women, who continued to practice this ritual in their new environment. Gradually it was adopted by free-born women as well (Fair 1996: 152). At present it can be found, apart from the areas in mainland East Africa where it originally came from, along the entire Swahili coast, including the islands of Zanzibar, Pemba, Mafia and Lamu (Allen 2000, Halley 2012, Rwebangira & Liljeström 1998, Tumbo-Masabo & Liljeström 1994). It involves the performance of dances and songs, and a set of instructions for girls on how to be a woman, carried out by *manyakanga*, ritual instructors. The dances involve a movement technique called *kukata kiuno*, which literally translates as “to cut the waist,” a hip-gyrating motion that teaches a woman the right movements and techniques

to accomplish sexual pleasure for herself and for her husband (Edmondson 2001: 160)—as Furaha just demonstrated for me. The songs usually have a sexually tinted content, as do the spoken instructions. Topics include the physiology of men and women, gendered morality, sexuality, desire and orgasm.

## Background, aims, and research questions

I have been interested in women and music in Zanzibar for over 15 years. I explored classical taarab music and female performers for my Bachelor's thesis in Musicology in 2006, and in pursuing my Masters in Musicology I conducted fieldwork on modern taarab in Zanzibar in 2009-2010. I examined the phenomenon of *rusha roho*, as modern taarab is often called, in Zanzibar society and how women use this particular music as a platform for social commentary. Zanzibar is a Muslim island, and there are distinct social spheres for men and women, each with their own norms and expectations with regards to speech, dress, and behavior. Briefly put, in daily life, women are supposed to be modest and follow their husband's lead.

During my 5-month fieldwork period in 2010, and subsequent visits between 2012 and 2016, I worked with several musicians and talked to many women about taarab music, *rusha roho*, social life and relationships. A concept that kept coming up in discussions, mainly related to women and their position in Zanzibari Islamic society, was *unyago*. I was told that this female ngoma was something special and secret, and only accessible to women. The women I spoke with informed me that the songs cover a wide range of topics, some of them very explicitly sexual in content, with a clear subversion of gender expectations. As I was already interested in music as a platform for social commentary, and gendered power relations, my interest in *unyago* music was born.

This study aims to document, analyze, and contextualize *unyago* songs, as well as place them in a broader perspective with regard to other marriage preparation ngoma that take place in present-day Zanzibar. In addition to a study of *unyago* songs, I therefore focus on the songs from a ngoma from Jambiani on the East coast in Zanzibar, called *msanja*. *Msanja*, like *unyago*, prepares a bride for married life, with songs on morality, gendered expectations, and sexuality. As such, my project can be seen as a further musical examination of my field site.

More specifically, this thesis focuses on the following research questions: How are *unyago* and *msanja* songs connected to Zanzibar society, with its gendered expectations? How do women negotiate, contest, or subvert existing gendered power relations through the performance of, and the discourse on, these female wedding songs? Overall, this thesis forms a musicological approach to *unyago* and *msanja*, aiming to show that an engagement with the music, in addition to lyrics and social context, can lead to a more profound

understanding of how Zanzibari women play with, and challenge, societal expectations.

## Research, concepts, and methodology

### Situating the research

The East African coast and its islands, among them Zanzibar, have attracted traders and travelers from the inland of Africa and various countries in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean for at least two thousand years (Askew 2003: 611). Swahili culture is generally seen as hybrid, with Arabic, Indian, mainland African and Western influences, and the acceptance of Islam as a unifying factor. Zanzibar is part of an “Indian Ocean network” in which Islam and cosmopolitanism are the most prominent cohesive factors (Topp Fargion 2014: 18-24; Thompson 2015: 6).

Because Zanzibar (or more precisely, Unguja, which is the biggest of the Zanzibar islands) is a Muslim island, there are distinct social spheres for men and women, each with their own norms and expectations. The focus in Zanzibar is not so much on *purdah*, or the physical separation of men and women, but rather on the organization of different cultural subgroups for men and women. These subgroups are visible in different organizations and networks, such as dance clubs and self-help groups for women, and political organizations, community centers and coffee houses for men (see also Askew 1999: 69). A general, rather reductive view, is that the public arena is the domain of men, while the private home is the domain of women (see also Chapter 3). Anthropologist Carol Eastman (1984: 110) contrasts *waungwana*, freeborn men, with *wanawake*, women, whom she defines principally as non-*waungwana*, and thus not free born:

<i>Waungwana</i>	<i>Wanawake</i>
Male	Female
Arabized	Bantuized
Literate tradition	Oral tradition
Dependent on religion	Dependent on each other

As anthropologist Katrina Thompson notes, women are largely absent in much of the literature on the history of the Swahili coast, and when they do make an appearance, they are almost solely portrayed as stationary and lacking agency (2015: 9). Much of the historical discourse on the Swahili focuses on the liaisons between traveling (Arab) men and local (African) women resulting in

Swahili culture, as Arab maritime traders “*penetrated* southwards along the East African coast” (Phillipson 1994: 26, emphasis mine).

In his discussion of the history of the development of Swahili society, anthropologist John Middleton also focuses on the marriage of Arab men to Swahili women: “Relations between Swahili merchants and their trading partners have been personal rather than market-oriented. Exchange has been on an individual basis and the relationships typically have been long-lasting, often based on the marriage of an overseas merchant to a daughter of his host Swahili family” (1992: 22). Women are thus seen in relation to their husbands and male family members, rather than individuals or subjects of their own (Thompson 2015: 11). Middleton dismisses the suggestion of the Swahili as a matrilineal people as a “peculiar assumption” based on a “misinterpretation of Swahili myths” (1992: 99), thereby dismissing the importance of Swahili female rulers in history.

For political scientist François Constantin, the subordinate position of women is evident, and he calls gender hierarchy “the oldest factor of status inequality” in which “women had a subordinate ranking according to an unbalanced division of labour and of dignity” (1989: 149), which remained unchanged from the period of Omani domination from the beginning of the eighteenth century through European colonialism and thereafter.

Thus, in Eastman’s scheme as presented above, *waungwana* would include active/mobile, and *wanawake* would include passive/static.

More recently, however, several authors have adopted a different perspective on female vulnerability and female agency in Swahili societies (see for example Gower et al. 1996, Topan 2004, Boswell 2008, Stiles & Thompson 2015). Anthropologist Kelly Askew explicitly addresses the position of Swahili women in terms of power and authority. She highlights the fact that there have been female rulers well into the nineteenth century, and that there was matrilineal inheritance as well as patrimony. She points out that although the existence of women endowed with a title has largely been relegated to footnotes in historical publications on the Swahili, there is a ubiquity of these references spanning the entire Swahili coast that strongly suggests that “women in positions of authority were not isolated, localized, or aberrant occurrences” (Askew 1999: 82).

In her study on spirits in Zanzibar, anthropologist Kjersti Larsen illustrates that there is a difference between human practices and ideal gender images. While there are clear expectations for both genders in theory, through spirit possession, ideas on feminine and masculine behavior are both represented and challenged. She discusses how, especially in a ritual called *ngoma ya kibuki*, gender and gender differences are “negotiated, constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed” (Larsen 1995: 232). She demonstrates how the female gender image may, in fact, include activities that are generally defined as male, and that women (and men) do not strictly adhere to the Zanzibari moral code.



Similarly, linguist Ann Biersteker questions the picture of male domination and female subordination by re-reading the famous Swahili poem *Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona*, composed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by female poet Mwana Kupona bint Msham about advice from a mother to her daughter on married life. While a literal reading of the poem might suggest a wife's subordination to her husband, a consideration of irony and metaphor in the poem shows that while the husband is portrayed as powerful, he is also "controllable and vulnerable to manipulation" (Biersteker 1991: 71). She shows that in this poem, the young woman is taught how to exercise control over her husband, by employing verbal skills and physical care (i.e., sex). Such a hermeneutic re-interpretation of (song) texts is integral to the analyses in chapters 3 to 6 in this thesis.

An understanding of sexuality as a tool for female control and power is also employed by Katrina Thompson. In her work, she shows how Zanzibari women use language during sex instruction rituals and in discourse on supernatural sex to position themselves as powerful agents within their marriage (Thompson 2011a, 2011b, 2013, 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). In spite of Zanzibari gendered power relations, where men seem to have more rights and control than women, during a *singo*, or pre-marriage sex instruction ritual massage, women are socialized into a (sexual) speech community and offered a commentary on these gendered power relations, allowing them to construct themselves as strategical agents, using language and sex to control their husbands to get what they want (Thompson 2013, 2015). Likewise, women's talk about supernatural sex allows a contestation of Zanzibari gender ideals, as Thompson presents in her research on *popobawa*—a giant bat-winged demon who visits people at night in Zanzibar and sexually assaults them (Thompson 2011b, 2017b). Women's engagement in discourse on supernatural sex allows them to *openly* violate speech prohibitions regarding sex and, as such, enables them to position themselves both as discursive as well as sexual agents.

Historical discourse on music from the Swahili coast has also paid little attention to women. Taarab, possibly the best-known music genre from the Swahili coast, with lyrics in Swahili, Arabic maqams and Western scales, Arabic, African and Western instruments, and Arabic ornamentations, has historically been constructed as a male stronghold.<sup>1</sup> Where women did make an appearance is in the lyrics: they are almost always the *object* of a man's romantic love and desire, their beauty praised and their appearance likened to objects or phenomena such as a rose or the moon—but rarely a subject (see for example Khamis 2004a for an analysis of historical taarab songs). Furthermore, 'women's taarab' and 'kidumbak' were often described as separate from the traditional (normative) taarab, relegated to the fringes of Zanzibari musical life. There was often a focus on gender segregation in music, such as

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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Siti Binti Saad (1880-1950), a female singer from a rural poor family in Zanzibar, who has been acknowledged to contribute to the spread and popularity of taarab in Zanzibar and beyond, by singing in Swahili (instead of Arabic) about everyday life topics.

in the work of musicologist Carol Campbell and anthropologist Carol Eastman (1984), who use gender as the main distinctive feature for their classification of different Swahili ngoma.

In more recent times, however, several authors have focused on female musical production and performance in Zanzibar (Topp Fargion 1993, Askew 1999, Topp Fargion 1999, Topp Fargion 2000, Edmondson 2001, Askew 2003, Fair 2002, Traoré 2007, Sanga 2011, Topp Fargion 2014). Most notable in this context is musicologist Janet Topp Fargion, because she highlights the role of women in the development of traditional *taarab* in Zanzibar. She argues that, although men have played the main role in the composition and performance of *taarab* historically, women are the main consumers and organizers of *taarab* events, thereby controlling the music-event market. Moreover, women are innovators of the genre, bringing in aesthetics of other styles, such as *lelemama*, with its competitive, direct lyrics, and rhythms from ngoma such as *chakacha* and *unyago*. As such, Topp Fargion sees Zanzibari women as drivers of change, influencing music culture and social relations: “Through highlighting women’s role in the realm of *taarab* music in Zanzibar, it emerges that women not only operate within public and cultural spheres, they also control them” (2014: 205).

Furthermore, in my own research on *rusha roho*, or modern *taarab*, I have shown how Zanzibari women use this musical platform as a form of defiance against dominant cultural norms on the island (Hulshof 2011a and 2011b). *Rusha roho* is a musical space in which women can express themselves, sort out quarrels and behave in ways they would not normally do in daily life. At *rusha roho* performances, women dance and intermingle freely with men, and can wear revealing dresses and forego wearing the veil, without this having consequences for their position in Zanzibari society. This immensely popular music genre is consumed by both men and women, and musicians are mostly men, but the singers and big stars are women.

This study thus contributes to the growing body of literature on Zanzibari women as discursive, sexual, and musical agents and seeks to make a connection between these different aspects of Zanzibari female agency.

## Ngoma

Ngoma is a widespread notion in sub-Saharan Africa and is a Bantu language cognate. The concept of ngoma is complex, and can be used in two different ways. In its narrowest sense, ngoma is the Swahili term for “drum,” denoting a particular category of musical instruments. In its broadest sense it means any event in which music and dance play a part.

As anthropologist John Janzen has argued, in Central and Southern Africa ngoma is often associated with healing, as a ritual in which the patient undergoes a therapeutic initiation encompassing dance, song, rhythm, divination and support (Janzen 1992, Janzen 2000). Ngoma in this sense is a “sung,

danced, healing ritual around a particular song/call response set, usually focused on a particular person at a time, within a larger setting of a group of healers, their patients/novices, and sometimes their families and other community members” (Janzen 2000: 46). However, according to anthropologist Peter Pels, ngoma is not solely a healing discourse (1996: 163). Instead, it can be seen as a discourse of transformation. Ngoma happen<sup>2</sup> when a person or society changes position and are an embodied expression of change: “*ngoma*, in all its senses, means the embodied—danced, drummed, or otherwise performed—change in the rhythm of life” (Pels 1996: 163). There are ngoma for initiation rituals, circumcision, marriage, and mourning. Apart from embodied markers of change, ngoma are also a site of production. For anthropologist Rijk van Dijk and colleagues, the emphasis lies on the political power of ngoma in (re)ordering social relationships (Van Dijk et al. 2000: 7). They see ngoma as “a way of articulating and commenting on processes of transition or transformation” (Van Dijk et al. 2000: 7). Thus, ngoma not only reflects or represents change, it can be seen as a mode of worldmaking (De Boeck & Devisch 1994).

It should be noted that ngoma should not just be seen as reordering social relationships in a metaphorical sense, but also in an actual, and very concrete, way. An historical example along the Swahili coast is discussed by anthropologist Rebecca Gearhart, who focuses on the potentiality of ngoma to alter people’s social status. Through participation in ngoma, people of lower social status could bring about social transformation. They were able to do this because the hierarchy in a ngoma association is based upon someone’s capacities and talents as a singer, dancer, drummer etc., instead of only upon their social status or wealth (Gearhart 2005: 26). Thus, people of lower social status could become influential leaders of important ngoma associations and obtain a higher position in Swahili society. Therefore, ngoma are the sites par excellence to observe “social interaction and cultural creativity” (Gearhardt 1998: xi) along the Swahili coast.

Ngoma on the Swahili coast have largely been studied from an anthropological perspective. In addition to Gearhart’s study of ngoma on the Kenyan coast (1998, 2005), and Campbell & Eastman’s description of ngoma in Lamu, Kenya (1984), both mentioned above, a study by anthropologist Margaret Strobel provides insight into female ngoma and gender relations in Mombasa, Kenya (1979). Historian Terence Ranger has documented the history and development of Beni ngoma as a means of illuminating aspects of colonialism and postcolonialism in East Africa, including the coast of Kenya and Tanzania (1975). Furthermore, Kjersti Larsen has presented a detailed study of spirit possession ngoma to provide an insight into identity and otherness in Zanzibar (1995, 2008). Kelly Askew has included ngoma in her work on music and politics on the coast of mainland Tanzania (2002). Focusing on dance aspects,

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<sup>2</sup> The singular and plural of the word ngoma have the same form.

anthropologist Marjorie Franken has analyzed ngoma from the Kenyan coast to illuminate nuances of Swahili social status on the Kenyan coast (1992). Literature scholar Asha Rashid Mohid has examined ngoma, and the role it plays in the education of women, on Pemba, an island in the Zanzibar archipelago (2015). A few authors have written about unyago ngoma specifically, such as theater scholar Laura Edmonson (2001), anthropologist Laura Fair (1996), Kjersti Larsen (2000, 2005), and Katrina Thompson (2011a, 2013, 2015). Msanja ngoma is less well-documented, with texts by Islamic teacher Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari (1981) and anthropologist Kelly Askew (1999). This study therefore complements the existing literature on unyago and msanja ngoma specifically, and ngoma on the Swahili coast more generally.

## Ngoma as Other space

In Zanzibar, people may use the word ngoma also to refer to the musical part of a (ritual) event, to set it apart from the larger event as a whole (which confusingly would also be referred to as ngoma).<sup>3</sup> As one of my interlocutors phrased it: “Ngoma IS the music.” It is this understanding of ngoma that I focus on in this thesis: the songs of unyago and msanja.

In this thesis, music is seen as an ‘Other space,’ a space in which different behavior is possible, in which set social rules can be contested and inverted. Music is an experience which is “out of the ordinary” (Stokes 1994: 13): it is associated with exploring boundaries, pleasure, and social freedom. In many societies it forms an acceptable and relatively safe way of expressing resistance against control. Music not only embodies the social values of a society, it also constitutes a means of expressing defiance. As cultural geographers John Connell and Chris Gibson put it:

Music is one way through which ordinary acts of consumption and movement throughout daily life could constitute .... subtle opposition that emerge from within the cultural spaces governed and controlled by others, occurring as they often do in the private spaces of home, in the corners of the night-time economy, beyond the panoptic gaze of the state. (2003: 16)

Music—whether performed live, played on the radio, or even talked about—is both tied to a society’s boundaries and is able to push them back, or transgress them, at the same time. In this thesis, I illustrate this dual nature of music through an analysis of unyago and msanja songs, and frame those in terms of the concept of *heterotopia* by Michel Foucault.

Foucault describes two different spaces which are related to all the other spaces which we occupy, but “in such a way as to suspect, neutralize or invert

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the Swahili term *muziki*, music, is not used for ngoma music but rather for most other musics in Zanzibar and the larger Swahili coast, many with non-African influences (eg. taarab or hiphop).

the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault 1986: 24): the utopia, a site with no real place, which represents society itself in a perfected form, and the heterotopia. Heterotopia is a place that really exists, “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1986: 24). Foucault distinguishes two types of heterotopias: the crisis heterotopia, a privileged or sacred place reserved for individuals who are—in relation to society—in a crisis, such as adolescents, menstruating women and the elderly; and the heterotopia of deviation. This refers to those places where individuals whose behavior is deviant from the norm in their society are placed, such as prisoners and psychiatric patients. According to Foucault, every society has its heterotopias, though an existing heterotopia can be made to function in a different way throughout history. A heterotopia can juxtapose several different spaces which are otherwise incompatible, such as the theater. Heterotopias are often linked to time, such as museums (linked to the accumulation of time) or fairgrounds (linked to the temporal mode of time). Heterotopias are not freely accessible like public places; there are certain conditions on which one can enter.

Important to note is that heterotopias exist in *relation* with all the other spaces and that they *do* something: “Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory .... Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault 1986: 27).

While music as such is not a physical, actual site, it is inextricably tied to, and informs our sense of, space. It is a marker of social space, and it can transform space: it creates a space that is Other, a space in which different rules apply. I understand music therefore to function *as* a heterotopia, but in the form of a utopia, much as Foucault describes the mirror. The mirror is a placeless place, an “unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface” (Foucault 1986: 24), but it is also a heterotopia because it does exist in reality, rendering the place that one is in at once real *and* unreal. Like a mirror, music exists in space (and in time): as sounding material—even though it is ephemeral—it has the capability to transform the normal order of that space.

Music functions as a heterotopia, precisely because it is a modality of its own, but existing *in* the modality of everyday life. Music occurs simultaneously in and out of time and in and out of social structure, and as such brings to mind anthropologist Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas* in the context of ritual (Turner 1969: 96). Turner bases his understanding of ritual on Van Gennep (1909), who has shown that all rites of passage are characterized by three stages: separation, in which the initiate is detached from an earlier point in the social structure/state; liminality, in which the initiate is in an ambiguous state, passing through a realm that differs from the past or coming state; and

aggregation, in which the initiate is in a stable state again and is expected to behave in certain ways. Turner understands the initiate's position of liminality as neither here nor there, betwixt and between, ambiguous, indeterminate, and refers to the social modality of this unstructuredness as "communitas."

While *communitas* is thus similar to heterotopia in the sense that both concepts represent a space of alternative ordering, I consider one of the main differences to be that *communitas* was originally conceptualized as a transitional phase, an in-between state that an initiate of a ritual goes through to appear as a new person afterwards. However, I understand heterotopia not necessarily as a transitional space, but rather as an Other space that can be accessed—in the framework of this thesis, through the performance of, and discourse on, music—and withdrawn from, a space which offers the possibility of doing things in a different way.

An important element in this potential for social re-ordering is ambiguity. In this thesis I understand ambiguity as potentiality, as a source of possible de-ordering and re-ordering, based on anthropologist Mary Douglas' work on im/purity and anomaly (Douglas 2001). Anomaly, and ambiguity, both of which Douglas treats as concepts not "passing the filter," do not fit any given classification. Anything that does not fit in the standard pattern of assumptions or is open for multiple interpretations is unsettling, since it is human nature to long for clear lines, classifications, structure, and clarity. Ambiguity therefore creates a tension within the normal ordering of things, a source of potential re-ordering that must be dealt with. In this thesis I connect ambiguity to the Zanzibari ideology of concealment to show how *unyago* and *msanja* songs, in their employment of ambiguity, open up the possibility for re-ordering and a redistribution of power.

In this thesis, *ngoma* is thus seen as a musical space separate from but existing in, Zanzibari society, with the potentiality to contest, transgress, and transform. I see *unyago* and *msanja ngoma* as an Other space, enabling women to feel strongly connected to Zanzibari norms and identity, while at the same time enabling them to challenge and subvert Zanzibari gendered morality and power relations.

## Fieldwork

The material for this thesis was collected on four separate field trips: in June 2019, December 2019, January 2020 and July 2021.

I have chosen to take multiple trips over the course of two years, rather than one longer trip, for several reasons. First, because I have a young child (he was one and a half at the start of my PhD research), and leaving him behind for more than a couple of weeks was just not an option, and neither could I take him with me for more than a couple of weeks since my partner had to

take leave to go with us.<sup>4</sup> There is a substantial body of publications on the possibilities and limitations of going on fieldwork with one's family. A special forum in the journal *Ethnomusicology Forum* (vol. 29, 2020) dedicated to parenting and music studies for example, illustrates some of the challenges a music-researcher parent in the field may face and the adaptations that may need to be made. These challenges include, but are not limited to, concerns about health and general well-being, potential safety issues and the management thereof, adaptations in one's travel schedule, and the occasional struggle to find the necessary baby supplies (Stobart 2020; Pope 2020). On top of these practical challenges, emotional stress may arise when things do not go as smoothly as hoped. During my fieldwork in July 2021, despite taking every health precaution we could think of, our son fell ill and had to be hospitalized in Zanzibar City for a few days. Even after his recovery, my focus in the field was affected: while I was able to record songs and collect data after his discharge from hospital, my mind was with him most of the time. In addition, women's bodies do not always meet fieldwork requirements easily (Ortbals & Rincker 2009), let alone mothers' bodies, especially when pregnant or breastfeeding, as I was in the beginning. During the first field trip with my son in June 2019 we therefore had to find time for nursing several times a day.

While going into the field with one's family may come with difficulties, as anthropologist Trisia Farrelly and colleagues demonstrate in their article on absence/presence of children in the field, going *without* one's children comes with challenges of its own (Farrelly et al. 2014), especially with regards to the management of strong emotions regarding the child's absence. For women, additional difficulties may arise such as, for breastfeeding mothers, having to express milk in order to avoid breast inflammation.

In order to balance the challenges presented by doing fieldwork with, and fieldwork without family, my son and partner came with me on two fieldwork trips, while I took the other two trips by myself. Since children can be great conversational icebreakers, having my son with me made it very easy to start talking to people and getting to know them. Furthermore, meeting women with my son in tow allowed people to meet me as a mother first, rather than only as a researcher, which might have made it easier to be open to me about matters such as marriage and sex (after all, I have a child, so I must have *some* experience). On the other hand, being alone in the field allowed me to work more focused and be more flexible with regards to meeting times. Thus, the combination of fieldwork trips with and without family was a productive approach.

Furthermore, especially in disciplines outside anthropology, traditional long-term fieldwork, where PhD students go into the field for at least a year, is no longer the golden standard; while ethnography can (and should) draw

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<sup>4</sup> Being alone in the field and getting work done with a toddler in tow would be nearly impossible.

upon long-term engagement with people's lives (I have known many of the women I work with for over 10 years), data gathering can take place during intensive "excursions into their lives" (Pink & Morgan 2013: 352). Such short research trips are characterized by their data intensive nature and require thorough preparation in terms of setting up meetings, finding locations to make recordings, and connecting with participants beforehand.

In practice, this meant I would meet with my main research contacts in Zanzibar City or Jambiani in the afternoon of the day of my arrival. In Zanzibar City my main research contact was Mariam Hamdani, a writer, musician and journalist, whom I have known for 15 years. Upon my arrival we would catch up on the latest news, and she would inform me of the whereabouts of the women that were involved with unyago. Through her I met most of the women I ended up working with in town. In Jambiani, my main research contact was Hadija Ramadhani, a singer who introduced me to women involved with msanja. Upon my arrival in the village, I would always first meet with her. I would also call all my other collaborators on my arrival day in the field to set up meetings for talking or recording, or to simply confirm existing meetings pre-arranged through WhatsApp while I was still in Europe. Typically, from the second day I would have one meeting in the morning and one in the afternoon. This allowed me to make the most of my stay while giving me a break in between meetings to upload videos or sound files into my laptop and type a few notes.

And finally, and perhaps most importantly, going in and out of the field gave me the opportunity to fine-tune my questions and focus before each subsequent trip. As anthropologist Sverker Finnström (2008) points out, when we are in the field as researchers, we continuously move between immersion in our interlocutors' lives, and distance to be able to reflect on our findings. However, going out of the field allows us to "step back more profoundly both in time and space" (Finnström 2008: 19). Writing fieldnotes in and out of the field was indispensable in this process since it helped me to maintain a reflexive practice in which I could continuously review my ideas, generate new ideas, and formulate new questions. Whenever I went back to my fieldnotes upon my return to Sweden, the fact that I was physically out of the field literally created more distance between myself and the events in my fieldnotes, enabling me to understand my own motives better, and what my next plan of action should be. As such, writing fieldnotes became even more an interactional process, a dialogue between myself-as-researcher-in-the-field and myself-as-researcher-out-of-the-field (Barz 1997). This was especially useful to be able to reflect on intense or disappointing fieldwork experiences without being absorbed by them so much that my vision became obscured (see also De Laine 2000: 146-176).

Because this thesis focuses on the musical sound of unyago and msanja, participant observation was less in the foreground than what might be ex-



pected with a more anthropological approach and long-term fieldwork. However, because of my long-term involvement with the research field and my years-long emotional work with some of the women that helped me, and the fact that many of them now have WhatsApp to enable continuous contact even outside the field, my analysis is built upon a rich understanding of the context of my data. Moreover, sonic immersion in different musics in Zanzibar since the 2010s combined with practical experience as a musician receiving training in these different musics qualifies me as what musicologist Michael Tenzer has called a “culturally informed listener” (Tenzer 2011: 159).

Recording, interviewing and informal conversations are the methodological cornerstones of my fieldwork, and they are strongly intertwined. I made audio recordings of unyago songs and drum patterns in Zanzibar City, and discussed the songs in those recordings with the performers. I followed the same approach with making audio recordings of msanja songs in Jambiani. While discussing the recorded songs with the performers, I paid attention to lyrics, rhythmic patterns, and anything else that came up in relation to a particular song. Also, playing back the recordings to listen to them together with the performers proved a useful method to gain more understanding of the meaning and context of songs; recordings in this thesis are thus not only resources for musical analysis, but also methodological tools, where they “are played back to participants to instigate discussion, for example in relation to social memory, or in questions relating to what might be considered ‘beautiful’ or ‘correct’ from an emic perspective” (Topp Fargion 2009: 82). Most of the recordings I made are thus “collection recordings” (Topp Fargion 2009: 82), which means they were made for the purpose of the research, serving as musical products. This type of recording is especially useful for a musicological approach to African music, i.e., focusing on music/sound, since the focus is on clear sound and proper documentation. Additionally, I use existing recordings of unyago songs, most notably from a CD recording that was given to me by one of my interlocutors as a point of reference for what unyago “should sound like.”<sup>5</sup> Several of the songs on this CD are also among the recordings I made in Zanzibar City, but I choose to base my analysis on the CD tracks wherever possible because of the cleaner recording sound. The translation of the lyrics and the meaning of these songs was found through collabo-

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<sup>5</sup> Bi Kidude. 2009. *Unyago*. Sauti za Zanzibar Studio. CD recorded by Adam Skeaping in the Sauti za Zanzibar Studio, Zanzibar City, as a collaboration between well-known Zanzibari performer Bi Kidude and music producer Roger Armstrong in an attempt to document the music of her unyago songs.

ration with either the performers (some of whom also participated in the recordings I made in Zanzibar City), or with help from my long-term friend and research associate Mohamed Issa Matona.<sup>6</sup>

In all, I recorded over 50 different unyago and msanja songs, several of them multiple times, the total number of recordings nearing 70. Additionally, women provided me with several song texts (only lyrics, no music recording). For a complete overview of the songs and their general topics, I refer to Appendix 1 on page 173.

Furthermore, I have made several video recordings, both of unyago songs as well as of a msanja ngoma performance (see Chapter 6). Video recordings are useful in capturing and analyzing movement and interaction, and they give additional visual clues to any obscurities that may arise in audio recordings. Being able to see the drummers' hands, for example, has helped in transcribing the underlying drum patterns of some unyago songs.

For each song, or song text, that I draw upon in my analysis, I provide the provenance. Where relevant and possible, references are provided to audio tracks of the songs. The audio tracks can be found here:

<https://uppsala.box.com/s/5saj5gi5rnbff0mjq0xctn0r987k2rs32>

A track list with additional information about each recording can be found in Appendix 2 on page 180.

### **Fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Between March 2020 and June 2021 travel to and from Zanzibar was not really possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I stayed in touch with many of my research contacts through WhatsApp conversations and phone calls. While I was not able to travel and make recordings during the pandemic, I could still work on the translation and interpretation of unyago and msanja lyrics during this time.

After receiving two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, I travelled to Zanzibar again in July 2021. Since vaccine roll-out took place later in Zanzibar than in Sweden, most of my interlocutors had not yet been vaccinated. I therefore took extra care in meeting with them outdoors, or in very well ventilated spaces, and maintaining distance. There was no testing for COVID-19 done in Zanzibar up until then, but many Zanzibari I met had respiratory-tract infections, some of them serious. Indeed, some of my recordings include continuous coughing.

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<sup>6</sup> While Matona is a male Zanzibari musician mostly active in taarab music, I have known him for over 15 years and have built up a long-term friendship with him, allowing for the discussion of a multitude of topics, including sensitive or personal ones. He was my taarab teacher and research assistant during my fieldwork for my MA thesis in 2009-2010, and has helped me with some of the translations and interpretations of unyago and msanja songs in the course of my PhD research.

## Analysis

My main methods of analysis are discourse analysis and analysis of musical recordings. In this thesis both methods are interconnected, because I am studying songs: a combination of music and text. On top of analyzing songs, I pay attention to their larger discursive context: how women communicate through songs, and how they talk about them and with what kind of language. My approach could thus be summarized as the study of ngoma *as text in context*. A combination of discourse analysis and music analysis can thus illuminate how unyago and msanja songs and the discourse that surrounds them are constructed by a particular world, but also how they are used to influence/construct that world. I will explain this approach further in the sections on discourse analysis and music analysis below.

### A word on discourse analysis

The term discourse itself has multiple meanings, from very general to more narrow definitions, depending on context and discipline (Mills 1997), but in this thesis I am particularly interested in the understanding of discourse in terms of critical discourse analysis based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model (Philips & Jørgensen 2002: 60-95): *Discourse as text* (so I can employ a textual analysis of unyago and msanja lyrics); *discourse as discursive practice* (so I can examine on how unyago and msanja songs are being produced and consumed and how they are part of what people generally do); and *discourse as social practice* (which enables an examination of the wider social practice of which msanja and unyago songs are a part). Thus, I will be able to examine how the language used in unyago and msanja songs is constructed by a particular world, but also how it is used to influence/construct that world. Consider for example the following unyago song text presented by Kjersti Larsen, sung during an unyago initiation:<sup>7</sup>

<i>Kila nikimwita</i>	Every time I call him
<i>Anayamaza kimya</i>	He remains silent
<i>Chukua mapumbu kayaweke nyuma</i>	Take your balls and put them behind
<i>Wacha kukoroma baba</i>	Stop snoring grandpa
<i>Utombe kuma</i>	Fuck the cunt
<i>Kichinichini nake, kichinichini nake</i>	This little thing, this little thing
<i>Nilidhani mboo</i>	I thought it was a dick
<i>Kumbe mswaki!</i>	Lo and behold, it's a toothbrush!

On a textual level, this song text uses very direct lyrics and some profanities, but the singer remains respectful in her use of (profane) verbs, for instance: *utombe*, from the verb *kutomba* (to fuck), is a polite imperative and could be

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<sup>7</sup> Lyrics from Larsen 2015: 221. Translation my own.

translated as “kindly fuck” or “please fuck.” So while using words that leave nothing to the imagination, the woman still takes the ‘normal’ rules of social conduct into account. It is interesting to note that in performances where men are also present, e.g., during actual wedding celebrations, the image that is projected in songs is that of the obedient woman who shall never refuse her husband when he wants to have sex. It is the man who takes the initiative, and the woman who follows. However, this song narrates or constructs a different kind of woman: a woman who is not passive but knows what she wants, who has sexual desire and blames her husband for not satisfying her—even mocking his equipment. The song depicts a man who is not interested (not able? not willing?) or at least not as sexually active as the woman would like. This particular song can therefore be understood as a celebration of female sexual agency, which at first may seem contradictory to the image that is reproduced in the official discourse. In this thesis this is explained through a perspective of ngoma as an Other space, both part of and separated from daily social life in Zanzibar. This means that there are simultaneously songs that reproduce the wider, official, discourse on gendered power relations, as well as songs that contest the official discourse. This enables Zanzibari women to speak (sing) in different voices, and to express contradictory messages. In other words, unyago and msanja enable Zanzibari women to *include* what is *excluded* in daily discourse, or to embody what is normally seen as the male norm (see also Mills 1997: 11).

### **A note on transcription and music analysis**

Transcription and music analysis have been politically charged topics among musicologists working on music from the African continent since the early 2000s. The main feature of ethnomusicology since the 1960s has always been its sensitivity to context, expressed for example in the work of Alan Merriam (1964) and Mantle Hood (1971). According to these authors and their contemporaries, ethnomusicology should be understood as the study of music in culture, the meaning of which can only be understood by adopting that particular culture’s musical concepts. While this approach was an important one in a newly post-colonial world, at present publications on African music<sup>8</sup> have been accused of being based on an anthropological approach and little or no musical content. Eliminating the sounding music in favor of context has led to the reputation of ethnomusicology being “musicology without ears” (Pace

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<sup>8</sup> To me, using the term ‘African music’ in 2020 signifies the problematic hegemonic remnants of colonialism in musicology, not only because obviously the music of Africa is not a monolith (like the continent itself was once—and sometimes still is—regarded) but also because as long as it is still needed to describe one’s focus of research in terms of geography (preferably with the prefix ethno-) we have still not reached a point where the binary Africa – the West can be put behind us. ‘African music’ is a stubborn colonial trope and its continued usage well into the 2000s does not contribute to the decolonization of musicology. I continue to use it here as an uncomfortable memento of imperialist legacy in musicology.

2016). More recently, (mostly) African-based musicologists have argued that by excluding African music from formal music analysis and solely focusing on context and meaning, ethnomusicology is, in fact, a “difference-producing machine” (Agawu 2003: 119). To put it in the words of musicologist and composer Akin Euba:

We do not need in Africa a field that is called ethnomusicology if it is really a branch of anthropology. We do not need in Africa a field in which music has been literally squeezed out. Take the music out of ethnomusicology and what you have is ethno-logy. (2000: 139)

Musicologists such as Akin Euba, Kofi Agawu, and Martin Scherzinger argue that a focus on insider/outsider distinction is not valid. An emic approach emphasizes ‘inside’ knowledge, only available to Africans themselves, and this emphasizes an us/them opposition: “The idea that, beyond certain superficial modes of expression, European and African knowledge exist in separate, radically different spheres originated in European thought, not in African thinking. It was (and continues to be) produced in European discourse and sold to Africans, a number of whom have bought it, just as they have internalized the colonizer’s image of themselves” (Agawu 2003: 180-181). Ethnomusicology’s study of African music in context has thus not been able to contribute to the decolonization of Africanist musicology; on the contrary, it has contributed to a perpetuation of problematic conceptions such as the reduction of African music to a functional or sometimes magical phenomenon, and the myth of African music as rhythm. African music has thus become the exotic other, a Western fantasy.

To combat the structural inequality that “affords Western music multiple institutional perspectives and African music only an ethnomusicological one” (Scherzinger 2001: 12), these authors advocate a more formal and indeed Western-based approach to African music, to create an additional cultural space for African music within modernity. According to Agawu, African music should be seen as text and as such requires a close listening; it is not just ‘functional’ but carries meaning in itself, away from its context, too. Scholars like Agawu and Scherzinger therefore advocate incorporating transcriptions of African musical works to counteract the enduring prejudice that African music is “merely repetitious and therefore not worth transcribing in full” (Agawu 2003: 51). As such, transcription has become a political tool in the decolonization of African musicology.

However, some scholars have doubted whether an insistence on analyzing African music through Western methods might not precisely affirm Africa’s liminal position in (Western) ethnomusicological discourse. Musicologist Thomas Solomon for example, points out the irony in the anti-anti-formalist approach of Agawu et al., concurring with Louise Meintjes’ review of Agawu’s *Representing African Music* (Meintjes 2006): “the formalist kind of

musical analysis Agawu advocates actually has its origins in the very colonial enterprise he critiques, replicating the discourse that uses the techniques of analysis of the high-art canon of Euro-American classical music as the standard against which the analysis of African music is to be measured” (Solomon 2012: 236). As such, imposing Western formal analysis can be seen as a neo-imperialist endeavor in which African music is to be incorporated into, and explained within, the European musicological canon. Scholars like Solomon emphasize the importance of further engagement with musicologists from the global South and putting “local traditions of research and writing in dialogue with international scholarship” (Solomon 2012: 237).

The importance of such a dialogue is also stressed by musicologist Jean Ngoya Kidula. In her article on ethnomusicology and the African academy (2006), she contends that while ethnomusicology is rooted in a Eurocentric understanding of non-European music, it *has* come to embrace viewpoints of indigenous cultures and now “includes local researchers, performers, and voices,” and that it has “moved beyond cultural ethnographies to more musicological analyses” (Kidula 2006: 110). She documents several developments in the African musicological academy, amongst which a music symposium at the Kenyatta University in Nairobi, and stresses that in African universities, African music should be the main focus, with European music at the periphery. While it has been difficult for many African music scholars to engage with the international academy, Kidula argues that African musicology “may provide pieces to a puzzle in our interconnected and multilayered musical encounters” (2006: 110).

Lastly, I take note of the danger of fetishizing transcription in a broader sense. As musicologist Marin Marian-Bălașa argues, ethnomusicology itself has gained status through transcription and has used it to legitimize its position. He critiques what he calls “analyticism” which he understands as the “exaggerated, self-referential, and redundant performance of analysis—analysis *per se*—that has become obvious in much of our ethnomusicological studies. More often than not, analyticism became *the* ethnomusicological objective, central to traditional ethnomusicology in its entirety and truly ultimate in systematic ethnomusicology, enjoying a rarely discussed hegemony” (Marian-Bălașa 2005: 19).

In this thesis I choose to incorporate transcriptions, and conduct music analysis where it is seen to have explanatory power regarding the sounds and structures of music. I take the sounding music and its makers’ ideas about it as the basis of my analysis. In my music analysis, I adopt what has been termed a “timbral sonicist” perspective. As philosopher of art David Davies defines it, “the timbral sonicist holds that musical works are types of sound sequences individuated by reference to ‘how they sound’ in a rich sense that includes not only properties as pitch, duration, rhythm, and accent, but also the timbral qualities that result from the use of particular instrumental means to produce the pitches, and so forth” (2009: 160). This does not mean I do not

acknowledge the importance of context, because meaning can be generated *during* an actual music performance.<sup>9</sup> However, unlike ‘pure’ contextualists for whom any differences in performances automatically create differences in the musical work, I argue that unyago and msanja songs can be seen as structural sound entities, and analyze them as such. In short, my principal focus is on “what can be heard in the music” (Davies 2009: 161). This does not mean a mere exploration of superficial characteristics: as musicologist Mattias Lundberg has shown in his analysis of songs by British group Gentle Giant, starting from “what is there in the audible artefact” (2014: 272-273), we can come to an identification of underlying structural features. As Lundberg writes, “in analysing the immanent level, it is productive to operate with a distinction between deep structure and surface design, allowing analytically a certain degree of autonomy to the surface level on which the motives are first observed” (2014: 275).

To this end, I incorporate short transcriptions of song fragments in Western staff notation in order to be able to support and guide my discourse analysis of the songs with musical analysis. My choice for transcribing in Western staff notation can partly be seen as a political and emancipatory act in the way Agawu and Scherzinger understand it. Furthermore, it is influenced by situational factors, since I am producing a text from within the tradition of musicology in the global North, and I am influenced by my training. Lastly, staff notation is often used by Zanzibari musicians in educational settings, for teaching maqams used in classical taarab music. Like many ethnomusicologists, my use of staff notation is descriptive (rather than prescriptive—which could be argued to be staff notation’s original goal). In other words, it aims to show what a culturally aware listener hears, not what a performer should play or sing.

Furthermore, for the drumming in unyago songs, I will use musicologist Gerhard Kubik’s method of transcribing the rhythmic cycles and put an encircled number at the beginning of the barline, for example ⑫, which represents the number of pulsations in one cycle (Kubik 2010: 44). I am using this method because it represents the cyclical nature of unyago ngoma better than Western staff notation with its rhythmic organization in sectioned-off measures. In accordance with Kubik’s method, I will note time-line patterns for unyago songs in a basic rhythmic notation when needed, where an x represents a stressed drum stroke and a period represents an un-stressed stroke, eg. x . x . x . . x . . x . . These time-line patterns can be seen a kind of rhythmic ostinato and serve as orientation for performers and dancers (Kubik 2010: 54-57). These short, asymmetrically structured cycles underlie most unyago drumming, and notating them helps us to understand the larger structure of a song. Chapter 2 will present an in-depth exploration of this notation in relation to a discussion of the three types of drums used in unyago songs and the main

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<sup>9</sup> See for example in Chapter 4, on the practice of *kutunza*, tipping, during taarab concerts.

musical features of this ngoma. Moreover, incorporating these rhythmic transcriptions makes rhythmic notation accessible for readers outside the musicological discipline too, including the women I work with.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, I use a computer software called PRAAT for several msanja song examples. PRAAT was originally developed for speech analysis at the department of Phonetic Sciences at the University of Amsterdam, but it has been adopted by musicologists as well, especially for the analysis of vocal music.<sup>11</sup> I employ PRAAT to produce pitch contour graphs, to visualize what happens ‘in between the notes.’ Since PRAAT was developed for speech analysis, it works best for the analysis of vocal music, so I use it for sound samples with voice only. Because it is a computer program, it reduces subjectivity and can be helpful in enabling us to distinguish the details of vocal lines. However, the program does require ‘clean’ recordings, i.e., recordings without much background noise—a condition that is not met by many of my recordings as they were mostly recorded outside and as such include environmental sounds such as wind, traffic, or people talking. Nevertheless, for my recordings that do meet PRAAT’s requirements, the program is able to show certain musical features that staff notation cannot, so I chose to include those graphs where possible. Moreover, graphs generated by PRAAT can show things that were not clearly audible to the human ear before, thus opening up new vistas as to hearing ‘what is there in the music.’

As musicologist Nicholas Cook has noted, notation hides as much as it shows (1998: 55). Therefore, a combination of transcription methods may show more of the unyago and msanja sound world than one method on its own and make this world accessible to a larger audience. Overall, my choice of notation method for any given song is contingent upon what I aim to show; for some, staff notation may be preferred, while other samples may require a closer look at the exact melodic progress through PRAAT. For all unyago drumming, I include rhythmic notation or description according to Kubik’s method.

## Positionality and ethical considerations: an insider *mzungu*?

I am aware that my own position and presence in the field have influenced those around me, the data I have gathered and the music recordings I have made. As a woman, I have mostly worked with other women, which gives me *some* common ground with my interviewees. However, I acknowledge that “gender is not enough” (Griffin 2016: 31). I remain a *mzungu*, a Swahili term

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<sup>10</sup> Some of the women, especially the ones that are active in taarab music, are familiar with Western staff notation, while others are not.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>



that denotes a white foreigner. I am a cultural outsider, a white Dutch researcher residing in Sweden doing research in Zanzibar, and I am cognizant of the power imbalance stemming from that. The fact that I come to Zanzibar repeatedly, talk to people and record their music, and then leave again is a prime example of my privilege. Other times, my privilege shows through access to resources, such as (simple) medical supplies. For example, one day in Jambiani, as I was waiting on the beach for the last members of a women's dance group to arrive, I noticed one of the women who had already arrived had a cut right above her left eye, just under the brow bone. She seemed in pain. Just as I was about to ask her what had happened, Hadija, my main research contact in Jambiani, told me the woman had hurt her eye on a nail sticking out of a wall, and asked me: "What should she do?" I told the woman that she should go to the local clinic to have a doctor take a look at it, but she said that this was not possible because the clinic was closed that day. The woman asked me if I could help her. She was wiping the cut with her *kanga*, a printed piece of fabric, wincing as she did so. I told her that I advised her to go to Paje (a village about 5 kilometer north of Jambiani, which also has a clinic) instead. But Hadija and the woman both kept insisting that I'd help her, and sensing that they wouldn't budge, I helped the woman to wash the cut with clean water and gave her some painkillers from my medical kit.

These power relations also become clear in situations when the white researcher (or journalist, or NGO policy maker) wants or needs something from a Zanzibari. Many *wazungu* (foreigners) may be tempted to fall into the trap of considering their European or American origin (plus the financial privilege that goes hand in hand with it) as a surefire way to get the information they think they need. While I do not share this conviction, the fact that I am white does immediately evoke this possibility, at least in my interaction with Zanzibari who do not yet know me. Zanzibari people I have come to know over the years are becoming more and more reluctant to talk to yet another foreigner about their culture with nothing in exchange. As Mariam Hamdani, my research associate in Zanzibar City, summarized it: "These Europeans come to Zanzibar, take our knowledge, and we are left with nothing!"

This brings me to the issue of payment. By no means do I assume that financial compensation is the (only) way to offer something in return to the people I work with. However, because many of the women I work with are musicians/performers, and spending time with me prevented them from performing elsewhere, I have chosen to compensate their time financially when appropriate. I have always tried to determine the amount based on the expected income of a performing musician at a concert in for example Stone Town, also taking into account customary amounts paid to informants by other researchers.

To acknowledge the relational asymmetry between my consultants and me, and to try to avoid misrepresentation, I turn to the concept of "asymmetrical

reciprocity” posited by Iris Marion Young. Asymmetrical reciprocity entails acknowledging the other as being just as morally valuable as oneself whilst being aware that it is never possible to fully adopt the particularity of the other’s position. A relationship between different individuals is never symmetrical, because of each person’s own experiences, beliefs, and history (let alone if there are structural differences in class, race, or religion), but acknowledging the asymmetry opens up a “creative exchange” through reciprocal recognition. The importance of acknowledging asymmetry and irreversibility is especially important for privileged people (like me): “When privileged people put themselves in the position of those who are less privileged, the assumptions derived from their privilege often allow them unknowingly to misrepresent the other’s situation” (Young 1997: 349). According to Young, understanding others does not revolve around finding things in common, but rather, on getting out of ourselves and learning something *new*.

Overall I have tried to follow what has been termed a “feminist ethics of care” (De Laine 2000, Edwards & Mauthner 2002, Rajan 2018, Weis 2019, Hemmings 2012), based on a relational ethics, by trying to be personally involved and committed as a researcher through focusing on emotional bonds rather than intellectual ones. Of course I have also explicitly asked for consent when using material according to the traditional ethical model that ethics committees use,<sup>12</sup> but overall I have attempted to be in the field *with* others rather than only *observing* them.

Sometimes ethical dilemmas still arose. For example, while I was back in Sweden, Mariam had been speaking to Bi Siri, an elderly woman living in Ng’ambo, about her unyago memories and had recorded several unyago songs that Bi Siri sang for her. Upon my return to Zanzibar, Mariam was supposed to take me to Bi Siri’s house so I could meet with her too, and record the songs that she remembered from her initiation. However, when I arrived back in Zanzibar, Mariam informed me that Bi Siri would not speak to me since her family refused; they were afraid they would die if their mother talked, since one of the main ways to ensure secrecy during an unyago initiation is to tell initiates that their family will die if they ever speak about what happened during their initiation. Mariam remarked dryly: “If you didn’t die the first time [when she recorded Bi Siri] then why would you die now? It’s stupid!”. Initially my reaction was to agree with her sentiment and to use the recordings that Mariam had already made, but I chose not to do so. I did listen to them together with Mariam, as a sort of compromise, but I decided to respect Bi Siri’s (or Bi Siri’s family’s) wishes that her songs and memories not become part of my explicit knowledge and analysis.

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<sup>12</sup> I received the approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority, Etikprövningsmyndigheten, to conduct this research on April 15, 2019, and have always worked in accordance with their guidelines.

Finally, I use pseudonyms for all the women I have worked with, to ensure their anonymity, except for my main research contacts Mariam Hamdani and Hadija Ramadhani, and my friend and research associate Mohamed Issa Matona, who have explicitly told me to use their real names. The stories I tell in this thesis are theirs as well.

## Thesis outline

In each chapter, music analysis, ethnography and theory are interwoven, but the balance and interplay may be different for each chapter. I have chosen to take the sounding music as the basis for my thesis; this means that the songs guide how much analysis and theory is needed.

Chapter 2, “Come in and Listen to the Drums,” is an invitation to enter the space of female wedding ngoma. It provides an introduction to my two field sites: Zanzibar City and Jambiani. The chapter then provides a historical background of the two ngoma that are central in this thesis: unyago and msanja. I outline the main musical features of these two ngoma, including instrumentation, melodic material, rhythmic patterns and structure, and exemplify and justify the way of transcribing in greater detail.

In Chapter 3, “A Good Zanzibari Wife,” I present an analysis of unyago and msanja songs that form an expression of Zanzibari gendered morality. In both msanja and unyago songs, norms and values can be found that are essential for a bride to know. The ways in which women singing these songs teach a bride-to-be how to be a ‘good Zanzibari wife’ include either asserting the normative state of affairs or evoking an unwanted image and criticizing that image. I present songs that articulate what a ‘good Zanzibari wife’ should be and do: she should be modest, keep to herself, take care of the domestic environment, take care of guests, make sure her husband is comfortable, and satisfy her husband’s sexual desires.

But real life seldom looks like the prescribed ideal. In Chapter 4, “Walking the Line,” I transition from normative ideology to ambiguousness, and show how the use of ambiguity in ngoma song texts creates potentiality: it enables Zanzibari women to say things without actually saying them. I do this by taking the unyago song *Mpanda waya* as the focal point for analysis. A close reading and listening suggests that the ambiguity used in this song, and in other songs, opens up the possibility of re-ordering and redistributing power. Furthermore, the chapter explores how women carefully construct and guard a realm of secret knowledge—knowledge that is only available to those who have ‘walked the line’—which allows them to challenge notions of vulnerability and power. Strategically employing secrecy and ambiguity especially with regards to female sexuality gives Zanzibari women the possibility to position themselves as powerful sexual agents. Throughout, the chapter also confronts the possibilities and limitations of walking the line as a researcher.

Chapter 5, “Waist Beads, Palm Trees and Cigarettes,” transitions from ambiguousness to contestation and subversion of the normative discourse on gendered power relations. It focuses on songs about female sexual desire and agency. In contrast to the songs presented in Chapter 2, where women are portrayed as modest, passive, and obedient, the songs in this chapter paint a different picture. The chapter shows Zanzibari women as *subjects* rather than objects: as individuals who have desire and sexual prowess, and who express themselves as sexual agents. This chapter thus presents analyses of songs that form counter-narratives to the dominant narrative of male sexual agency and shows female Zanzibari sexuality in a different light.

As becomes clear from the songs presented in chapters 3, 4, and 5, the boundaries between the public and the private are rather blurry in the world of ngoma. Certain songs reflect ‘public’ gender expectations, while others push back and renegotiate gendered power relations. Using the perspective of music as an Other space, a heterotopia in the Foucauldian sense, where different rules may apply, I present a critique of the classic public-private dichotomy in favor of a more fluid, contingent approach of space in Chapter 6, “Inside and Outside.” I argue that spaces in Zanzibar are not private or public in themselves, but are constructed as such by the people present and the activities taking place, and that women continuously negotiate, adapt or challenge what is expected of them related to the space they occupy.

In the concluding section, titled “Final Lines,” I address the two distinct, yet interconnected, lines that emerged in this thesis: one that regards music and ngoma as Other space, a space in which women are able to behave in ways they would not be able to in daily life; and one that embodies a musicological approach to African music that shows how engagement with the music of un-yago and msanja can deepen our understanding of how women are able to play with gendered expectations and norms. This section also presents several suggestions for further musicological research on other music genres and ngoma from Zanzibar and the Swahili coast area at large, in the hopes of opening up new vistas as to the interconnectedness, migration, and adaptation of these musics in this area.

I use an *Italic* font for Swahili words when introduced for the first time; Swahili words that are used more than once will be in plain typeface after their first appearance. For the reader’s convenience I include a glossary of the most used emic words as an appendix.

In representations of my fieldnotes I use plain typeface for observations in the field, and italics for my reflections on them.

All photos were taken by the author, unless otherwise stated.

## 2. Come in and Listen to the Drums

*Aiche, aiche*  
*Nakibarabara kila ngoma*

Come in, come in  
And listen to the drums<sup>13</sup>

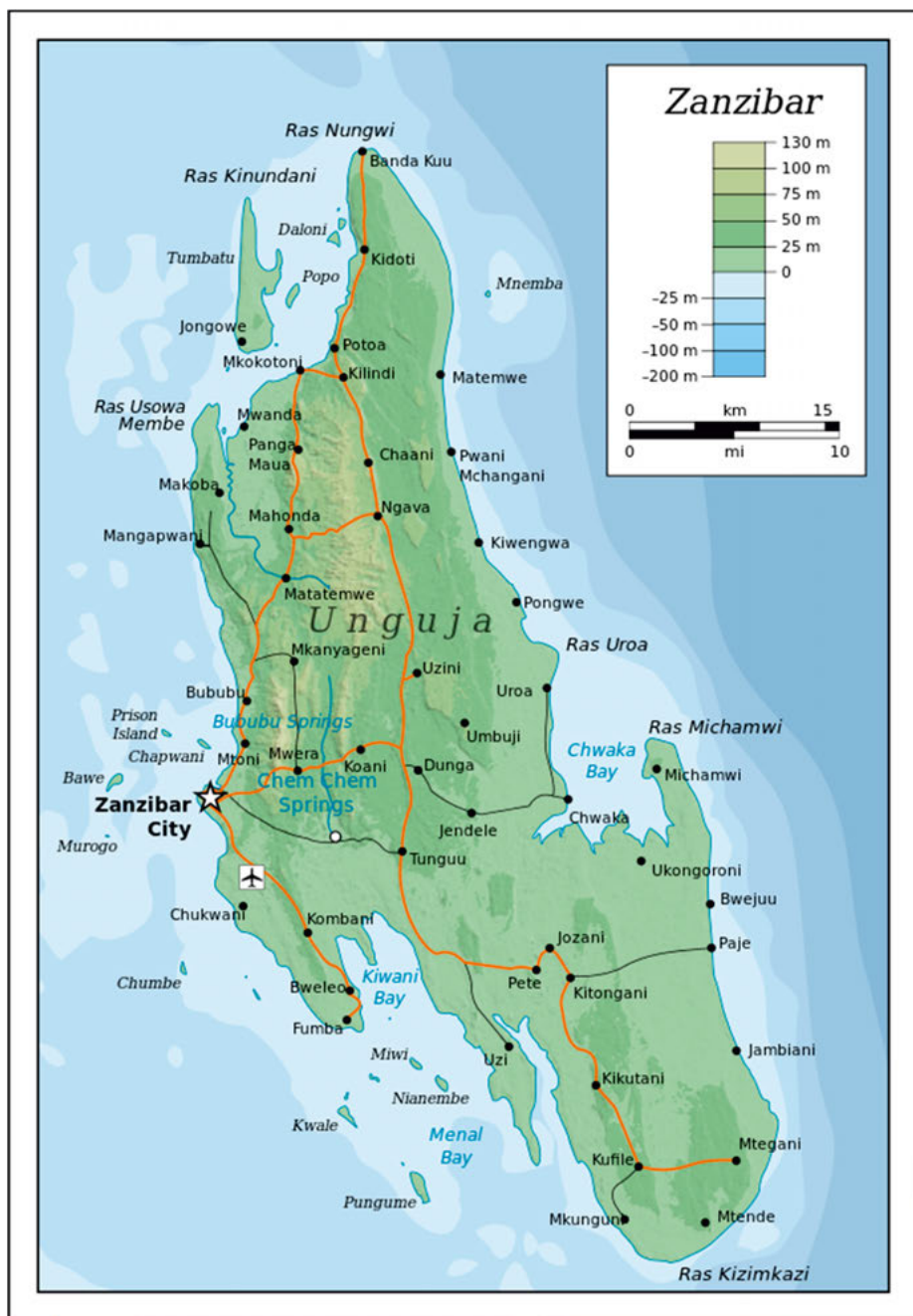
*Aiche, aiche* is an unyago opening song that may be played at the beginning of an unyago ngoma, a music and dance event that can be held before a young woman gets married in Zanzibar City. The song is an invitation to the guests who are attending the celebration, and beckons them to come closer and listen to the drumming, signifying the ngoma is starting. It is also an invitation for the bride-to-be to come and listen to the drums. This invitation is literal: the bride-to-be is invited into the space where the ngoma will take place, but it is also metaphorical, as she is invited into the unyago ngoma and her transformation from an unmarried to a married woman begins.

This chapter, “Come in and listen to the drums,” is an invitation to explore the main musical and (con)textual features of the two female ngoma that serve as the basis for my analysis: unyago, which primarily takes place in Zanzibar City, and msanja, which is performed in Jambiani on the East coast of the island. I have chosen to focus on these two ngoma because they each highlight issues of gendered power relations, and the contestation thereof, in a slightly different way. Furthermore, Zanzibari make a clear distinction between town (Zanzibar City at large) and *shamba*, the countryside. The term *shamba* in its strictest sense means farm lands, but it is also widely used as a term to designate everything outside town, including villages (sometimes in a slightly derogatory way). So, town and *shamba* in its broadest sense are two separate geographical spaces, and perhaps also separate cultural-musical spaces. While I do not aim at a comparative approach, the combined analysis of a ngoma from town with a ngoma from *shamba* will provide a more nuanced understanding of how women negotiate gendered power relations through the performance of, and discourse on, female wedding ngoma in Zanzibar.

Before I discuss the basic structure and instrumentation of unyago and msanja ngoma, I will briefly introduce the two field sites: Zanzibar City and Jambiani.

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<sup>13</sup> This unyago song, like many of my unyago recordings, has lyrics in Kiswahili and Kingindo, the language of the Ngindo people from mainland Tanzania, from whom this particular song originates.



## Introducing Zanzibar City

Zanzibar City is the capital and only city of Zanzibar. A bit more than half of the island's population lives here: 705,000 out of 1.3 million in 2020. The town is divided in two sections: Stone Town, or *mji mkongwe*, which used to be the seat of the Omani sultanate; and Ng'ambo, which literally translates as "the other side." To understand why this division is still relevant today, as it is connected to several other binaries operating at various levels of importance throughout history in Zanzibar society,<sup>14</sup> it is useful to give a brief historical overview of Zanzibar and Zanzibar City here.

As noted in Chapter 1, the East African coast and its islands have attracted traders and travelers from the inland of Africa and various countries in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean for at least two thousand years (Askew 2003: 611). The earliest record of encounters between East Africa and merchants from Southern Arabia is found in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, an ancient Greek document from the second century AD, which mentions that Arabic merchants interacted with East Africans and that intermarriage took place. From that time on, the East African coast was visited by Arabic traders, who settled down and intermingled with the African inhabitants. By the end of the first millennium a coastal society had developed that we know today as the Swahili (Middleton 1992: 36), with the acceptance of Islam and a modern form of the Swahili language.

From 1498 the Swahili coast was a point of interest for the Portuguese. However, according to anthropologist John Middleton, the influence the Portuguese had on Swahili society, unlike their colonial power further south in Mozambique, was limited, because they did not colonize the East African coast and did not look further inland, leaving the essential trading power in the hands of the Swahili (Middleton 1992: 45). The Portuguese finally left the Swahili coast after losing their power to the Omani in 1729, leaving behind several loanwords in Swahili and remains of their buildings (Middleton 1992: 46).

A foreign power that did have enormous impact on the Swahili coast was Oman. The Omani were the first to achieve a hegemony over the entire coast. In 1729 the Omani sultanate of Zanzibar was established, with its seat in Zanzibar City—or more precisely, in Stone Town. Starting then, the influence of the Arab world on the Swahili coast increased, with intermarriage occurring at a large scale, especially between Arab men and Swahili women (Middleton 1992: 22). The trade on the East African coast flourished, with the most important trade interests being cloves, ivory from the inland of Africa, and people to be enslaved. Zanzibar thus became the center of the East African slave trade. People were captured in inland Africa and traded on Zanzibar, and many

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<sup>14</sup> These binaries include Arab – African, town – shamba, enslaved – freeborn, men – women, outside – inside, tourists – Zanzibari.

enslaved people were forced to work on the plantations on the island itself. One of the most infamous slave traders and plantation owners was Zanzibari born Tippu Tip, or Hamed bin Mohammed (ca.1837–1905), who worked for the sultan of Oman and assisted in various mainland expeditions. From the late 1860s he was leading expeditions into eastern and central Africa of more than 4000 men, most notably around the Congo River Basin, focusing on ivory and people to be enslaved (Brode 2000). The expansion of trade in Zanzibar led to the enormous growth of Zanzibar City, as it attracted “merchants, traders, diplomats, artisans, sailors, porters” (Fair 2001: 13).

In 1890 Zanzibar became a protectorate of the British Empire, which in practice did not differ greatly from colonization since the reigning Sultan of Zanzibar retained his status as head of the protectorate on paper, but in practice the governmental power was in the hands of the British (Fair 2001: 14). The British Empire was known for its diligent administration and compartmentalization, in Zanzibar leading to the following classification of different ethnic groups: “Asians were to be traders, Arabs junior officials, and Africans, indigenous or mainland, were to be labourers” (Clayton 1981: 5). This segregation encouraged feelings of ‘us’ and ‘them’ between different ethnic groups, and even geographically this division was visible: Rich Indians and Arabs lived in Stone Town, while the African laborers lived in Ng’ambo (Fair 2001: 20). The two parts of the city were physically and symbolically separated by a creek. The creek separating the two sides of town was finally closed in the 1930s, and at present the two parts of town are separated by a road, first named Creek Road but later renamed Benjamin Mkapa Road.<sup>15</sup> Although there is a wide variety in socio-economic background in both areas now, the symbolic boundary remains, and difference in architecture remains visible: elaborate ornamental Arab style houses with up to five stories in Stone Town (see Figure 2), while the houses in Ng’ambo vary from huts with corrugated iron roofs to concrete socialist apartment buildings erected in the 1960s.

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<sup>15</sup> After the third president of Tanzania.





*Figure 2. Multistory Arab style building in Stone Town with elaborately carved balconies and doors, March 2010. Photo: Leo Hulshof*

In 1963 Zanzibar gained independence from Britain. Historian Anthony Clayton notes that during the elections earlier that year, the Arab-oriented Zanzibar National Party (ZNP) had won the elections, together with the Zanzibar and Pemba People's Party (ZPPP) from the neighboring island of Pemba. The African-oriented Afro-Shirazi Party won 54 percent of all votes, but lost the elections because of the distribution of electoral districts on the island (Clayton 1981: 47). For many Africans this meant that nothing would change in the social, political, and economic problems in Zanzibar. The independence from the British was in fact *uhuru wa waarabu tu*, freedom for Arabs only (Clayton

1981: 49). The new Arab-oriented government reinforced the existing feelings of distrust between ethnic groups even more by limiting the activities of the press and the opposition, and by replacing police officers from the African mainland by government oriented officers. The government fired the African police officers but refused to pay for their transportation back to the mainland. This left a group of bitter men in Zanzibar with a proper knowledge of the police force, for whom joining the revolutionaries was later appealing (Clayton 1981: 64).

On 12 January 1964 the revolution took place, led by the Ugandan John Okello. African revolutionaries, joined by former African police officers, overtook the power of the Arab-oriented government, using extreme violence against Arabs and Asians (Clayton 1981: 69-82). After the expulsion of the government, a Revolutionary Council was established. Abeid Karume, leader of the ASP, became president of the People's Republic of Zanzibar and Pemba. The goals of the Revolutionary Council were an African government with a single-party system, nationalization of land and banishing capitalist classes, and the abolishment of racism and discrimination (Clayton 1981: 119-127). Karume wanted to ban all Arab influences from Zanzibar, and to end the division of races.

On 26 April 1964 Tanganyika united with Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, which was later renamed the United Republic of Tanzania. Julius Nyerere became president of Tanzania, and Karume remained president of Zanzibar. Despite the Union, Zanzibar retained a great level of independence, which it still enjoys.

In 1977 the ASP and the TANU (Tanganyika African National Union) were united to form the CCM (Chama Cha Mapinduzi). The CCM wanted to promote an African identity, by collecting African cultural traditions and music. A cultural administration was established, which decided which cultural expressions were to be promoted or banned (Askew 2002: 178-195).

In 1992, Tanzania became a multi-party democracy. In 1994 elections were held on the mainland, and in Zanzibar in 1995. Political parties were encouraged to register to be able to participate in the elections, on the condition that they were not against the Union of Tanzania and Zanzibar. In Zanzibar the two main political parties were the ruling CCM and the liberal CUF (Civic United Front). However, because the CCM had "superior financial resources, superior communication networks, superior access to transport, and decades of experience in the arts of campaigning and governance" (Askew 2002: 245), this party had the strongest position and won the elections. In the elections of 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015 the CCM won again. In October 2020 the current president of Zanzibar was elected, Hassan Mwinyi, again representing the CCM.

## Introducing Jambiani

Jambiani is a village stretching about 7 kilometers along the southern East coast of Zanzibar, and is one of the main tourist locations on this side of the island, along with Paje and Bwejuu further north along the coastline. Jambiani is part of the administrative region Zanzibar Central/South, and is part of the land that Zanzibari refer to as *shamba*, rural area—which in practice means everything outside Zanzibar City. Life moves at a slower pace on the coast than it does in the city, and the distinctions between Arab and African, wealthy and poor, are less pronounced here. Traditionally Jambiani is a fishing village, and most of the island's seaweed-production farming is done here. Seaweed farming is done by women, who collect and sell the seaweed to be turned into soaps and beauty products.

Most houses are built from coral rock with *makuti* (thatched coconut leaves) roofs, which keeps them cool in the blazing midday sun in the hot season and dry during the downpours of the rainy season. The main road running parallel to the coastline is tarmac, but in the village itself the roads are unpaved—a mixture of dirt and coral (Figure 3). In the village there are a few small shops that sell basic foodstuffs, and there is a mosque, several schools and a small dispensary. For needs beyond what the village offers, people have to take a two-hour *daladala* (minibus) ride to Zanzibar City.



Figure 3. Village road in Jambiani with coral rock houses, June 2019.

The beautiful white beach dotted with palm trees and the turquoise ocean are what draws many tourists to Jambiani, and the majority of the direct coastline is taken up by mostly Western-run hotels and guesthouses—a stark contrast with the village itself in terms of geophysical and moral space. Some hotels follow Zanzibari architectural norms, with modest coral or wooden huts on the beach, but there are many larger hotels with air conditioning and swimming pools and bars that play loud music. Most hotels have their own private beach, guarded by an *askari* (security guard)<sup>16</sup> and sometimes dogs, and are physically separated from the village by high walls with a gate that gives access to the hotel premises from the main road. Tourists thus inhabit a geographically marked off space, but also a morally marked off space. They can sunbathe on sun loungers in swimwear, enjoy elaborate seafood meals, and drink alcohol at all times of day. Anthropologist George Gmelch notes that this morally demarcated space is associated with vacationing in general, when an inversion of the normal world can take place and tourists can enjoy temporary different behavior: “When on holiday their world is inverted from what it is at home—from work to play, normal morality to promiscuity, saving to conspicuous spending, structure to freedom” which in turns complicates interaction with local people (Gmelch 2003: 28). In this thesis, the space inhabited by tourists is also marked off for me, since it does not form part of my research space. However, as we will see in Chapter 5, Zanzibari women do find their life worlds affected by the presence of tourists.

## Unyago: context and basic features

### Historical narratives

Unyago originally comes from mainland Tanzania, Mozambique, and Malawi, and spread throughout East Africa in the nineteenth century as a result of the slave trade (Fair 1996: 146). As anthropologist Laura Fair notes, the ethnic groups from which unyago originates include the Yao, Makua, and Makonde (Fair 1996: 151), and in my own research I encountered unyago songs originating from the Ngindo people from mainland Tanzania. Unyago was a custom among enslaved women, who continued to practice this ritual in their new environment in Zanzibar, working as house servants and concubines for the upper class. Gradually it was adopted by free-born women as well (Fair 1996: 152). At present it can be found all over mainland East Africa, as well as along the entire Swahili coast, including the islands of Zanzibar, Pemba, Mafia, and Lamu. It involves the performance of dances and songs, and a set of instructions for girls on how to be a woman, carried out by manyakanga, ritual instructors. In the nineteenth century the manyakanga were enslaved

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<sup>16</sup> On the beach, askari are usually Maasai men from mainland Tanzania.

women, who were responsible for instructing the (free-born) initiates. However, gradually the role of manyakanga passed into the hands of free-born relatives of the initiates, and thus unyago became a structural part of Swahili culture in Zanzibar and elsewhere along the coast (Fair 1996: 152-154).

Historically the first part of the instructions, *unyago wa kuvunja ungo* (literally: “to break the basket”) took place when a girl reached puberty and began to menstruate. She was told about the changes in her body and how to take care of herself during menstruation, especially with regard to the use of menstrual cloth and hygiene. *Unyago wa kuvunja ungo* used to be practiced in Zanzibar until well into the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>17</sup> The ceremony lasted 7 days, in which a group of girls were instructed by their *somo*, instructress, on cleanliness and how to take care of themselves in terms of female hygiene (see also Mohamed 2016: 39). They were told how to clean their menstrual cloth until it was spotlessly white again. Another part of the instructions was how to make a paste for *singo*, a full-body massage. At present, this part of unyago has become obsolete in Zanzibar, since most Zanzibari women use disposable pads or tampons—though the latter are often scarce on the island. However, a *singo* is still a part of Zanzibari practice, but now takes place not when a girl starts menstruating, but rather right before she gets married.

The historical second part of the ritual is the part that is known as ‘unyago’ in Zanzibar today: the unyago proper, which is held before a young woman gets married. The ceremony lasts several days while the bride-to-be is prepared for marriage. It involves the performance of dances, using *kukata kiuno*, “to cut the waist,” a hip-gyrating movement. Theater scholar Laura Edmondson suggests that this movement teaches the girl the right movements and techniques for sexual intercourse with a male partner (Edmondson 2001: 160). The ceremony also involves songs, many of them with a sexually tinged content, and spoken instructions. Topics may include the physiology of men and women, gendered morality, sexuality, desire and orgasm, pregnancy, and childcare. In short, unyago treats an entire range of women’s issues. How many days an unyago ngoma goes on, depends on how much the families of the initiates can afford to pay—usually between three and seven days.

Since ritual is not static, it is not surprising that there is not one single version of unyago—naturally as changes take place over time, but also at a certain given point in time. Anthropologist Kjersti Larsen for example, notes that at the beginning of her fieldwork in Zanzibar in the mid-eighties, the ritual was called *unyago wa siri*, secret unyago. Later during that decade she already distinguishes different versions: *unyago wa kutapisha* (in which the bride, among other things, must drink and then vomit up a particular soup); *unyago wa kusinga* (which she sees as being identical to *singo*, in which the bride is massaged); *unyago wa harusi* (wedding unyago) and *unyago wa ngoma*

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<sup>17</sup> Based on personal narratives of initiated Zanzibari women who are now in their 60s and 70s, December 2019.

(events in which unyago is publicly performed) (Larsen 2015: 212). One of my main research contacts also expressed that there are different versions of unyago, explaining that this is due to associations with different ethnic groups from whom the particular version of unyago originated, such as the Yao, Makonde or Ngindo people. These different versions have been transported to Zanzibar and have each continued to be performed and developed in their new environment. The unyago recordings made in the course of this research are therefore a part of a larger body of unyago songs existing in Zanzibar.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ritual performance of unyago at weddings in Zanzibar is becoming increasingly rare. Especially since the death of several older ritual teachers and performers, most notably Bi Kidude who passed away in 2013, the number of unyago initiations has rapidly declined. However, unyago ngoma—the music and dance part of the ritual—is still known and performed, offering an insight into female musical performance and gendered power relations.

## Contextual positioning

When Zanzibari women get married, they may still undergo an unyago initiation. This is private, and female-only. However, some of the songs may be performed openly, and might thus technically fall under the category of *msondo*. Msondo thus corresponds to Larsen's category of *unyago wa ngoma* mentioned above, publicly performed unyago. Msondo is a ngoma that can be attended by anyone, but, as one of my interlocutors explained, forms "a more toned down version." In practice this means that the dance movements known as kukata kiuno are less exuberant and the lyrics meet the expectations of official gender relations, or, at least do not challenge them too overtly: it is the man who takes the lead, the woman follows him. Msondo, taking its name from the largest drum used in unyago, is sometimes also performed at festivals and other public settings, such as the well-known Sauti za Busara festival, held every year in February in Stone Town. In February 2019 for example, the all-female Tausi Women's Taarab group performed several msondo songs at Sauti za Busara, which according to the leader of the group, Mariam Hamdani, evoked much delight among the members of the audience, many of whom came up to the stage and danced.

As mentioned, the number of unyago initiations has declined over the last decade, and they have done so in favor of the singo. As anthropologist Katrina Thompson shows in her analysis, a singo is a ceremonial full-body massage and a site of "transformation and socialization into married life" (2015: 169). Historically, a singo was a part of an unyago initiation but took place when a girl started menstruating: *unyago wa kuvunja ungo*. As mentioned above, since this part of unyago has become obsolete, it no longer takes place when a girl starts to menstruate, but rather before a young woman gets married. It has thus become a ritual on its own. During a singo, which takes place inside



and in private, married women massage the bride and socialize her into the practices of being a married woman while also teaching her how to speak as a married woman (Thompson 2015: 171). The bride is also taught how to make the paste for a *singo*: by wetting a large, flat stone with water, and then rubbing a piece of *liwa*, sandalwood, over it (Figure 4). Then, other ingredients such as cloves and coconut oil can be added.



Figure 4. Rubbing *liwa* on the wet stone, Ng'ambo, December 2019.

The focus of a *singo* is largely on sex and the use of the body during sex. Although Thompson mentions that there is no musical accompaniment during a *singo*, only explicit verbal instructions, she does note that there are no rigid definitions of different pre-marital sex instruction rituals and that “a particular instruction ceremony may involve a variety of activities” (Thomson 2015: 179). Some of the female musicians I work with sometimes perform during a *singo*, suggesting that there may be songs during a *singo* as well.

Another, very popular, musical genre of choice for wedding celebrations is modern *taarab*, or *rusha roho*. Previous fieldwork in 2010 showed that, unlike *unyago* and *singo*, *rusha roho* is not performed before the wedding starts, but rather during the *karamu* (wedding lunch), and the *sherehe ya harusi* (wedding celebration) following the lunch. Before a Zanzibari wedding there is often a *kitchen party*, which takes place at the house of the bride, and all the guests bring gifts that she can use in her kitchen. She also receives advice on married life, on how to behave during the wedding night, and on how to be a good wife. In some ways, the kitchen party thus resembles the ritual context of *unyago*, as a preparation for married life. There might be music played during a kitchen party, but this is usually not live.

## Instrumentation and basic structure

Unyago ngoma uses three different drums: The smallest one is a *vumi*; the player is seated, and starts the song with the main reference beat. The medium one is called *kinganga* and comes in second, and is usually played standing up. The biggest drum is called *msondo* and is played standing up and usually comes in last (Figure 5).



Figure 5. From left to right: Bi Salama on *kinganga*, Bi Zuweni on *msondo*, and Bi Akina on *vumi*. Ng'ambo, December 2019.

The body of the drums is made of wood, and the skin is either cow or antelope (*paa*) hide. Drums are tuned by holding their skin close to a burning piece of cardboard (Figure 6). This reduces humidity and heats the skin, which causes it to tighten and its pitch to rise.





*Figure 6. A kinganga (left) and a msondo (right) being tuned. Ng'ambo, December 2019.*

The three drums each have their distinct role in the establishment of the basic rhythmic pattern that underlies each unyago song: its time-line pattern. However, more so than individual instruments, the different drums should rather be seen as part of one large performing musical body. Musicologist Gerhard Kubik, who has done extensive research in sub-Saharan Africa, offers an insight into how this performing musical body works, by suggesting that a time-line pattern “represents the structural core of a musical piece,” a point of reference for the singers and drummers, a “condensed and extremely concentrated representation of the motional possibilities open to the participants” (Kubik 1994: 45). According to Kubik, there are three levels of reference related to timing that together make up this basic structure of most sub-Saharan African music, and in performance the creation of patterns is “constantly and simultaneously related to these three levels” (Kubik 2010: 31). This means that each of these levels of timing exists on its own, but more importantly, is always performed and experienced in relation to the other levels at the same time. Kubik proposes three levels of reference:

1. An elementary pulsation, which is “a fast, infinite string of pulse-units considerably faster than anyone’s heartbeat [...] the smallest time-units” (Kubik 2010: 31). It is unaccented and serves as a background pulsation, sometimes exclusively mentally. As Kubik points out, in many African timing systems this fast sequence is between

500 and 600 bpm, but in unyago drumming, the elementary pulsation is slower than that, about 300 to 350 bpm. The elementary pulsation in unyago is not played by one instrument, but is rather fulfilled by the vumi and kinganga respectively, and sometimes completely covered by the msondo.

2. The reference beat, or gross pulse, with associated metrical schemes; as Kubik points out, the reference beat combines 2, 3, 4, or sometimes 5 elementary pulses to form a larger unit of reference. In unyago the reference beat incorporates 3 elementary pulses, and is played by the vumi consistently.
3. The cycle, which Kubik defines as “one round of a constantly repeating structure; a recurrent series of notes or combination of patterns” (Kubik 2010: 41). Short cycles can be 12 or 16 pulses, for example, and in unyago songs a cycle usually incorporates 12 pulses, which are then grouped together in a (much) larger cycle of 48 or even 60 pulses.

Usually the drum players are singing as well, though there may be more singers than drummers. Most unyago singing operates according to a call and response principle, in which the *kiongozi*, or leader of the group, provides the ‘call,’ and the *kiitikio*, the chorus, provides the response. The drumming and singing is sometimes ornamented with hand clapping and ululating.

An entire unyago ngoma consists of the continuous performance of rhythmic cycles, where one song may flow into the next without pause. The drumming thus provides a stimulating acoustic landscape for the lyrics to progress from one song to the next. Occasionally, the drumming and singing is interrupted by speeches, laughter, and talking.<sup>18</sup>

I now present an analysis of the opening song *Aiche, aiche* (Track 01)<sup>19</sup> to illustrate the basic underlying structure of unyago ngoma.<sup>20</sup> This song starts with a loud downbeat on the vumi, the smallest drum which continues to play the main reference beat (Figure 7).

<sup>18</sup> See for example the recording of unyago songs at a wedding in Zanzibar, made by Janet Topp Fargion, 1990:

<https://sounds.bl.uk/sounds/unyago-songs-at-wedding-1001186462600x000006>

<sup>19</sup> <https://uppsala.box.com/s/5saj5gj5rnbff0mjq0xctn0r987k2rs32>

<sup>20</sup> The basis for analysis is the version on Bi Kidude, 2009. *Unyago*. Sauti za Zanzibar Studio. I made another recording of this song on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in Zanzibar City, and a video can be found here: [https://youtu.be/8A\\_yofQgDyw](https://youtu.be/8A_yofQgDyw)



Figure 7. *Vumi* main reference beat. Ng'ambo, December 2019.

The basic rhythmic cycle of *Aiche*, *aiche* consists of 4 groups of triplets, the gross pulse or reference beat (thus, the first note of each triplet) is played by the *vumi*, the following two notes played by the *kinganga*. The *msondo* either plays the entire triplet—albeit sometimes with accent shifts—or creates cross-rhythmic sections, mostly hemiolas. To capture the base time-line pattern, I am using Gerhard Kubik's method of transcription, in which he uses an encircled number at the beginning of the staff, in favor of conventional time signatures, e.g. ⑫. This encircled number represents the number of elementary pulsations. 'X' represents the reference beat, whereas periods '...' represent the elementary pulsation. In this song, there are 12 elementary pulse-units in one cycle, which are grouped in sets of three pulses, each set of three pulses representing one reference beat. The basic time-line pattern thus looks as follows:

⑫ X . . X . . X . . X . .

This basic pattern is similar to the 'triplet rhythm' of *chakacha*, another female ngoma originating from the Kenyan coast. Ethnomusicologist Carol Campbell and anthropologist Carol Eastman in their discussion of various ngoma on the Swahili coast note the following basic *chakacha* rhythms (1984: 476):

⑫ x . . x . . x . . x . .

⑫ x . . . x . x . . . x .

The first rhythm is identical to the basic unyago pattern in the song *Aiche*, and the second can be seen as a variation of that pattern. Chakacha ngoma involves one msondo drum, which plays the main rhythmic pattern, two or three smaller drums, bells, shakers, as well as melodic instruments such as a tarumbeta (a type of trumpet) and a nzumari (a type of oboe), but unlike in unyago ngoma, the instrumentalists are all male (Campbell and Eastman 1984: 476). Like unyago, chakacha is a ngoma performed in a wedding context as well, involving the dance technique kukata kiuno: “Each girl folds and ties a leso (a piece of brightly colored cloth, also known as kanga, usually used as a wrap-around garment) tightly about her hips. The hips are then rotated without any accompanying shoulder movement as the girls progress slowly around the circle” (Campbell & Eastman 1984: 475).

Musicologist Janet Topp Fargion notes this connection between chakacha and unyago (and the related msondo) in terms of sexual education, and suggests that the origins of chakacha in Mombasa, a coastal town in south Kenya, lie in msondo coming from Pemba, which is another one of the islands in the Zanzibar archipelago (2014: 106). This was also mentioned by one of the women I work with: she told me unyago in Pemba is called msondo, but that it is just a different name for the same thing.<sup>21</sup> Like unyago, msondo in Pemba teaches women about married life, and how to love one’s husband (Mohid 2015).

Literary scholar Wangari Mwai, in her study of unyago in Kenya, understands chakacha and msondo as two different dancing styles, both part of the unyago ritual: she states that chakacha is danced upright, whereas msondo is danced lying down. Mwai understands chakacha as “that which should make the girl’s waist very flexible” and msondo as “that which makes her move pleasurably during love making” (2010: 34).

Thus, it is clear that unyago ngoma is interconnected with other ngoma and music genres along the Swahili coast both rhythmically and contextually. Topp Fargion also notes the incorporation of unyago rhythms in taarab songs. She transcribes the basic unyago rhythm as follows:

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<sup>21</sup> Personal communication with Bi Nyota, June 13, 2019.



Figure 8. Basic unyago rhythm (Topp Fargion 1999: 222)

She discusses several taarab songs that make use of this rhythmic pattern, as well as the use of the dance technique *kukata kiuno*, which is part of unyago, in *kidumbak* (female informal drumming songs) and taarab. She writes:

This rhythm is used in the song ‘Na mnikome’ (‘You should leave me alone’), sung by Sahib al-Ari .... The hand-clapping establishes the regular beat in place of the first drum .... The Akhwani Safaa [Zanzibar’s oldest traditional taarab group] song ‘Adisadi’ .... is a typical example of the way that the *unyago* rhythm is used in ‘ideal’ taarab songs. The *dumbak* [a type of drum] begins the piece by establishing a regular beat and the bongos divide this into three. Improvisation is kept to a minimum and is very subtle. The *rika* [a type of tambourine] sets up a different rhythmic pattern, which contrasts with the duple division by the *dumbak* in a relationship of two against three .... Finally, the *kiuno* dance of *unyago* is performed often very explicitly at *kidumbak*, somewhat more sedately at women’s taarab events, but is virtually forbidden in ‘ideal’ taarab contexts. (Topp Fargion 1999: 222-223)

Thus, unyago in Zanzibar is rhythmically and contextually connected to *kidumbak* and taarab, lending its rhythm and dance techniques to these genres. This musical appropriation has also occurred the other way around: as we will see, unyago has adopted melodic material from classical taarab, consisting of maqams.

The basic unyago pattern of *Aiche* is grouped together in larger patterns of 5 cycles and 4 cycles, where a group of 5 cycles represents one call and response session, and a group of 4 cycles the ‘bridge,’ in which the base timeline pattern seemingly changes due to the presence of hemiolas in handclapping. However, during this ‘bridge,’ the underlying drum pattern continues in triplets, resulting in polyrhythm. This principle of timing is found in many African musics, according to Gerhard Kubik: “Many of the form or cycle numbers can be divided or split in more than one way, thus allowing for the

simultaneous combination of contradictory metrical units. For example, the number 12 which is the most important form number in African music, can be divided by 2, 3, 4, and 6” (Kubik 1994: 42). The resulting rhythmic structure of *Aiche* looks like this:

- ⑫ [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..]  
 ⑫ [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..]  
 ⑫ [x.x.x.x.x.x.] [x.x.x.x.x.x.] [x.x.x.x.x.x.] [x.x.x.x.x.x.]  
 ⑫ [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..]<sup>22</sup>

The song thus has a cyclical, non-strophic form, in which each cycle flows into the next. The form as notated is not fixed, as cycles can be repeated more often or less frequently at the discretion of the performers—which in practice means it is up to the *kiongozi*, the leader of the group, to decide this. The rhythmic time-line pattern then serves as the backdrop for the following call and response lyrics:

***Kiongozi:***

*Aiche, aiche*

**Leader:**

Come in, come in

***Kiitikio:***

*Aiche, nakibarabara*

**Chorus:**

Come in, and listen

***Kiongozi:***

*Ooh aiche, aiche*

**Leader:**

Ooh come in, come in

***Kiitikio:***

*Aiche nakibarabara, nakibarabara  
kila ngoma*

**Chorus:**

Come in and listen, listen to the drums

The loud downbeat of the *vumi* signals the beginning of the song, but also of the *unyago ngoma* at large. After an instrumental introduction of the basic rhythmic time-line pattern, the *kiongozi* signals both the start of the call and response, as well as the invitation for the audience and the bride-to-be to come

<sup>22</sup> I am using square brackets in accordance with Kubik’s notation, and, while he does not explicitly elaborate on their function it could be argued that they are there *not* as an equivalent of bar lines (because that would negate his argument that this notation better represents the cyclical nature of *unyago ngoma* than Western staff notation with its rhythmic organization in sectioned off measures) but rather to facilitate reading. In any case, the brackets do not signify stressed beats after a “[”, as a barline would.

in and listen to the drums. Thus, the performative effect of the song is twofold: the bride-to-be (and her entourage) is drawn in by the sweeping drum patterns but is also literally invited in by the lyrics sung by the performers. As such, *Aiche*, *aiche* can be seen as the start of the line that the bride to be is about to walk: from unmarried to married woman; from unknowing to having explicit knowledge.

The melody is based on *Ajam*, a popular and frequently used maqam, or Arabic mode. Maqams constitute the melodic framework of a lot of Arabic music, and they are the melodic material for taarab and other musics in Zanzibar as well. The dominant narrative is that maqams, as the basis of taarab music, were brought to the island from Egypt at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Sultan Seyyid Barghash of Zanzibar (1870-1888). The Sultan sent one of his musicians, Mohamed Ibrahim, to Egypt to learn the music he had so much enjoyed during a previous stay there. In those days, the music of the so-called *takht* ensembles was very popular in Egypt, consisting of *qanun* (zither), *ud* (lute), *nay* (flute), violin, *riqq* (tambourine) and *darabukka* (drum), and using maqams as the melodic framework of their compositions (Topp Fargion 1999: 199-200; 2014: 43-50).

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that when unyago was appropriated in Zanzibar, musicians who are also involved in taarab adapted the melodic material to fit these Zanzibari standards. However, not all unyago songs make use of maqams, some adhere to a pentatonic framework closer to melodic material from the mainland, where unyago originated from. Conversations with unyago performers suggest that the prevalence of maqams in unyago songs depends on the performer: if she is involved in classical Zanzibari music such as taarab, it is more likely she will use maqams in some unyago songs as well.

Maqams can be seen as a system of modes, “habitual phrases, modulation possibilities, ornamentation techniques and aesthetic conventions”<sup>23</sup> that together form the melodic framework for the music. Maqams form the foundation for the organization of pitches in Arabic music, and the tonic and the octave are prominent cornerstones of a maqam. Maqams can be transposed easily, thus the tonic is not fixed; in the recording of *Aiche* that is the basis for this analysis, the maqam *Ajam* has b as a tonic. Note the similarity to B Major (Figure 9):<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.maqamworld.com/en/maqam.php> accessed February 23, 2022

<sup>24</sup> Though *Ajam* and major may sound the same, their behavior is different, as the relationship between the notes and their possible patterns is based on a different concept.



Figure 9. Maqam Ajam

It should be noted that most maqams are made up of two *ajnas* (sing. *jins*), building blocks consisting of 4 or 5 notes each. The combination of *ajnas* and their respective melodic behaviors constitute the overall mood of each maqam. In the example of *Ajam* above, the first five notes constitute *jins Ajam* starting on the tonic ( b c# d# e f#), indicated by the horizontal bracket, whereas notes 5 to 8 constitute *jins Upper Ajam*. In this song, only the first *jins* is really used, since the kiongozi starts on the fifth step (f#) and her melodic line, as well as the response from the chorus, forms a downward movement towards the tonic (Figure 10).<sup>25</sup>



Figure 10. Jins Ajam as used by kiongozi and kiitikio

<sup>25</sup> Note that for songs with many accidentals, I have chosen to insert a key signature instead to increase readability.



The only irregularity can be observed in the third bar in the transcription above (not counting the upbeat), where the kiongozi extends her melody out of *jins Ajam*, below the tonic b with an a# and a g#. However, I consider this an ornamentation, not part of the modal framework, since she varies this section of the melody each time it comes back. Therefore, the melodic material is firmly rooted in *jins Ajam*. As musicologists and Arabic music performers Johnny Farraj and Sami Abu Shumays note, each *jins* conveys a distinct mood and/or character, but there is no one fixed description of the moods of the different *ajnas*. They write that “*ajnas* are very much like colors in the way they affect people. However, as with colors, *ajnas* do follow trends and conventions, and certain *ajnas* have traditionally been associated with a certain lyrical content or emotional expression” (Farraj & Shumays 2019: 193). The use of *Ajam* in the song *Aiche* may evoke a happy feeling, and emphasizes the joyous occasion that is starting.

In Figure 11, I present a transcription of the beginning of the song, illustrating the instrumental introduction and the opening lines of the kiongozi and the kiitikio. Note the changing rhythmic pattern comprised of sixteenths and eighths in bars 4 and 5, which has a disorienting effect on the listener due to the changing accentuations and durations of pattern. Furthermore, note that in the transcription in Figure 11, the kiongozi starts her part on the fourth beat (with upbeat) in bar 6, which also has a slightly disorienting effect. Music theorist David Temperley suggests that this common in African music: “African music possesses more syncopation, that is, more conflicts with the underlying metrical framework; and African listening requires a greater ability to maintain a steady beat despite conflicting accents.... the greater tendency of Western listeners to shift their metrical structures in response to phenomenal accents might be seen as a greater sensitivity to metric shift in the music” (2000: 79). While I do not necessarily agree with his focus on difference here, a conflict with the underlying metrical framework can be gathered from the start of the kiongozi in bar 6.

Kiongozi  
 Kiitikio  
 Msondo  
 Kinganga  
 Vumi

A - i -

7

che A - i - che-ee - - - - A - i - che a - i - che-ee

A - i - che na - ki - ba - ra - ba - ra - - - - A - i - che

7

10

na - ki - ba - ra - ba - ra na - ki - ba - ra - ba - ra ki - la ngo - ma

10

Figure 11. Introduction and first call and response of Aiche

## Msanja: context and features

The origins of msanja in Zanzibar are less clear than those of unyago, but there seems to have existed a ngoma by that name at least since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in coastal East Africa. In the *Desturi za Waswahili*,<sup>26</sup> Islamic teacher Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari (1869-1927) from Bagamoyo describes, amongst others, various dances that were performed by the Swahili in the Bagamoyo area until

<sup>26</sup> Customs of the Swahili people

at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Under the heading *Dances for enjoyment*, he mentions a dance named msanja, which is “performed in the yard or in the house” (Bakari 1981: 91). It was performed by both men and women, who gathered in a circle to sing, and the instruments used include two types of drums, a metal struck idiophone, and horns. Bakari makes no mention of msanja’s connection to marriage celebrations.

Anthropologist Kelly Askew describes a msanja performance in Tanga, on the East coast of mainland Tanzania, that she attended in 1993. She does note its association with marriage, and she mentions that msanja ngoma include (male) drummers. She describes a msanja performance as a gathering of women in a circle, and while singing, striking “buffalo horns with wooden sticks, punctuating the rhythms intoned by the drums” (Askew 1999: 67). She quotes Bakari (mentioned above), highlighting the passage where he mentions that both men and women gather in a circle to sing, as opposed to only women singing during the msanja that she attended in 1993. She sees this change as an expression of transformation in gender relations on the Swahili coast: “The striking difference between *msanja* as performed in the 1990s versus the 1890s is that it is currently performed exclusively by women (with the exception of male drummers), whereas a century ago both men and women participated” (Askew 1999: 68). Her main point is that gendered power relations have changed over a century, and that these changes can be noted in ngoma as well.

Both of these sources thus seem to indicate a use of instruments in msanja—at the very least, drums. However, during the first few field trips (June 2019, December 2019, January 2020) to Jambiani I did not encounter drums during msanja performances, or any other instruments, and when I explicitly asked, women told me that msanja consists of singing, and sometimes hand clapping and ululating. But when I visited Jambiani again in July 2021, I was told that there is sometimes percussion involved, where musicians play on *madebe*, empty oil drums. And when I was able to record a msanja performance in full, there was a (male) drummer playing a small *ngoma*. It should be noted that both of the sources quoted above refer to coastal mainland Tanzania—Bakari in Bagamoyo, Askew in Tanga—but it is likely that msanja has existed on the islands off the coast since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well. However, whether msanja was brought to rural Zanzibar from the coastal mainland and has since changed its musical form, or whether msanja in Jambiani has developed independently into its own form and with the same name, remains unclear.<sup>27</sup>

At present, msanja in Jambiani constitutes of songs mostly for the bride-to-be, sung by women, to teach her about and socialize her into married life. Like in unyago, topics include how to be a good Zanzibari person, and a good wife,

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<sup>27</sup> However, Bakari mentions another dance called *dandaro* in his *Desturi za Waswahili*, this is another dance that is currently found in Jambiani, tentatively suggesting a link between Jambiani and the mainland.

both domestically and sexually. However, msanja is not for women exclusively: men can attend this ngoma too. As Hadija, my research associate in Jambiani explained it:

Because a woman gets married to a man. So, with msanja there is a woman and a man. You teach the men, you teach a woman. Okay? .... Because with msanja men play the ngoma, women sing.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the participation of men in this ngoma seems to be important for two reasons: they need to know what to do in married life, and they have a practical role as drummers.

Msanja is one of the three ngoma associated with weddings in Jambiani: brides-to-be may also undergo a singo, the ceremonial full-body massage; and there may be *shindwe*, a dance performed by women at weddings.

I will now discuss the main musical features of msanja songs. Msanja songs are sung by women, and if there is drumming involved, this is done by men. A msanja ngoma is a continuous performance, this means that one song flows directly into the next: the connection between different songs is made either by singing melismatic syllables (“Oyaaaaaaaa”) or by drumming. There may be breaks during the ngoma in which the participants discuss the next song of choice, or even just take a rest.

Msanja ngoma, like unyago ngoma, often start with the same song each time. In msanja, the following sequence is a typical example of the opening of the ngoma (Track 02):<sup>29</sup>

*Bismillahi ndiyo ya kwanza ya  
kuondokea eee*

In the name of Allah, this is the first  
time of things to go

*Mpe kibao cha kukalia mgeni wako  
eee*

Give your guest a seat to sit on, eee

*Akikuaga mpe ruhusa mwana na  
kwao eee*

If he leaves give him permission,  
the boy and the family, eee

*Na matandiko tandike sawa  
chumba cha nana we*

And the bedsheets put them  
properly in your room

<sup>28</sup> “Kwa sababu, mwanamke anaolewa na mwanaume. Kwa hivyo, na msanja: mwanamke na mwanaume. Unafundisha wanaume, unafundisha mwanamke. Sawa? .... Kwa sababu msanja wanaume [wanacheza] ngoma, wanawake wanaimba.” Jambiani, July 27, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> <https://uppsala.box.com/s/5saj5gj5rnb0mj0xctn0r987k2rs32>

*Ni mti mwema wa kuegemea  
kwenye kivuli*<sup>30</sup>

It's a sweet tree to lean on that has  
shade

The first line, *Bismillahi ndiyo ya kwanza ya kuondokea*, is always used as the opening line, whereas the order of the lines following thereafter may vary according to the mood, and which performers are there. These first few lines are usually sung without drums, rhythmically quite ad libitum, and the melody can be transcribed as follows (Figure 12):<sup>31</sup>

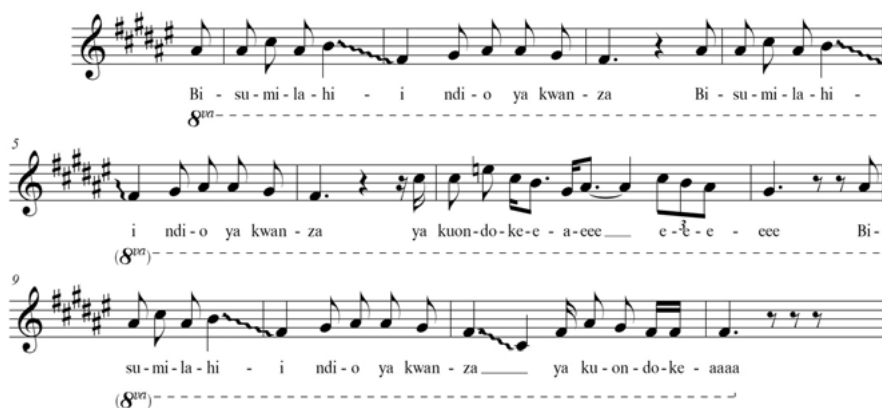


Figure 12. *Bismillahi*

Note the AABA form (with a small ‘coda’ at the end), in which the first part (*Bismillahi ndiyo ya kwanza*) is repeated before moving on to the second part (*ya kuondokea*). Furthermore, the melodic setting of the lyrics enforces a different syllabic emphasis than would occur in spoken Swahili. A clear example is the word *kwanza* at the end of the first phrase; in spoken Swahili, the second-to-last syllable of any word is always stressed, thus it is pronounced ‘*kwan-za*. In the song, the stress falls on the last syllable of the word: *kwan-‘za*. Finally, the use of glissandi corresponds to phrasing: a glissando seems to function as an indication that the melodic phrase is not finished: note the glissandi in the middle of a phrase from bar 1 to 2, from bar 4 to 5, and from bar 9 to 10. To signify that the f# (on “za” from “*kwan-za*”) in bar 11 is not the end of the phrase, as would be expected based on its previous occurrence in bars 3 and 6, a glissando is added between this f# and the c# below, which then leads into the small ‘coda’ to conclude the phrase. In Figure 13, a PRAAT visual of bars 9 (with ‘upbeat’) to 12 reveals in greater detail how this is done:

<sup>30</sup> Jambiani, July 27, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> The melody may be transposed, depending on the vocal range of the singer, but the melody intervals do not change.

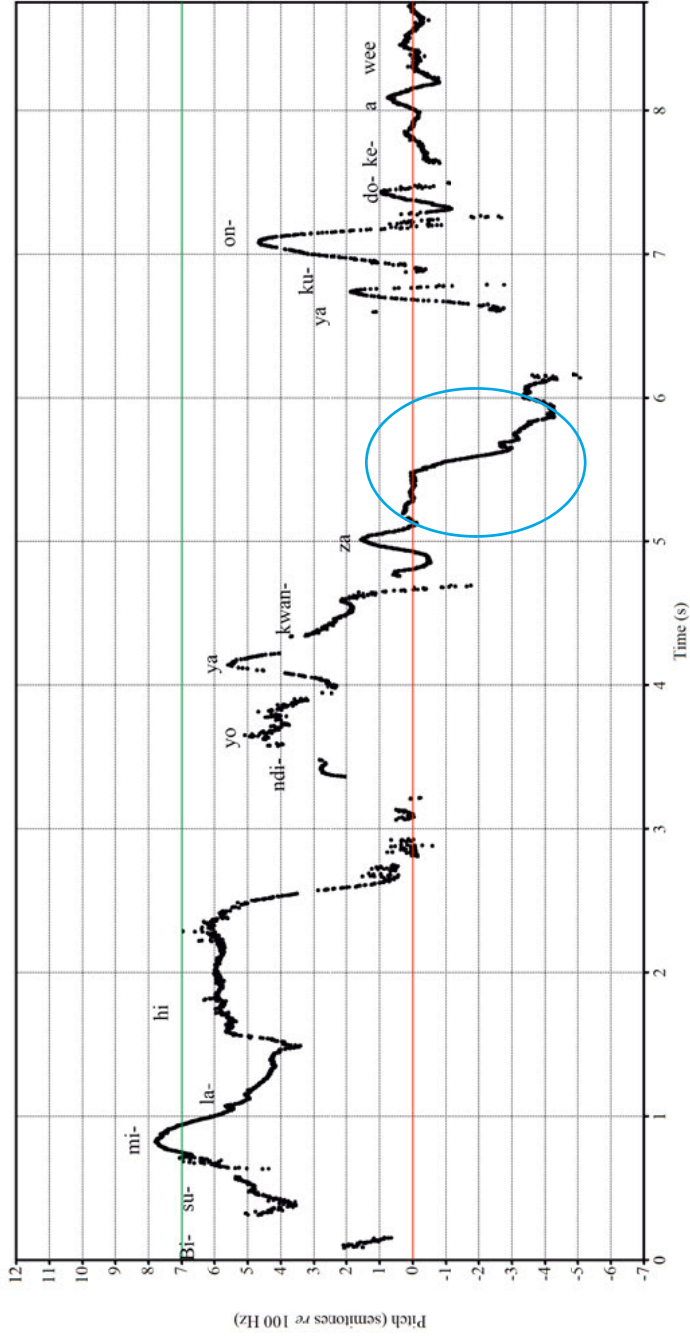


Figure 13. PRAAT pitch contour graph of bar 9-12 of Bismillahi

In the pitch contour graph in Figure 13, the red horizontal line marks the ‘tonic’ f#, whereas the green horizontal line marks the fifth.<sup>32</sup> Each semitone is marked by one step on the y axis of the graph, whereas the time is shown in one-second intervals. Just after the 5-second mark, the singer reaches the tonic, which corresponds to the “za” from “*kwan-za*” in the lyrics (bar 11 in the transcription in Figure 12). The consecutive glissando downwards to signify that the song is not yet finished is clearly visible between the 5-second and 6-second marks, as highlighted by the blue oval. Here, the singer reaches the lowest note in the entire song. After this glissando, she finally concludes the song with a small coda, ending on the tonic, which is reached around the 8-second mark.

As can be gathered from Figure 13, for the most part the singer only briefly touches on each pitch (PRAAT shows no real pitch plateaus), while a transcription in Western staff notation suggests the existence of separate, discrete pitches. A listener does perceive more or less discrete pitches, because those moments are seemingly aligned with the perceived underlying felt pulsation, or latent pulsation, but in reality the melody glides from one note to the next, only briefly touching each discrete pitch. The reader may wish to keep this in mind for future transcriptions as well.

Apart from the opening lines, msanja songs may constitute of two or three lines of lyrics, which are repeated several times with little musical variation, although repetitions may be ornamented by ululating. In general, there is a call-and-response structure, where one participant initiates a song, and usually sings the entire verse first. Then this is repeated by the chorus of women.

The first line is repeated once before moving on to the second, as in the song *Cheni yangu* (Track 03):<sup>33</sup>

<i>Cheni yangu imeanguka mtoni</i>	My necklace went missing in the river
<i>Cheni yangu imeanguka mtoni</i>	My necklace went missing in the river
<i>Saa sita naivinga [naitafuta] sioni</i>	At 1 o'clock I search but I don't see [it]
<i>Napiga hodi nimeikuta shingoni</i> <sup>34</sup>	I knock on the door and I found it [went in] all the way to the neck

<sup>32</sup> Note that, for ease of calculations within PRAAT, the tonic has been set to 100 Hz, while in the actual recording the tonic is at around 180 Hz, or f#.

<sup>33</sup> <https://uppsala.box.com/s/5saj5gj5rnbfo0mj0xctn0r987k2rs32>

<sup>34</sup> Jambiani, July 27, 2021.



In the particular recording of this song I am using here, the entire verse is first sung by the male drummer, after which it is repeated entirely by the female singers. It can be transcribed as follows (Figure 14):<sup>35</sup>

The figure displays a musical score for a song, organized into three systems. Each system consists of a 'Voice' staff (treble clef) and a 'Ngoma' staff (percussion clef). The lyrics are written below the voice staff.

**System 1:**

- Voice: *Ché - ni yan - gu i - me - an - guka mto - ni*
- Ngoma: A rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

**System 2:**

- Voice: *guka mto - ni Saa si - ta nai - vin - ga si - o - ni na -*
- Ngoma: A rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

**System 3:**

- Voice: *pi - ga ho - di nime - ku - ta shin - go - ni*
- Ngoma: A rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Figure 14. *Cheni yangu ngoma and voice*

The song has an AABA' structure, where the last line is almost similar to the first. In the B section (bars 5 and 6 in the transcription above) the melodic contour is comparable to the one in the A sections (bars 1-2 and bars 3-4): while the intervals are slightly different, the melodic contour is very similar. The song moves in small intervals, apart from the start of each phrase where we find a larger skip. The A' section or last line, found in bars 7-8, is identical in the last part (bar 8), while bar 7 can be seen as a variation on the melodic material as found in bars 1 and 3. The melody is firmly rooted in a tonality based on c' (the listener might define the tonality as C major).

*Cheni yangu* is a song about a woman who is cheating. The male subject is looking for his woman; note that "cheni" is slang for vagina, so that he is in fact looking for his vagina. He is looking everywhere but he does not find her. Then he "knocks on the door," which is slang for trying to enter the vagina,

<sup>35</sup> The rhythmic pattern transcribed here is a basic (intended) pattern, which may be varied throughout the song.

and to his surprise his penis goes in immediately all the way to the balls (literally, to the neck, which means the entire shaft of the penis). Thus, the woman has had sex with another man before him, as he can enter her easily and with no difficulty, contrary to what would allegedly be expected from a virgin. As such, this song is sung as a warning for women not to have sex before the marriage, as the husband will be able to tell. The song is a warning for men as well, by providing a possible scenario if the husband is not careful, or is not treating his woman right.

At first glance, this song seems to confirm the stereotypical power relations between men and women. A purely textual analysis would indicate the man as subject and having agency and control, and the woman (and her vagina) as object. However, the musical performance changes this perspective: the women singing are taking sides with the “missing necklace” and turn the woman into the subject; moreover, their elaborate whooping, dancing, and ululating suggests that the moral warning should be understood rather loosely and tongue-in-cheek. Furthermore, the happy mood evoked by the tonality (‘C major’) and musical setting of the song further emphasize this. Thus, in order to fully understand the meaning of this song, the entirety of the performance is more important than a textual or structural analysis only.<sup>36</sup>

In this chapter, I have presented an introduction to the two field sites, Zanzibar City and Jambiani, as well as an overview of the main musical features and structures of unyago and msanja ngoma. In the following chapters I will present analyses of unyago and msanja songs along various themes: songs following the official discourse on male-female relationships (Chapter 3), ambiguity in songs and communication in general (Chapter 4), and songs that represent a contestation and re-negotiation of the traditional gendered power relations (Chapter 5).

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<sup>36</sup> Chapter 5 will address the re-negotiation of gendered power relations through musical performance analysis in greater detail.

### 3. A Good Zanzibari Wife

On a hot afternoon in Jambiani, June 2019, I am sitting at a beach bar under a makuti-thatched roof, made from interwoven palm leaves, with my research associate Hadija. We are sipping cold sodas, which together with the light ocean breeze helps us cool down in the heat. Hadija is a woman in her early sixties, who has four children and six grandchildren. She is wearing a long red and blue dress with gold embroidery along the neckline, and her blue and pink kanga headscarf is loosely draped over her head. Hadija knows everyone in the village and has put me in contact with female singers so I could record msanja songs. We are meeting today because she has written down the lyrics of the msanja songs that I recorded a few days ago, plus several additional song texts, and wants to explain their meaning to me. Many of the song texts are a mix of Kiswahili and KiJambiani, the local dialect spoken in the village, so she wants to make sure I understand each of them. She points to the following msanja song text:

<i>Baba wakiume hawanuni waongo</i>	Husbands don't sulk over misunderstandings
<i>Jua likitua lakudunda la mgongo</i> <sup>37</sup>	[because] when the sun sets it [the penis] knocks you in the back

"You see," she says as she touches my arm gently and smiles, "this song says: your husband can be unhappy in the morning, unhappy in the afternoon, but not unhappy in the evening!" She bursts out laughing.

The msanja song text referred to here expresses the marital duty of a Zanzibari wife to meet her husband's needs in bed. The lyrics suggest that the husband will have his sexual desires met in the evening, when the sun sets, even if he and his wife have been arguing during the day. Taking care of one's husband's needs, both domestically and sexually, is a recurrent theme in both msanja and unyago songs. Wifely virtues alluded to in these songs include being a good person in general, taking care of the house, being a good host, and pleasing one's husband in various ways.

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<sup>37</sup> Lyrics collected in Jambiani, June 9, 2019.

This chapter deals with the expression of Zanzibari gendered expectations and norms in female ngoma. Through an analysis of both unyago and msanja songs, it examines what it means to be a ‘good Zanzibari wife.’<sup>38</sup>

## Zanzibari gendered society, expectations and norms

Most Zanzibari are Sunni Muslims, accounting for 99% of the island’s population. The Qur’an and the hadith<sup>39</sup> form the basis of the *sheria*, Islamic law. Islam in Zanzibar has been both part of the long-established “local” Swahili culture in coastal East-Africa since at least the eighth century AD, as well as part of the global community of Muslim believers (Reese 2014). Coastal East-African Islam emerged as a result of Arabic traders and merchants who settled there since the second century AD, and intermingled with local African inhabitants. This resulted in the establishment of a coastal society of Swahili people, with Islam and Swahili language as defining factors. As Islamic history scholar Scott Reese argues, until fairly recently, Islam in Africa, including the islands and the East coast, manifested as its own entity and different from global, Arabo-Persian Islam in Western academic discourse (2014). More recently, however, instead of focusing on difference, scholars have sought to “place the faith of African Muslims squarely within the context of the global community of believers” (Reese 2014: 18). Zanzibari are linked in their faith to the history of Swahili coastal Islam, while at the same time connected to the global community with a striving to undertake the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, for example.

Anthropologist Simon Turner notes that over the past 15 years or so, there has been an Islamic revival in Zanzibar, a strengthening of Islamic thought and practices, not linked to any particular doctrine, as part of reconnecting with the global Muslim community. There has been an upsurge in Islamic activities in different spheres of life, such as Islamic NGOs, *madrasa* (Quran schools) and universities, Islamic bookshops, etc. (Turner 2009: 237-238).

Turner sees the Zanzibari Islamic revival as a “result of and a reaction to liberalization and globalization” (2009: 238). He identifies three main factors that have contributed to this revival. First, it is related to the socialist reformations in the 1960s, especially after Zanzibar’s bloody 1964 revolution aimed at eradicating “Arab” influences, and implementing an “Africanization” of the island. The goal of the reformations that followed was to install an African government with a single party system, amongst others, and to promote an African identity; religion was to have no place in the public sphere.

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<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that heterosexuality is the norm in Zanzibar: same-sex marriage in Zanzibar is illegal and homosexuality is punishable by law; therefore a ‘good Zanzibari wife’ per definition refers to a woman who is married to a man.

<sup>39</sup> A record of the words and actions of the prophet Muhammad

The demise of the one-party state after the 1980s created a favorable climate for the blooming of Islamic activities as described above (Turner 2009: 238). Second, the revival can be seen as a critique of government nepotism and corruption. While on paper the new political climate was to be more open, the Zanzibari government with its ruling party CCM (Chama cha Mapinduzi) is highly corrupt and is highly oppressive of any political opposition. An example is accusing members of the liberal CUF (Civic United Front), the other main political party in Zanzibar, of religious fundamentalism in order to receive support from Western countries (Turner 2009: 250). Third, the revival is a reaction to the “present moral state of affairs” (Turner 2009: 251) in Zanzibar, most notably the increasing influx of tourists and thus confrontation with ‘Western values.’ Scantily dressed tourists roaming the streets of Stone Town and the villages beyond the beaches are perceived as insulting or, at best, out of line with traditional Muslim values.

While there are of course individual differences in terms of how life as a Zanzibari Muslim is shaped, many Zanzibari today follow Islamic principles regarding marriage, divorce, and inheritance (see Hirsch 1998) and send their children to madrasa, Qur’an school.

A Zanzibari marriage follows the principles of a Muslim marriage: the man must pay a dowry to his wife (rather than to her family); the man must provide for his wife; and a Muslim woman can only marry a Muslim man (Ali 2016: 1). During previous fieldwork in 2010, I attended several Zanzibari weddings. These can last several days, and start with the *akhdi*, the wedding ceremony which is held at the home of the bride’s family. After the *akhdi* follows the *karamu*, or wedding lunch—usually both are held on the same day. The *sherehe ya harusì*, or celebration of the wedding, comes last and is the moment where the bride is shown to her family and friends in her wedding dress. To this end, there is a stage with two chairs, one for the groom and one for the bride. First the groom comes on stage, followed by the bride, who is in the center of interest. The festivities that follow include music performances (often taarab or rusha roho) and food and drinks for the wedding guests.

Zanzibari men have the classical Islamic legal right to divorce their wives unilaterally through *talaka*, repudiation: simply by stating that he divorces his wife, he divorces her. *Talaka* does not require a Zanzibari man to go to court. Zanzibari women can file for divorce, too, but have to do so in court (Stiles 2015: 253). A common and legal ground for a divorce instigated by a woman is impotence of the husband.

In addition to their daily secular school attendance, most children in Zanzibar attend madrasa several hours a day, where they learn the Qur’an as well as the *maulidi*, a long poem in praise of the prophet Muhammad (Hoffman 2008: 46). Children wear school uniforms to both the madrasa and the regular school, which includes a *hijab*, or headscarf, for girls.

Zanzibar City has many mosques—Stone Town alone has around 50 mosques—that sound their calls to prayer five times a day, and each village

has at least one mosque. The oldest mosque is located in Kizimkazi in the southern tip of the island, dating from the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. As historian Abdul Sheriff also points out, Zanzibari mosques are architecturally not distinct from domestic buildings, but are rather inconspicuous without tall minarets—one could walk by one without noticing (see Figure 15). They are, however, important spaces of worship, education, and social interaction (Sheriff 1995: 5).



*Figure 15. Kiponda Mosque blending in with the streetscape (light yellow building on the right), Stone Town, February 2016.*

Women's status in Islamic societies has been the subject of many heated debates. As feminist Muslim scholar Kecia Ali points out, the position of women is a hot topic both within anti-Muslim polemics, which sees Muslim women as oppressed, on the one hand, and an "apologetic counter-discourse" which understands Islam as protective and respectful of women, on the other hand

(2016: xxi). However, Ali states that neither of these rather reductive viewpoints is especially helpful in deepening our understanding of issues concerning Muslim women's lives. Nina Hoel notes in her study of sexuality and religion among South African Muslim women, that care should be taken not to impose Western dominant discourses in which "Muslim women are portrayed as victims of patriarchal oppression" (2016: 12). Equating Islam with inequality without taking into account local cultural practices is too reductive.

Feminist Islamic scholar Asma Afsaruddin argues that the status and role of women in Islamic societies from the inception of Islam has been largely equal to that of men's, especially in terms of spiritual and religious life. She sees Islam as inherently inclusive of women and women's rights and sees the unequal position of women in some Islamic societies not as prescribed by, or even in line with, the Qur'an, but rather as a result of cultural practices and masculinist interpretations of Islamic law.<sup>40</sup>

This seems to apply to Swahili culture, as becomes clear from the work of anthropologist Margaret Strobel. She describes how among the Swahili in East Africa, Qur'anic verses that emphasize women's weakness have been chosen over verses that celebrate male and female spiritual equality. She sees unequal gender relations and male dominance as key ingredients of Swahili ideology (Strobel 1979: 43-100). More recently, historian Felicitas Becker, in her study of Muslim Friday sermons along the Swahili Coast, also sees a focus on men's superiority over women, resulting from "a complex mixture of scriptural, legal, sociopolitical, and biological statements" (2016: 164). The contents of the sermons she studied points to patriarchal authority both outside and inside the household, with women supposedly following their husbands' leads.

One consequence that follows from Islam in Zanzibar is that there are distinct social spheres for men and women, each with their own norms and expectations. The focus in Zanzibar is not so much on *purdah*, or the secluding of women from men, but rather on the organization of different cultural subgroups for men and women. These subgroups are visible in different organizations and networks, such as dance clubs and self-help groups for women, and political organizations, community centers and coffee houses for men (see also Askew 1999: 69). In daily life, women tend to hang out with women, and men hang out with men. This socio-spatial gender segregation can be observed in public when taking a walk in the narrow streets in Stone Town: groups of men sitting on the *baraza* (stone benches) in front of the houses, and depending on the time of day either sipping coffee, playing a game of *bao*, a board game, exchanging news, or, on Jaws corner,<sup>41</sup> watching a football game (Figure 16). Women are also part of the streetscape, but they tend to be on the

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<sup>40</sup> "Islam, Gender and Feminist Hermeneutics," lecture by Asma Afsaruddin at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Alberta: <https://vimeo.com/207479836>, accessed March 23, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Jaws corner is an intersection of streets in the heart of Stone Town, named after the showing of the movie *Jaws* on the television hung up in one corner. It is presently a busy meeting point where vendors serve steaming hot coffee from a coffee tank.

move from one point to the next, as they usually do not sit down on the baraza. Women in rural areas such as Jambiani are also visible in public village life but tend to limit their movements to areas close to their homes or areas otherwise defined as female spaces (Demovic 2016: 11).



*Figure 16. Men sitting on the baraza on Jaws corner in Stone Town, December 2019.*

This socio-spatial gender segregation tends to become less strict with age: an older, divorced woman with grandchildren has more affordances than a young unmarried girl. For Hadija, my research associate in Jambiani, it is thus not much of a problem being seen at a beach bar frequented by scantily clad tourists, as she is a divorced grandmother and does not need to worry too much about accusations of being morally loose for hanging out with me there.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> I am mindful of my sartorial choices when I am in Zanzibar, always covering shoulders and legs.



Outside the home, there are norms related to clothing, behavior and communication. *Heshima*, honor and respectability, is an important notion, especially for women. Activities that cause *aibu*, shame, are to be avoided. When moving outside, an important way for women to retain their moral standing is by dressing appropriately, i.e., modestly. Different levels of ‘outside’ are reflected in a woman’s sartorial choices. The further a woman moves from her home, the more layers of garments are added, depending on how far she intends to travel (Demovic 2016: 11). If she stays within or close to her compound (inner courtyard or entry), a pair of *kanga* may suffice, but if she is to go shopping at Darajani market in Stone Town, a *buibui*, a long black robe to the ankles with long sleeves that covers one’s day outfit is added (see Chapter 6). Zanzibari men tend to dress modestly as well, often donning a *kanzu*, a long white robe with long sleeves, and a *kofia*, a round shaped embroidered hat. If they do not wear a *kanzu* or *kofia*, men dress in long trousers and mostly long-sleeved shirts, since shorts are considered for children or tourists.

While modesty in dress is thus not necessarily a marker of gendered *power* relations, the expectations in terms of ‘good behavior’ are highly gendered and *are* signifiers of Zanzibar’s patriarchal social structure. In daily life in Zanzibar, women are expected to follow their husband’s lead. They should be modest, respectful of elders, and passive. Men are also expected to be modest but should take the initiative more (Beckmann 2010: 620-621). As also noted by anthropologist Katrina Thompson, this dynamic is reflected in the Swahili language in several verbs that assume active or passive form depending on gender: a man proposes (*anaposa*), a woman is proposed to (*anaposwa*); a man marries (*anaoa*), a woman is married (*anaolewa*); a man fucks (*anatomba*), a woman is fucked (*anatombwa*); a man has divorced (*ameacha mke*) and a woman has been divorced with (*ameachwa*), and so on (Thompson 2013: 69).

In theory, men are supposed to provide for the household, but more and more Zanzibari women take on paid work, either from home as tailors, for example, or outside the home. In Stone Town, women may for example run shops or other small-scale businesses, while in Jambiani women may work on seaweed farms or get involved in small-scale agriculture. A growing number of women are entering the formal labor market as well since the last few decades (Fair 2013: 17), for example in government positions. However, working outside the home is a highly contested issue for many Zanzibari women: unless they belong to the upper class and are educated and successful, women have to take great care not to overstep any boundaries that may lead to the destruction of their reputation (Mutch 2012). Again, women generally maintain their *heshima* by avoiding *aibu*. One way of accomplishing this is by dressing modestly, for example by donning a *buibui* (a long black robe that covers one’s day dress) and/or a *niqab* (a veil that covers the face and leaves the eyes free).

Zanzibari gendered power relations as they exist do not mean that women have no role in the overall functioning of Zanzibari society. Women’s cultural expressions for example have their own established position in Zanzibari society. An explanation for this as offered by several authors is that there are two sets of ideologies and practices that operate along the entire Swahili coast: the Islamic ideal (the *sheria*, or *dini*) which encompasses all activities and teachings in accordance with Islam; and custom (*mila*), which includes activities not necessarily in accordance with, or even commendable to, Islam (Caplan 1982, Larsen 2015). Rituals such as spirit possession ngoma and un-yago ngoma, as well as artistic expressions such as music, generally fall into the category of *mila*. Anthropologist Pat Caplan notes that *mila* is mostly the domain of women, and she provides a scheme that defines *sheria* and *mila* as polar opposites (Caplan 1982: 40):

Sheria	Mila
Islamic	Non-Islamic
Male	Female
Patriliney	Cognation
Hierarchy	Egalitarianism
Cash economy	Subsistence economy
Women secluded	Women productive
Women dependent	Women autonomous

As Caplan notes herself, this is a rather black-and-white binary, and in different spheres of life the balance between the two may differ. Furthermore, in areas where there is a stricter adherence to Islam, *mila* has a more peripheral status and is more of a female-only space, whereas less rigid application of Islamic law means that *mila* ritual might occupy a more prominent position in society.

Katrina Thompson, on the other hand, does not agree with the idea of the necessity of a space where women can assert their authority *in contrast to* the authority related to Islam. In fact, in her article aptly titled “How to Be a Good Muslim Wife,” she argues that women’s participation in *mila* rituals is about defining their roles *as Muslims* rather than about mitigating the constraints of Islam (2011: 429). As she shows through her analysis of a singo she attended, where married women massage the bride and teach her how to speak like a married Muslim woman, women do not see talk about sexuality and talk about God as two conflicting topics, since sexuality is an essential part of being a Zanzibari Muslim woman. As a matter of fact, Zanzibari women see “specific sexual acts as an integral part of their religiously obligatory roles as Muslim

wives” (Thompson 2015: 171). Thompson’s perspective thus indicates a breach with ‘older’ discourse on gender relations along the Swahili coast where Islamic authority is considered the domain of men and women’s rituals are seen as peripheral to Islamic knowledge. Rather, she argues, Islamic knowledge is part and parcel of pre-marital sex instruction for Zanzibari women, and, through initiation rituals, women emerge *as* Islamic authorities.

On a formal level, the current power imbalance between Swahili men and women has not always existed to the degree it does today (Askew 1999: 69). Swahili women have held more political and economic power in the past than they do today, and there were female Swahili rulers well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Askew 1999: 81-85). Moreover, and on a more practical level, the way real women live their lives is not necessarily in line with what is prescribed by Islamic texts. Indeed, Zanzibari women go about their business while “letting the men get on with their normative statements” (Becker 2016: 178).

In the following sections, I want to contribute to this critique of patriarchal discourse on the Swahili coast through an analysis of several female ngoma songs that seem to push back, contest, and negotiate gendered boundaries, and focus on Zanzibari women as sexual, discursive, and musical agents. But before I do that, I will first present songs that apparently socialize the bride into being a good Zanzibari wife *within* those boundaries.

## A good Zanzibari wife

A ‘good Zanzibari wife’ as expressed in unyago and msanja songs is framed in terms of general morality, with songs on how to be a good person; domestic virtues, focused on expectations regarding household chores; and the sexual relationship between wife and husband.

### Being a good person

Anthropologist Nadine Beckmann notes that Zanzibari notions of morality are first and foremost connected to sex: moral behavior includes sexual abstinence, before marriage and outside of it, and decent clothing and behavior. On top of the direct sexual connotations, Beckmann also notes a wider range in which Zanzibari morality operates: being a good person includes showing “friendliness and helpfulness, modesty, humbleness and self-restraint in every sense –sexually, but also emotionally, by not submitting to anger, jealousy or even overly excited expressions of joy” (Beckmann 2010: 620). Overall, Zanzibari pursue modesty in dress and behavior, and keep to themselves. It is considered bad form to interfere in other people’s business unsolicited or to talk about others behind their backs.

One of the recurrent themes regarding Zanzibari social norms in female ngoma is keeping to oneself, and not looking toward others. Msanja and un-yago songs may evoke an image of unwanted behavior, and then proceed to criticize or ridicule that behavior.

In the following msanja song, *Kiroboto* (Track 04),<sup>43</sup> which translates as “Flea,” we encounter a warning against being envious of others. The song describes a woman who comes to borrow another woman’s shoes and is then ridiculed by being likened to a tiny creature: a flea. The shoes represent something which other people want but do not have, and can refer to material possessions or a romantic relationship. Wanting another person’s possessions or being after another woman’s husband makes one a very small person. This song thus sends a message that one should not be envious of others and that one should not covet what others have:

<i>Kanyaniazima [amekuja kuniazima] viatu</i>	She is coming to borrow my shoes
<i>Kanachaka [anataka] kutembea</i>	She wants to walk
<i>Kiroboto hana miguu, ndo jambo nililokekea</i> <sup>44</sup>	A flea does not have feet, it is indeed a problem that I laugh at

The ambitus of the song is relatively small—a fifth—and the melody moves mostly by small intervals (apart from the upbeat to the first bar). The mood is happy, maybe even frivolous, thus underscoring that the “flea” is someone to be laughed at. Figure 17 is a transcription of the melody:

<sup>43</sup> <https://uppsala.box.com/s/5saj5gi5rnb0mjq0xctn0r987k2rs32>

<sup>44</sup> Jambiani, January 9, 2020.

The musical score for Kiroboto is written in a single system with five staves. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together in groups. The lyrics are in Swahili and are aligned with the notes on each staff.

Staff 1: Ka - nya - nia - zi - ma vi - a - tu ka - na - cha - ka ku - tem - be - a \_\_\_\_ Ka - nya -

Staff 2: nia - zi - ma vi - a - tu ka - na - cha - ka ku - tem - be - a \_\_\_\_ Ki - ro -

Staff 3: bo - to ha - na mi - gu \_\_\_\_ ndo jam - bo ni - li(o) - che - ke - a Ka - nya - nia - zi - ma vi - a - tu ka - na -

Staff 4: cha - ka ku - tem - be - a \_\_\_\_ Ka - nya - nia - zi - ma vi - a - tu ka - na - cha - ka ku - tem - be - a \_\_\_\_ Ki - ro -

Staff 5: bo - to ha - na mi - gu \_\_\_\_ ndo jam - bo ni - li(o) - che - ke - a

Figure 17. Kiroboto

Likewise, the unyago song below, *Chauongo*, evokes an unwanted image: that of a liar who is exposing others' behavior while engaging in that same behavior (but hiding it). The basic time-line pattern consists of 4 groups of triplets and can be transcribed as:

⑫ x..x..x..x..

This basic pattern is then grouped in larger patterns of 4 cycles:

⑫ [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..]

⑫ [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..]

Etc.

Over this time-line pattern a call and response unfolds, where the chorus repeats the full lyrics of the kiongozi. The maqam used here is Ajam muadil,<sup>45</sup> tonicizing the fourth step (E in the transcription in Figure 18):



Figure 18. Maqam Ajam muadil

Because the fourth step is tonicized, the principal note here is the E, with which the song starts, and on which the word *chauongo* is sung repeatedly, thus emphasizing the word liar. The following lyrics develop:

**Kiongozi:**

*Chauongo we chauongo*

*Chauongo we chauongo yako uyafiche*

*Ya wenzio uyaseme chauongo*

**Leader:**

Liar, you liar

You liar, you conceal your [things]

The others' [things] you tell, liar

**Kiitikio:**

*Chauongo we chauongo*

*Chauongo we chauongo yako uyafiche*

*Ya wenzio uyaseme chauongo*

**Chorus:**

Liar, you liar

You liar, you conceal your [things]

The others' [things] you tell, liar

<sup>45</sup> Ajam muadil sounds like Mixolydian mode.

**Kiongozi:**

Ah sikusema ee sikusema  
 Sikusema sikusema, mmesema  
 wenyewe  
 Mwanisingizia mie sikusema

**Leader:**

Ah I didn't say it, I didn't say it  
 Didn't say it, didn't say it, you said  
 it yourselves  
 You are slandering me, I didn't say  
 it

**Kiitikio:**

Ah sikusema ee sikusema  
 Sikusema sikusema, mmesema  
 wenyewe  
 Mwanisingizia mie sikusema

**Chorus:**

Ah I didn't say it, I didn't say it  
 Didn't say it, didn't say it, you said  
 it yourselves  
 You are slandering me, I didn't say  
 it

Thus, this song is an accusation of hypocrisy and backbiting: a warning not to be the person who sees the speck in the other's eye but not the beam in her own and who keeps quiet about her own faults but broadcasts others'.

The following unyago song, *Mwanikalia*, addresses the issue of gossip, and tells the bride-to-be not to engage in talking behind people's backs. The basic time-line pattern consists again of

⑫ x..x..x..x..

Which is then grouped into larger patterns of 4 cycles:

⑫ [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..]

In the lyrics, people who engage in gossiping are addressed; here *mwanikalia* means: you who are sitting and talking behind people's backs. Again there is a call-and-response structure, where the kiongozi sings the full verse by means of call, and the kiitikio responds by repeating that same full verse:<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> To avoid too much repetition of words, I am only transcribing the leader and chorus separately for the first verse, but each verse is first sung by the leader and then repeated by the chorus.

**Kiongozi:**

*Mwanikalia eeee mwanikalia  
eee*

*Si mama yangu si mama ya  
mwenzangu*

*Mwanikalia dede kunisema*

**Leader:**

You are sitting with me, eeee, you are sitting with me

It is not my mother nor the mother of my fellow

You are sitting with me, (to) tell me

**Kiitikio:**

*Mwanikalia eeee mwanikalia  
eee*

*Si mama yangu si mama ya  
mwenzangu*

*Mwanikalia dede kunisema*

**Chorus:**

You are sitting with me, eeee, you are sitting with me

It is not my mother nor the mother of my fellow

You are sitting with me, (to) tell me

*Mwanikalia eeee mwanikalia  
eee*

*Si ndugu yangu si ndugu ya  
mwenzangu*

*Mwanikalia dede kunisema*

You are sitting with me, eeee, you are sitting with me

It is not my sibling nor the sibling of my fellow<sup>48</sup>

You are sitting with me, (to) tell me

*Mwanikalia eeee mwanikalia  
eee*

*Si baba yangu si baba ya mwen-  
zangu*

*Mwanikalia dede kunisema*

You are sitting with me, eeee, you are sitting with me

It is not my father nor the father of my fellow

You are sitting with me, (to) tell me

*Mwanikalia eeee mwanikalia  
eee*

*Si binti yangu si binti ya mwen-  
zangu*

*Mwanikalia dede kunisema<sup>47</sup>*

You are sitting with me, eeee, you are sitting with me

It is not my daughter nor the daughter of my fellow

You are sitting with me, (to) tell me

In the song, the closest family relationships are all mentioned as *not* the object of gossip: mother, siblings, father and daughter. Thus, those who are gossiping (“You who are sitting”) stress that what they are saying is not about their direct environment, but rather involving unfamiliar persons. Nevertheless, by using call and response for each family relationship that the gossip is not about, thus addressing each relationship at length, the song criticizes the idea that it is always about others, never about oneself or one’s kin. Thus, like the song

<sup>47</sup> Bi Kidude, 2009. *Unyago*. Sauti za Zanzibar Studio.

<sup>48</sup> *Ndugu* means brother, sister, friend; I have chosen to translate it here as sibling.



*Chauongo*, it sends the message that one should not talk about others, suggesting one should rather first look at oneself.

Gendered power relations are also addressed in *unyago* and *msanja*. In general, Zanzibari women ought to assume a passive role and follow their husband's lead. In the *msanja* song below, *Ng'ombe*, we encounter the message that a wife should obey her husband. *Ng'ombe* literally means cow, but is used here as a metaphor for trouble.

<i>Baba kanunua ng'ombe na</i>	The husband <sup>50</sup> bought a cow and I
<i>mchungaji niwe mimi</i>	became the shepherd
<i>Juzi kampiga teke kidogo anikate</i>	A while ago it kicked him so he told
<i>ulimi</i>	me
<i>Afungwe ng'ombe</i>	The cow should be bounded
<i>Afungike maana kamba ya watu</i>	It should be bounded so therefore I
<i>nimeiazima</i> <sup>49</sup>	borrowed a rope from someone

The song text thus says that the wife (the “I” in the song) does as her husband tells her: she is told to contain the kicking cow, or trouble, and then indeed proceeds to take measures to contain it: she borrows a rope to tie it up. Moreover, the song hints at Zanzibari gender roles where women are responsible for taking care of the domestic environment. Even though it is the man who brought the trouble home, it is the woman who can go and deal with it.

## Domestic virtues

Part of being a good Zanzibari wife is connected to taking care of the domestic sphere. Consider again a typical opening sequence of a *msanja ngoma*, which I also discussed in Chapter 2:

<sup>49</sup> Jambiani, January 9, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> *Baba* literally translates as “father” but here it represents the father of the household, i.e., the husband.

<i>Bismillahi ndiyo ya kwanza ya kuondokea eee</i>	In the name of Allah, this is the first time of things to go
<i>Mpe kibao cha kukalia mgeni wako eee</i>	Give your guest a seat to sit on, eee
<i>Akikuaga mpe ruhusa mwana na kwao eee</i>	If he leaves give him permission, the boy and the family, eee
<i>Na matandiko tandike sawa chumba cha nana we</i>	And the bedsheets put them properly in your room
<i>Ni mti mwema wa kuegemea kwenye kivuli<sup>51</sup></i>	It's a sweet tree to lean on that has shade

After the opening line, *Bismillahi*, which was analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 2, we find different lines with references to a woman's domestic duties. As mentioned above, the choice and order of these lines may vary, according to the performers' taste. In the example above, the second line starting with *Mpe kibao*, stresses the importance of the bride being a good host. It is an instruction for the woman to offer a seat to her guests, thus telling her to be welcoming and caring to anyone who visits her house. Line 3, *Akikuaga*, instructs a woman not to object whenever her husband wants to leave the house to go somewhere. According to the lyrics, she should also not object to her family-in-law. Furthermore, a woman should take care of the house, for example by making sure the bed is properly made, according to line 4, *Na matandiko*. And finally, part of her wifely domestic virtues include making sure that her husband can fully relax and be comfortable at home, as expressed in the line 5, *Mti mwema*. The sweet tree in this line refers to the wife: she should provide her husband with metaphorical shade (i.e., comfort at home), so he can feel good at home. Note that the interpretation of metaphor is contextual, as a tree can also be used as a metaphor for a man's penis, as we will see in Chapter 5. However, the line *mti mwema* alludes to the potentiality of a tree to provide shade, not its phallic properties.

All the song lines in this msanja sequence are sung to the same melody, transcribed in Figure 19 for *Mti mwema*:

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<sup>51</sup> Jambiani, July 27, 2021.

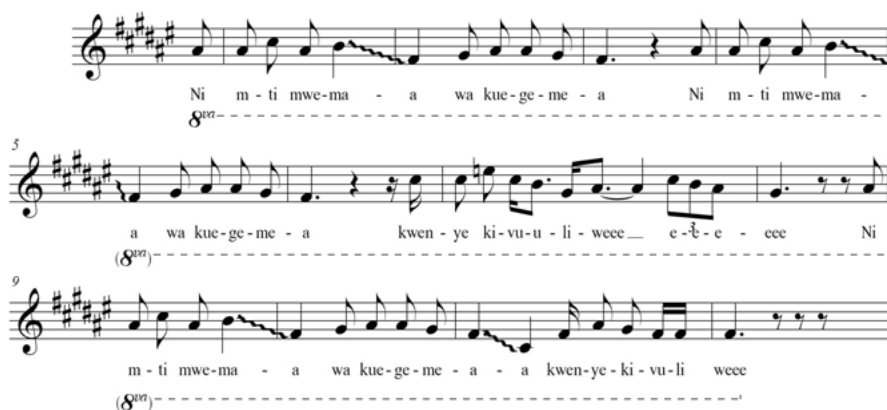


Figure 19. *Mti mwema*

Another msanja song that women sing to teach the bride-to-be about domestic duties is *Biti Ambari*. In this song, a young woman who is addressed as “daughter of Ambari”<sup>52</sup> is instructed to take care of various household tasks:

<i>Biti [binti] Ambari panga ee</i>	Daughter of Ambari arrange [the
<i>panga nana x2</i>	clothes]
<i>Biti [binti] Ambari panga wee</i>	Daughter of Ambari arrange [the
<i>panga nikusaidie</i>	clothes] I shall help you
<i>Biti [binti] Ambari tunga wee</i>	Daughter of Ambari string [the flow-
<i>tunga nana x2</i>	ers]
<i>Biti [binti] Ambari tunga wee</i>	Daughter of Ambari string [the flow-
<i>tunga nikusaidie</i>	ers] I shall help you
<i>Biti [binti] Ambari fua wee fua</i>	Daughter of Ambari wash the clothes
<i>nana x2</i>	
<i>Biti [binti] Ambari fua wee fua</i>	Daughter of Ambari wash the clothes I
<i>nikusaidie</i>	shall help you
<i>Biti [binti] Ambari fua wee fua</i>	Daughter of Ambari wash the clothes
<i>nana x2</i>	
<i>Biti [binti] Ambari fua wee</i>	Daughter of Ambari wash, dirty is not
<i>uchafu mbaya</i> <sup>53</sup>	good

The daughter referred to in this song is a bride-to-be, who is instructed to do different chores: fold away laundry, sew, and wash clothes, as “dirty is not good.” The song is sung by older, more experienced women, who tell the

<sup>52</sup> Ambari is a Swahili woman’s name.

<sup>53</sup> Jambiani, July 26, 2021.

young woman “I will help you,” to properly teach her how to do these things. The content of the song may vary, as chores and tasks can be added—depending on the singers and the instructions they want to give to the bride. In the version used here, putting away laundry, washing, and sewing (stringing) are mentioned. The verb *kutunga* can literally be translated as ‘to string,’ as in putting a thread in a needle, but it has a special connotation when sung in this context of wedding preparations: to string flowers into a chain, such as jasmine or rose. This string of flowers can then be worn especially for the husband.

All verses are sung to the same melody, whereas the rhythmic accompaniment may vary. In the transcription in Figure 20 I give the exact transcription of one verse, rhythmically and melodically, but as mentioned the rhythmic patterns played by the ngoma are varied from verse to verse:

The musical score for 'Biti Ambari' is presented in three systems, each with three staves: Kitiikio (melody), Hand-clapping, and Ngoma (rhythm). The lyrics are written below the Kitiikio staff.

**System 1:**

- Kitiikio:** Bi - ti Am - ba - ri pan - ga ee pan - ga na - na Bi - ti Am - ba - ri
- Hand-clapping:** A steady 2/4 beat pattern.
- Ngoma:** A complex 2/4 beat pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes.

**System 2:**

- Kitiikio:** pan - ga we pan - ga na - na Bi - ti Am - ba - ri pan - ga
- Hand-clapping:** A steady 2/4 beat pattern.
- Ngoma:** A complex 2/4 beat pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes.

**System 3:**

- Kitiikio:** we pan - ga ni - ku - sa - i - di - e
- Hand-clapping:** A steady 2/4 beat pattern.
- Ngoma:** A complex 2/4 beat pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes.

Figure 20. *Biti Ambari*

What is striking in this song is its explicitly perceived triple time, which is unusual in my other recorded material.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the structure of the song also adheres to a tripartite framework. Note that the melodic material of each phrase is transposed, leading to three iterations of (roughly) the same melodic contour: compare bars 1-4 with bars 5-8 and bars 9-13 in the transcription above.

Thus, through the performance of certain msanja songs, including the opening sequence starting with *Bismillahi*, and the song *Biti Ambari*, both presented above, the women singing them socialize a bride into the practical side of her domestic duties: it is the woman who needs to care for visitors, and it is the woman who needs to care for her husband's comfort and everything around the house.

As noted in the introduction of this chapter, an important aspect of a Zanzibari woman's gendered morality is found in her heshima, her respectability. Zanzibari women are expected to be modest and behave respectably. Aibu, shame, is to be avoided at all times, and fear of shame is a powerful incentive for 'pure' modes of behavior. The following song text shows that a woman should retain her heshima also when her husband is away. She should sleep inside her house with the door closed, so there won't be rumors that may cause her aibu:

<i>Mume akiondoka funga mlango</i>	If [your] husband leaves, close the
<i>ulale</i>	door to sleep
<i>Ukiwa hujalala itasema familia</i> <sup>55</sup>	If you don't sleep [inside] the family
	will speak

Part of getting married entails severing the ties with one's mother and entering the husband's household. During an unyago ngoma, the song *Ngondo* invites the mother of the bride to sit with her daughter and ceremoniously eat and speak with her:

<b><i>Kiongozi:</i></b>	<b>Leader:</b>
<i>Mama mwari mwaranae</i>	Mother of the bride, sit with her
<i>Mama mwari mwaranae</i>	Mother of the bride, sit with her
<i>Mwasema nae</i>	Speak with her
<i>Mwakula nae</i>	Eat with her
<i>Mwazungumza nae</i>	Converse with her
<i>Mwaiona ngondo leo</i>	Look at this challenge today

<sup>54</sup> While *Kiroboto*, as discussed above, can be transcribed in a triple time, it is not as explicitly perceived as here in *Biti Ambari*.

<sup>55</sup> Jambiani, June 9, 2019.

**Kiitikio:***Mwaiona ngondo mwairegedera***Chorus:**

Look at this challenge today

The basic timeline pattern, like in the previous unyago examples, consists again of four groups of triplets, grouped into larger cycles of four patterns.

The mother of the bride in this song is accompanying her daughter along the way to becoming a married woman, gradually disconnecting her from her mother's household. As a married woman, she is no longer part of her mother's household, but rather of her husband's. Thus, she should no longer rely on her mother but focus on the new household instead.

This new sense of belonging is also expressed in the following msanja song text, where the metaphor of food is used to allude to family ties. According to the following lyrics, when a woman is married, she should not rely on the relationship with her mother any longer, but rather "eat" with her new relationship:

*Hiyo ni ila ya mwanamke**Kula na mama eeee**Usiende kwa mimi**Wala kwa mingine eehee*

This is the flaw of a woman

To eat with her mother

Don't go to me

You eat with the other, eehee

## Sexual morality

As the songs below illustrate, the sexual relationship between husband and wife is explicitly addressed in unyago and msanja. As Kjersti Larsen points out, there is a difference between open expressions of sexual activity and desire, and inside, female-only, expressions of sexual relations (2015).<sup>56</sup> The latter will be discussed in Chapter 5, where I will discuss female sexual agency and power related to sex. In this section, the focus is on societal expectations of Zanzibari sexuality as expressed in unyago and msanja songs. Here, the image of the sexual relationship between husband and wife that is being maintained is that the man takes the initiative to sex, and it is the woman's marital duty to satisfy her husband's sexual needs. A woman's needs or desires come second to her husband's in these songs: "it seems that brides .... receive the instruction that if they wish to keep their husbands they have to respond actively to their advances whatever the woman may feel or wish" (Larsen 2015: 225).

Zanzibari sexual ethics—the man takes the initiative, the woman is following, passive and shy—is vividly expressed in the unyago song *Kuku lala*

<sup>56</sup> Larsen uses the terms "public" and "private," but as I will show in Chapter 6, the boundaries between public and private are not really clear. Through my analysis of unyago and msanja songs in chapters 3–5 I will come to a critique of this dichotomy in Chapter 6.

(Track 05).<sup>57</sup> This song is performed somewhere after the introductory song *Aiche*, *aiche* (see Chapter 2) and thus begins as a continuation of the drummed basic time-line pattern consisting of four groups of triplets. This time-line pattern is then organized into larger patterns of four cycles.

During the instrumental introduction, during one cycle the msondo drummer draws in the listener with an accentuated hemiola (bar 2 in the transcription in Figure 21), after which she proceeds to improvise over the basic structure. Note the changing rhythmic pattern comprised of sixteenths and eighths in bars 6 and 7, which has a disorienting effect on the listener due to the changing accentuations and durations of pattern:

The figure displays musical notation for three instruments: Msondo, Kinganga, and Vumi, arranged in three systems. Each system consists of three staves. The first system shows the initial measures, with Msondo featuring a hemiola in bar 2. The second system, starting at measure 4, shows a continuation of the patterns. The third system, starting at measure 6, introduces a more complex rhythmic pattern with sixteenth and eighth notes for all instruments. The notation includes various rhythmic symbols such as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and rests, with some notes marked with accents.

Figure 21. Instrumental introduction of *Kuku lala*

<sup>57</sup> <https://uppsala.box.com/s/5saj5gj5rnb0mj0xctn0r987k2rs32>

From bar 8 in the transcription in Figure 21 the basic structure without ornamentation is performed. Then, as the singers start, the following call and response unfolds:

***Kiongozi***

*Kuku lala lala we kuku lala lala*

*Kuku lala lala*

**Leader**

Chicken lie down, chicken lie down

Chicken lie down

***Kiitikio***

*Kipanga anakuja!*

**Chorus**

The hawk is coming!

The song uses the image of a hawk hunting for chickens, and the behavior of chickens to crouch down onto the ground to try and hide from the bird of prey who is hunting them, as a metaphor for sexual advances. The chicken and the hawk represent a young girl and a man who is interested in her, respectively, and the song instructs the girl to go and hide (crouch down), because he is coming for her (for sex). The man is the hunter, the woman is the prey, and she must protect herself from his advances. The song is thus both a socialization into these respective gender roles where women are passive and men take the initiative, as well as an instruction for a girl *not* to have sex with a man before she gets married.

The melody is based on Hijaz (Figure 22):



Figure 22. Maqam Hijaz

Hijaz is a very recognizable maqam, because of its prominent augmented second interval. While this maqam is often used in Western stereotypical evocations of the ‘exotic’ Middle East, it actually is strongly rooted in the Arabic sound world, since it is one of the main maqams for the call to prayer (Farraj & Shumays 2019: 217). In *Kuku lala*, the downward movement of the melody in the part of the kiongozi seems to offer a sonic figuration of the message that the chicken should crouch down, and can thus be seen as musical mimesis (Figure 23):<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Although the melody sung is quite ad libitum rhythmically, the reader may wish to feel an underlying 12/8 time signature.





Figure 23. Downward melodic movement in *kiongozi* part

The answer of the chorus, “the hawk is coming,” is centered around the tonic, or the central note of the *maqam*, suggesting it is the hawk (the man) who is the center of the (musical) universe. Also, the minor second interval used to cover the word *kipanga* creates extra tension in that word, making the image of the hawk more menacing (Figure 24):



Figure 24. Minor second interval covering the word *kipanga*

Another *unyago* song, *Naliparamanda*, teaches the bride that wherever she may run and hide, her husband’s desire will follow her. Over the basic time-line pattern, again consisting of four groups of triplets, organized into larger cycles of four time-line patterns, the following call and response unfolds:

***Kiongozi:***

*We ukenda shamba utamkuta ee*

*We ukenda shamba utamkuta*

*Ukenda Shangani untamkuta*

*Ukenda Malindi utamkuta*

*Na li nyama gani hilo!*

***Leader:***

If you go to the countryside you will meet him

If you go to the countryside you will meet him

If you go to Shangani<sup>60</sup> you will meet him

If you go to Malindi<sup>61</sup> you will meet him

What kind of beast is that!

<sup>60</sup> Shangani is a western neighborhood in Stone Town.

<sup>61</sup> Malindi is a northern neighborhood of Stone Town.

**Kiitikio:**

*Na li paramanda ukenda mbio lita-  
kuganda*<sup>59</sup>

**Chorus:**

Even when you run it will stick to  
you

The “beast” referred to in this song stands for the penis of the husband: to whichever district in Stone Town or beyond the bride may run, she will not be able to avoid her husband’s desire, and will need to deal with it (for an illustration of *how* she is expected to handle his desire, see below). Thus, this song socializes the bride into the idea that sex is an essential, unavoidable part of marriage, and that it is her husband’s desire that prevails.

The two examples above, *Kuku lala* and *Naliparamanda*, are thus examples of the outside performance of male sexual agency and female passivity. Openly, it is performed that it is the man who takes the initiative in the sexual relationship. A good Zanzibari wife will then respond to her husband’s desire and ensure that his needs are met. The sexual needs of the husband and the wifely duty to satisfy them is humorously expressed in the following msanja song text, mentioned in the opening vignette of this chapter:

*Baba wakiume hawanuni waongo*

Husbands don’t sulk over misunderstandings

*Jua likitua lakudunda la mgongo*<sup>62</sup>

[because] when the sun sets it [the penis] knocks you in the back

As the singers explained, in rural Zanzibar houses often have very narrow beds so even when a woman is lying with her back towards her husband, it is impossible to ignore his erect penis; the fact that the husbands referred to in this song do not sulk implies that their sexual needs will be met once the sun goes down. It does not matter whether or not the woman is in the mood, the song implies that to keep her husband happy, she should satisfy his sexual needs. As shown in the opening vignette of this chapter, Hadija has already explained this: “Your husband can be unhappy in the morning, unhappy in the afternoon, but not unhappy in the evening!” The same message is expressed in the following lyrics:

<sup>59</sup> Bi Kidude, 2009. *Unyago*. Sauti za Zanzibar Studio.

<sup>62</sup> Lyrics collected in Jambiani, June 9, 2019.

*Baba wakiume hawanuni*

Husbands don't sulk

*Jua likitua wanajichekesha  
wanataka mlale*<sup>63</sup>

When the sun sets they amuse themselves [as] they want to sleep with her [his wife]

These two songs starting with *Baba wakiume*... thus refer to the wifely virtue of pleasuring her husband and taking care of his needs: the duty of a good Swahili wife is to have sex with her husband, even if they have been arguing during the day.

In this chapter, I have presented an analysis of various songs that are an expression of Zanzibari gendered morality. In both *msanja* and *unyago* songs, norms and values can be found that are essential for a bride to know. The ways in which women singing these songs teach a bride-to-be how to be a 'good Zanzibari wife' include either asserting the normative state of affairs, or evoking an unwanted image and criticizing that image. I have shown songs that articulate that a 'good Zanzibari wife' should be modest, keep to herself, take care of the domestic environment, take care of guests, make sure her husband is comfortable, not rely on her mother's cooking anymore, be prepared for her husband's sexual advances, and be available and willing to satisfy his desire. But as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, real life seldom looks like the prescribed ideal. The following chapter deals with the vulnerability of the norm, by focusing on ambiguity in songs, and the potentiality that emerges from that.

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<sup>63</sup> Jambiani, June 9, 2019.

## 4. Walking the Line: Secrecy and Ambiguity as Discursive Potentiality

*Mpanda waya oya eeeee*  
*Mpanda waya oeeeeee*  
*Na wangindo wajiri kuteremka*<sup>64</sup>

Walker of the line, oya eeeee  
Walker of the line oeeeeee  
And the Ngindo people are able to  
descend

*Mpanda waya* is an unyago song with multiple semantic layers. It directly addresses the young woman for whom the unyago is performed as a ‘walker of the line,’ because she is walking the metaphorical line from the outside to the inside, from uninitiated to initiated, from un-knowing to being in the know. The choice of the word *mpanda*, which is a noun derived from the verb *kupanda*, is especially salient, since the song at once makes potential reference to three meanings of this verb: “to climb socially,” referring to the change of status of the young woman; “to climb literally,” referring to climbing on a wire or rope; and “to mount sexually,” referring to the sexual techniques taught during an unyago ritual (Biersteker 1991: 76). Thus, the young woman is a social climber, because she is transitioning from being a single woman to about-to-be-married. She is also a rope climber, climbing a metaphorical rope, which stands for the knowledge needed for married life—a rope that the *Wangindo*, the Ngindo people from mainland Tanzania from whom this song originates, are able to descend according to the lyrics. And finally, she is suggested to learn the movements to climb/mount her husband for sexual intercourse: so she is a ‘husband climber.’ Thus, the young woman is walking the line in different ways.

In January 2020, I recorded this song with Bi Salama, Furaha and Akina in Salama’s house in Raha Leo, a neighborhood in Ng’ambo in Zanzibar City. When we were done recording it, Bi Salama told me: “Wewe unapanda waya. Siyo wote.” (You are also walking the line. Just not all the way). I understood her use of the verb *kupanda* (“unapanda,” you are walking/climbing) as referring to the second meaning as outlined above: climbing the metaphorical rope which leads to knowledge—knowledge about unyago songs in my case. Bi

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<sup>64</sup> Zanzibar City, January 4, 2020.

Salama thus expressed that I was in the process of learning and understanding more about unyago, but that I would not get to know everything.

This chapter deals with the different hermeneutic levels of ‘walking the line’ in unyago and msanja. This chapter examines how the ambiguity of the Swahili language, and its use in unyago and msanja songs, creates potentiality, as in the example of *kupanda* above, which enables Zanzibari women to say things without actually saying them. It discusses different options for equivocal communication available to women. Furthermore, it explores how women carefully construct and guard a realm of secret knowledge—knowledge that is only available to those who have ‘walked the line’—which allows them to challenge notions of vulnerability and power. Throughout, the chapter confronts the possibilities and limitations of walking the line as a researcher, as Bi Salama so distinctly expressed to me.

## Walking the semantic line: semantic opacity in the Swahili language

Swahili poetry is famous for its multiple meanings, double entendres, and play on words. There is often a *Kiswahili cha ndani*, an internal Swahili, consisting of the inner meanings of words and expressions that lie beyond the actual written words (see also Thompson 2018: 8). One of the women I work with told me: “Things are never what they seem in Zanzibar,” and this adage is applicable to the use of language itself too. Linguist Jan Knappert has termed the Swahili language as the perfect tool for poetry in his work on the history and interpretation of Swahili verse (1979), and with good reason.

As in most languages, there is an underspecification of terms (Beck 2005: 140), which means that many words have more than one potential meaning or can mean different things at the same time. An example of this is found in pun-poems, didactic poems used by Swahili people to teach youngsters the Swahili language. Knappert presents the following pun-poem which exemplifies this. In this poem, one word, *kaa*, has four different meanings:

*Kaa ni kaa la moto, liwakalo na  
kuzima*

Kaa is the coal of the fire, which  
burns and goes out

*Kaa mnazi mtoto, ambao usougema*

Kaa is a baby coconut tree, from  
which you have not tapped wine

*Kaa ukae kitako, utuze wako mtima*

Kaa is sit down and rest, reward  
your heart

*Kaa, sikutaki tena, kwangu  
usiniyilye<sup>65</sup>*

Kaa [scram!] I don’t want you  
again, don’t come to me

<sup>65</sup> Poem from Knappert 1979: 41, translation my own.

This aptitude for double entendres (or rather, multiple entendres as in the example above) of the Swahili language, and Swahili poetry in particular, has led to its reputation of being “unexpectedly difficult to penetrate” (Knappert 1979: xi).

The Swahili language is a Bantu language, but with a hybrid history since its formation during the first millennium AD due to contact with the Arab-Islamic world. During this time, Swahili incorporated “thousands of Arabic words, which were fitted into the Bantu system of noun classes and verb categories. The result was a totally new linguistic structure, that evolved along its own lines and blossomed forth into a wealth of forms, uniquely suitable to become the vehicle of a great epic tradition” (Knappert 1979: xvii). As linguist Alamin Mazrui has noted, this hybridity of the Swahili language is ontologically essential, and in recent years the concept of hybridity has become more relevant, because of “the realization that it has the potential to counter certain historical claims of identitarian politics, especially of the colonial kind” (2007: 1). Not only does hybridity have the potential to obscure and subvert the colonizer’s obsession with binaries; in recent years there has also been a shift in understanding *how* the Swahili hybridity came into being. Instead of seeing it as the result of Arab-Islamic imposition of linguistic elements onto the Bantu recipient, it is now regarded as the result of mutual adjustment (Mazrui 2007: 15). The current Swahili language is thus an interplay of an indigenous Bantu system, Islamic legacy, and more recently, Western impact. This intercultural heritage has contributed to the language’s richness and potential for creativity.

In his analysis of taarab songs on the topic of love for example, linguist Said Khamis shows the sheer number of possible images available to the Swahili taarab poet: “objects, concepts, figures of speech, tropes, symbols and icons to create the appropriate images for different facets of love, love processes and love situations” (2004a: 61). Some of these images are derived from local concepts, such as *nanasi* (pineapple), others are a result of the cultural exchange that has taken place over the centuries between East Africa and the Arab world, India, and Persia, such as *mwezi* (moon), which is of Arabic origin. Yet other concepts are derived from cultural exchange with Europe, such as *kibiriti* (match) and *masidi* (a Mercedes car).

Furthermore, the use of proverbs and sayings in daily Swahili communication is widespread, providing a further source of equivocation. Many Zanzibari spice up their colloquial communications with sayings and proverbs, sometimes only having to articulate the first few words of a proverb, as once a woman waiting in line behind me at the post office in Shangani proclaimed at my visible impatience: “*haraka, haraka...*”. The full saying she was alluding to is *Haraka haraka haina baraka*, which can be translated as “hurry hurry

has no blessing”. By simply saying the first two words she reminded me to remain patient and not get worked up.<sup>66</sup>

And finally, Swahili discourse surrounding *Kiswahili cha ndani* sustains semantic pluralism in itself: Swahili speakers rely on the common notion of ambiguity in their everyday use of language, both the addresser and the addressee knowing very well that what has been said can be interpreted in a variety of ways, thus building layer upon communicative layer. Semantic opacity and ambiguity give people, and especially women, in Zanzibar the opportunity so say something without actually saying it.

This means that interpretations of poems, songs or proverbs for native Swahili speakers are not necessarily uniform: different people may ascribe different meanings to a particular phrase. This, in turn, has consequences for the researcher trying to unpack the different layers of any given song text. Consider the following msanja lyrics:

<i>Mwanangu mdogo mtunzie moyo</i>	My small child, take care of the heart
<i>Ufunde machicha kayaacha</i>	Pound the husks that it leaves
<i>Chukua ufagie ukumbe<sup>67</sup></i>	Take a broom and sweep

*Mwanangu* is an aggregation of the words *mwana*, child, and *wangu*, mine. *Mwana* can refer to both boys and girls, so the song creates potentiality for multiple interpretations right from the beginning. *Machicha* refers to coconut husks, and they can be pounded to make soap, but the process is rather messy and leaves flakes everywhere. Trying to find out what the deeper meaning of the song is by engaging in dialogue with my interlocutors, I encountered several different explications, and once even only an acknowledgement of the complexity of its message. One of my interlocutors simply told me: “It is a complicated metaphor,” but she was not sure what it was a metaphor for. One of my male research contacts provided the following translation and interpretation: the child in the song is a young girl, who is not being raised by her mother, perhaps because the mother has no funds to raise her child herself. In the song, the mother asks the person who is taking care of her daughter to be gentle with her, and to teach her all the things a girl must know, such as how to take care of the house, husband, children, etc. If she makes a mistake and does not clean up, she should be shown how to do it properly. Another one of my research contacts, an older woman, explained to me that this is a song about men needing to do housework as well—the word *mwana* may refer to both son and daughter, but she was absolutely adamant it meant son here. Thus this song would be an instruction for a husband to take care of his wife’s heart and clean up after himself. Since msanja is primarily aimed at women who are

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<sup>66</sup> I am not suggesting that Swahili is unique in the use of proverbs and shortening them in daily life, but simply wish to point out the widespread use in this context.

<sup>67</sup> Jambiani, January 9, 2020.

going to get married, I would more specifically understand her interpretation as a message to the bride that she can and should expect her husband to take part in domestic chores, too, as this is part of a loving relationship. So, depending on who is listening to this song, or reading its lyrics, the interpretation differs—perhaps unsurprisingly so, since men and women have different agendas when it comes to domestic chores.

## Concealment and discretion

On top of semantic opacity inherent to the Swahili language, two concepts potentially further obfuscate communication: Zanzibari ethics of concealment, and Islamic ideals of discretion (Thompson 2011).

Zanzibari ethics of concealment most commonly refers to the fact that personal, emotional, or sexual matters are never to be discussed openly, and it underlies most Zanzibari social behavior (Thompson 2011: 5, Larsen 2008: 51-52). As noted in Chapter 3, self-restraint and modesty are important in all areas of life. Zanzibari do not talk openly about personal and emotional issues, and what goes on inside a marriage should stay *ndani*: inside, hidden. When a Zanzibari experiences problems in their marriage, these should not be discussed with others. Sexual matters, positive or negative, should not be spoken about publicly either. This applies to both men and women, though some authors have argued that there is a stronger imperative for women to remain silent, calm, and in control of one's emotions (Hirsch 1998, Beck 2005, Beckmann 2015). These authors argue that while both men and women are expected to keep private matters to themselves, especially women will be scolded for being too brazen. Swahili women should maintain *heshima*, respectability, in their speech and actions, by speaking softly, being polite, and expressing deference to those who are older or higher in status. Moreover, Swahili women's speech is dismissed as having low status, being merely gossip, tales, or even dangerous. As anthropologist Susan Hirsch notes in her work on Swahili women in coastal Kenya:

The beliefs about speech .... suggest that the prototype devalued speaker in Swahili culture is a woman, specifically a woman who tells tales. .... Emphasis on the trivial and potentially fictional quality of women's speech merges with emphasis on its dangerous and disruptive qualities to create the impression that women's speech is suspect, not to be counted on, and to be suppressed when it gets too close to home, literally (Hirsch 1998: 67)

The imperative for especially Zanzibari women to keep things *ndani* is also reflected in some wedding songs. Consider the following *msanja* song text:



*Najambo sijambo usiende kusema  
kwa mama yako kuna badiria  
utakuja kufa wewe na mama*<sup>68</sup>

Don't go tell your mama [because]  
there is a medicine that will make  
you and your mama die

These lyrics are a powerful assertion of Zanzibari ethics of concealment: it alludes to the bride's relationship with her mother, to ensure that she does not air her dirty laundry. It teaches the bride not to disclose anything personal, even to her own mother. If she does talk, not only she herself will be affected, but her own mother will die, too. Alluding to people's closest relationships with loved ones is of course a very powerful discursive tool to ensure secrecy, even more so than threatening one's own life or sanity.

In addition, as I have come to discover during my fieldwork, an ethics of concealment may be expected in *any* kind of social interaction. As one of my main research contacts put it: "This is Zanzibar. You *have* to tell lies sometimes. Or keep things a secret." There are many visible, but even more invisible ties and relationships, and it can be very tricky not to step on someone's toes. It is challenging to get to know, and keep up to date with, all connections, friendships, feuds, and latest relational developments.

That these ethics of concealment also affect a researcher in Zanzibar, especially one who is interested in private and sexual matters, should come as no surprise. Below is a brief excerpt from my fieldnotes that illustrates how people shape the truth and adhere to these ethics of concealment to avoid getting in trouble or to avoid damaging social ties:

Tuesday 10 December 2019. I am meeting Mariam at 3 pm in her house in Kisiuandui, Zanzibar City. I have arrived this morning after a night flight, so this first meeting will be to make a plan for the next few weeks. I ring her doorbell, and she opens the door for me. I enter the ground floor sitting room, which is empty, and see her at the top of the stairs. "Karibu!" she calls out. She is wearing a faded batik dress with short sleeves and no hijab, and bath slippers on her feet. To open the door for me she didn't show herself in public (of course): she can open her front door with a rope from upstairs. *I think she trusts me enough to not "dress up" and that she feels comfortable. I am happy that I am considered safe enough to be part of her "at home," inside life.*

I receive a warm welcome, she seems happy to see me and inquires about my family's health. She complains about the heat, and I agree. We exchange pleasantries for half an hour or so, and then discuss the various interviews and performances that are coming up. Mariam tells me that Bi Muhimu, a nyakanga who lives in Zanzibar City, has been impatiently waiting for me to arrive on the island. *When I was in Zanzibar the last time (June 2019) Mariam had given me her contact details, and I exchanged messages with Bi Muhimu on WhatsApp briefly. I was meant to meet her, but on the day of our appointment, Bi Muhimu did not respond to my repeated queries where I could meet her and went silent, so I could not meet up with her back then. A few weeks before my*

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<sup>68</sup> Jambiani, June 9, 2019.

*current trip to Zanzibar I told her on WhatsApp I was coming again, and this time she responded and said that she would be there. Apparently she and Mariam have discussed my arrival. Mariam tells me Bi Muhimu wants 150 USD for giving me information and thinks I can't forego visiting her.*

Then Mariam tells me that tomorrow, Wednesday, at 3 pm, we will go and visit two older women in Ng'ambo who know "a lot about unyago." They have been initiated themselves. Mariam says I will be able to record them singing, and take photos. She tells me I will need to pay them, between Tsh 30,000 and 60,000 per person,<sup>69</sup> depending on the information they give me. When I tell her that this is fine, she takes her phone and tells me she will now call Aisha, who is the granddaughter of one of the women and who will take us there. *I think Mariam needed my confirmation that I will pay the women before finalizing the appointment. Mariam leaves the sitting room and goes into her private sitting room so I cannot follow the conversation.* When she comes back, she informs me that Aisha has told her employer she is sick and needs to go to hospital – so she can leave work early to be with us from 3 pm. *Why was the appointment arranged at 3 pm instead of after Aisha's regular working hours? Was the appointment already scheduled with the older women? Or is it so we can be back before dark?* I tell Mariam that I hope Aisha will not get in trouble for telling her employer she is sick. Mariam says: "This is Zanzibar, you have to tell lies sometimes. Or keep things a secret." Not that she would tell lies to hurt anyone, she added, but sometimes you can't avoid telling a lie. She then proceeds to tell me that if Bi Muhimu calls her to inquire about me she will say that I am very tired and that she hasn't seen me yet. I tell Mariam that that is good to know and that I will go along with what she thinks is best.

In the excerpt above, Aisha and Mariam adhere to an ethics of concealment, rather than being direct, and Mariam explicitly expresses the need for keeping things a secret in Zanzibar. This in turn affects my interaction with others too. Moreover, it affects my interpretation, since I cannot assume that the information shared with me can be taken at face value.

On top of this Zanzibari ethics of concealment, communication is restricted by Islamic ideals of discretion (Thompson 2011: 5-6). Islam is a religion that is inherently positive about sex (in the marital sphere) and promotes both pleasure for men and women during sexual intercourse. But, as Muslim feminist scholar Kecia Ali points out, there is a difference in perspective on women's sexual needs between classical key Islamic texts and more contemporary authors: "Classical texts note the importance of female fulfillment, but usually focus on the discord-producing effects of female dissatisfaction (the potential for social *fitna* [chaos]) while stressing the wives' duty to remain sexually available to their husbands," while more contemporary authors stress women's sexual rights by focusing on the importance of female pleasure and orgasm (Ali 2016: 6-7). Although the Qur'an and hadith allude to female satisfaction and see it as the husband's duty to satisfy his wife, to prevent her

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<sup>69</sup> Roughly between 12 and 25 US dollars (as of October 1, 2020).

from wreaking social havoc, Ali stresses that according to Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), sex largely remains a male right and a female duty. While sex is seen as a natural and important part of marriage, discretion is key. Ali summarizes it as the “don’t ask, don’t tell” principle: “The two most salient [theological and juridical] principles are that one should not expose sinful behavior, whether one’s own or another’s, and that it is a greater offence to deny certain rules than to break them” (2016: 99). Although the sinful behavior she refers to in this context is same-sex encounters, the ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ principle extends to sins (that are not crimes) in general: “it is part and parcel of a general insistence on not attempting to pursue potentially incriminating information about one’s fellow Muslims or to disclose it about oneself” (Ali 2016: 106). This means that it is considered worse to openly refer to ‘breaking the rules’ than it is to actually break them.

## Spaces of equivocal communication

This does not mean that talk about sex and other private matters does not form an important part of Zanzibari daily discourse—it just has to happen equivocally. Apart from marriage, which is an inside realm, there are several outside spaces in which discourse about love and sex is exercised.

One such space is the realm of kanga.<sup>70</sup> colorful printed fabrics that come in pairs. They usually have an image in the center, a continuous border design along all four borders, and a proverb or saying printed on one border. Designs may include floral prints, Rajasthani inspired patterns, geometric prints, and everyday household objects, and some even depict political figures to commemorate a special day (Moon Ryan 2018). For example, the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States in 2008 prompted the production of kanga with a picture of Obama in the center and the text *Upendo na amani ametujalia Mungu*: God has blessed us with love and peace. Kanga play a role in women’s interpersonal communication in two ways: women may wear a certain kanga as a communicative sign, and women may gift a kanga to another woman to send her a message (for example, as a wedding gift). Kanga are an excellent means of saying something and saying nothing at the same time, and as such are embedded in Zanzibari ethics of concealment. One of the kanga I have collected over the years for example, reads: *Kuyaona ninayaona lakini kuyajibu siwezi*: As for seeing it, I see it, but as for what to answer, I don’t know. This particular one may mean “I have noticed you are interested in me but I can’t do anything about it.” The woman sending this message by wearing it (or gifting it) might be already engaged or married to someone, or her parents are opposed to this man’s proposal.<sup>71</sup> To engage

<sup>70</sup> The plural and the singular of the word kanga have the same form.

<sup>71</sup> Personal communication with Abdulaziz Lodhi, February 15, 2019.

openly with another suitor's interest would be immoral, but through kanga a woman can respond within a socially accepted framework. As linguist Rose Marie Beck has argued, the ambiguity associated with kanga communication is exactly what makes kanga so powerful: "One of the central features of communication with the kanga is its immense possibility to equivocate, to leave ambiguous or even to render unclear whether the addressing party actually did communicate or not, whether the addressed got the message or not, what was meant, what the inscription referred to and to whom, etc. This makes the genre particularly powerful, because the implicit aspects are focused in the process of the interpretation and construction of meaning" (2005: 138). Women can even communicate that they do not want to communicate, by wearing the kanga upside down, hiding its script in the folds around the waist. *Not* communicating is impossible, because even when a woman hides the script, she is still choosing to wear that particular kanga—thereby making a statement about *not* communicating its message. This is due to the fact that even though the words are invisible, the pattern is not.

On kanga, the patterns and colors of the fabric are linked to the written proverb or saying printed on the border. For example, one of the kanga in my collection reads *Wapenzi hawagombani pasi na fitina mtaani*: Lovers don't fight, it is the gossip of the neighborhood. The kanga saying is thus a warning against street gossip, which could potentially harm the lovers' relationship. The colors of this kanga are red and white, and in the middle there is a depiction of a rosewater sprinkler, which is used to sprinkle cool scented rosewater around the house or on visitors, and can be given as a wedding gift. This old custom is widespread in countries around the Indian Ocean. The image of the rosewater sprinkler alludes to the potential soothing quality of rosewater, which could help to heal a lovers' quarrel. Message and image are interconnected. Thus, even if the words are obscured by wearing them out of view, people will still be able to deduct what the message is—or, more precisely in this case, what message the woman is stating not to convey.



Figure 25. Women dancing shindwe on the beach in Jambiani, making statements by wearing kanga, June 2019.

Furthermore, kanga play a role in sex instruction. During unyago ngoma, women tie a kanga around their hips to emphasize the movements made during kukata kiuno (to cut the waist), the hip-gyrating movement that is said to train women in pleasure-enhancing movements during sexual intercourse. A kanga rolled up and tied around the hips emphasizes the rolling motion and helps the bride learn the correct movements.

Another popular realm of equivocal interpersonal communication is taarab, a musical style from the coastal area of East Africa, which is often performed at weddings and other celebrations. The name taarab comes from the Arabic word *tarabun*, which means joy, pleasure, delight, entertainment, and music (Askew 2002: 102). The term *tarabun* thus doesn't signify a specific musical genre, but rather a state of mind provoked by the music. This also applies to the term taarab as it is used in Zanzibar. Two important features of traditional taarab are its strict adherence to poetical structure, and the use of metaphors. This use of metaphor enables semantic opacity and pluralism—which, in turn, is why taarab is an excellent platform for social commentary. Consider part of the lyrics of the following song, *Mpewa hapokonyeki*, by the taarab group Culture Musical Club:<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Song recorded and lyrics collected during previous fieldwork in 2009-2010, translation my own with the help of my Zanzibari Swahili teacher Bi Josephine.

1.

*Aliepewa kapewa, naapa haponyeki*

*Kwa alichajaaliwa, wallahi hapunguziki*

*Kwake ukilia ngowa, unajipatisha diki*

What has been given has been given, it can't be taken away  
What he has been blessed with, by Allah, it can't be reduced  
If you feel jealous, you are only giving yourself a hard time

*(Kiitikio)*

*Mpewa hapokonyeki, aliyepewa kapewa*

*Wewe ukufanya chuki, bure unajisumbua*

*(Chorus)*

What has been given can't be taken away, who has been given has been given  
When you are feeling hatred, you are only troubling yourself

2.

*Mola ndiye atoe, akawapa mahuluki*

*Humpa amtae, ambaye humbariki*

*Na kila amnyimae, kupata hatodiriki*

God is the one who gives, and He gives to many people  
He gives to whom He likes, to whom He blesses  
And everyone He doesn't give to, will never get it

3.

*Mola hutuo hidaya, tafauti na riziki*

*Kwa anomtukia, huwa ndiyo yake haki*

*Na asie mtakia, huwa si yake haki*

God gives gifts, different from our daily bread  
For the one He rewards, that is what he deserves  
And for whom He doesn't want it, that one doesn't deserve it

4.

*Wa tisa humpa tisa, wa moja haongezeki*

*Alomnyima kabisa, pindi akitaharuki*

*Hubakia na kulia, na kulia kama nyuki*

He gives many to the ones who deserve it, the one who deserves a little He doesn't increase  
For the one He doesn't give anything at all, if that one gets worried He keeps crying, and crying like a bee

The topic of this song is being content with what you get in life, and not feeling envy toward others. You get what you deserve, and if you do not get it, it means you do not deserve it. The generality and semantic pluralism of the lyrics render them applicable to multiple people in multiple situations and relations. The meaning of a song is rendered clearer during a performance of it, when people (mostly women) practice *kutunza*, literally “to reward.” This refers to the practice of tipping. As I noted during previous fieldwork in Zanzibar in 2009 and 2010, during a performance, when someone in the audience hears a song that he or she likes, or that is considered appropriate for oneself or another person in the audience, they can move forward towards the stage. While dancing in front of the stage, he or she waves a note of money around, and eventually delivers it to the singer. This can be done with a lot of arm gestures and hip movements, and by giving the person for whom the song is meant a meaningful look, so that there can be no doubt this other person gets the message. So, during a performance of this particular song, a woman may practice *kutunza*, while giving another woman—whom everyone knows is after her husband—a meaningful look, warning her to stop chasing her husband, letting her know that her husband is and remains her husband (Hulshof 2011a). Thus, the lyrics of a *taarab* song may be general or subject to multiple interpretations, and specificity is generated during a performance when women practice *kutunza*.

It should also be noted here, that *not* tipping during a *taarab* performance may send a message as well—much like *not* showing the proverb on one’s *kanga*. I once attended a *taarab* concert at the Serena Hotel in Stone Town by an ad hoc *taarab* group consisting of one of my friends and main research contacts, Matona, and several of his colleagues from the Dhow Countries Music Academy, among them a young Norwegian woman. During this performance, which was for Zanzibari as well as expats living in town (hence a very close-knit community), Matona’s Dutch wife made it a point to go to the front and tip the group a couple of times, because, as she told me “otherwise everybody is going to think that I am jealous that he is playing with her.” As with hiding the script of a *kanga* as mentioned above, *not* sending a message by *not* tipping would be sending a message as well.

However, while *kanga* and *taarab* are powerful systems of communication, for some authors their equivocality and indirectness are a confirmation of the hegemonic gendered power relations in Zanzibari daily life. By communicating through discourse created by others (*kanga* sayings or *taarab* lyrics often created by men) rather than their own, women’s speech remains subordinate and passive. According to Rose Marie Beck, women’s use of equivocal communication denies their own discursive agency because women do not (have to) take responsibility for their communicative acts. To Beck, the realm of *kanga* confirms women’s subordinate position in society, since there is no overt questioning or subversion of power relations though this medium (2005). Rather, women are to make use of a culturally appropriate tool for

expressing themselves, a tool that comes from, and is still embedded in, a patriarchal society.

Anthropologist Katrina Thompson also sees this type of equivocality in female speech as a perpetuation of gendered language restrictions: “Thus, while *kanga* allow women to communicate about sex without violating ideals of female sexual discretion, their own agency, both sexual and discursive, is denied” (2011b: 7). She does offer women’s verbal communication on *popobawa* as a means of challenging these gendered speech prohibitions. *Popobawa* is a giant bat-winged demon, who has been said to sexually assault people at night in Zanzibar. *Popobawa* has been present in Zanzibari discourse since at least the 1960s, and attacks occur periodically in both Pemba and Unguja, the two main islands making up the Zanzibar archipelago, and lead to periods of collective panic. Thompson presents an analysis of women’s discourse on *popobawa* attacks and supernatural sex and sees this talk as potentially transformative in Swahili society: “unlike nonverbal communication, which merely subverts speech prohibitions, women’s talk about supernatural sex openly violates them and thus has the potential to play a more transformative role in society, allowing women to position themselves not only as discursive but also sexual agents” (2011b: 16).

Likewise, I understand unyago and msanja songs as a sounding challenge of existing power relations. Through their conceptualization (by women) and their performance (for women) I see unyago and msanja ngoma songs as sites of transformation and contestation by virtue of their semantic pluralism and secrecy. Ambiguity here is not a denial of agency, but rather a *potentiality*. I will discuss this further in the following section.

## Walking the line: ambiguity as potentiality

The ambiguity in many unyago and msanja songs renders them powerful as a source of transformation and subversion of existing power relations. Consider the unyago song *Mpanda waya* again ([Track 06](#)):<sup>73</sup>

<i>Mpanda waya oya eeeee</i>	Walker of the line, oya eeeee
<i>Mpanda waya oeeeeee</i>	Walker of the line oeeeeee
<i>Na wangindo wajiri kuteremka</i>	And the Ngindo people are able to descend

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, *Mpanda waya* marks a transition of the young woman for whom the unyago ngoma is being performed. The young woman is framed as a ‘walker of the line,’ because she is walking

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<sup>73</sup> <https://uppsala.box.com/s/5saj5gj5rnb0mj0xctn0r987k2rs32>



the metaphorical line from nje, outside, to ndani, inside, from uninitiated to initiated, from un-knowing to being in the know, from unmarried to married.

Since this song is introduced when the unyago ngoma is in full progress, its basic time-line rhythmic structure is a continuation of the typical unyago drum pattern:

⑫ x..x..x..x..

This basic pattern is then grouped in larger patterns of 4 cycles:

⑫ [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..]

The song starts with an instrumental introduction, performed by all three drums, vumi, kinganga and msondo—the vumi playing the reference beat, i.e., the first beat of each group of triplets, the kinganga playing the elementary pulsation, and the msondo either doubling the elementary pulsation or creating a fill at the end of each cycle, leading towards the first note of the next cycle. At the start of the song, the elementary pulsation creates a continuous, flowing auditory landscape, and the end of the instrumental introduction becomes clearly audible when the msondo performs a rhythmic cadenza in hemiola form, as illustrated in bars 7 and 8 in Figure 26:



Figure 26. Instrumental introduction of mpanda waya

Hereafter, the basic structure can be transcribed as follows:

⑫ [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..]

Over this time-line pattern, the following call and response unfolds:

**Kiongozi:***We, mpanda waya mpanda waya***Kiitikio:***Waya oyeeee***Kiongozi:***Mpanda waya mpanda waya***Kiitikio:***Waya oyeeee**Na Wangindo wajiri kuteremka***Leader:**

You, walker of the line, walker of the line

**Chorus:**

The line, oyeeee

**Leader:**

Walker of the line, walker of the line

**Chorus:**

The line, oyeeee

And the Ngindo people are able to descend

The song is set in maqam *Ajam muadil* starting on b (Figure 27):



Figure 27. Maqam *Ajam muadil*

However, something unusual happens in the melody in the first line of the second chorus (Figure 28):



Figure 28. A# outside *Ajam muadil* framework

Note the a# leading to the tonic b', thereby going 'outside' of *Ajam muadil*'s regular framework. To me, this unusual note has two effects. First, the a# fills the whole tone gap between the tonic b' and the note leading up to it (the a'), thereby anchoring the tonic b'. Second, since the a# is not part of *Ajam muadil*'s regular framework and only occurs here, and not elsewhere in the song, it creates extra interest and draws the ear in. While the a# appears as a passing note, and thus may not be structurally significant, it still colors the maqam in a different way than what would be expected.

Furaha, one of the performers, explains the meaning of the lyrics:

The meaning is that the Wangindo climb a wire, and then descend [into] the witchcraft<sup>74</sup> of unyago. There is a wire that you are wanted to climb and then to descend if you are not a Ngindo, for example people from Tanga are able to descend.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, the phrase *mpanda waya* can be translated as ‘walker of the line,’ the young woman who is walking the line, from outside to inside, from uninitiated to initiated, and as such is connected to one of the meanings of the verb *kupanda*, to climb socially: she will become an initiated woman. On another level the meaning of *mpanda waya* is connected to another meaning of the verb *kupanda*: to climb literally, as explained by Furaha above. The young woman has to climb the magic wire and then descend again, as the Ngindo people are able to do, and then she will descend into the magic (or, witchcraft) of unyago. So while the translation here refers to climbing a wire literally, the meaning is much more profound: by climbing this wire, and then descending again, she will descend *into the magic of unyago*. As one of my interlocutors explained, the magic of unyago, or the magic wire, seems first to refer to sexual stimulation for the woman (though not literally, as nothing is inserted into the vagina in terms of objects such as a stick by means of practice) as she is taught about her own pleasure and how to stimulate herself. And finally, the magic wire acts as a metaphorical representation of the penis that will be climbed/mounted (*kupanda*) during sex. Thus, the phrase *mpanda waya* is connected to a third meaning of *kupanda*: to mount sexually.

The reference to secret knowledge/witchcraft in this song, combined with the semantic pluralism found in the verb *kupanda*, enable it to be performed openly, whilst at the same time evoking ambiguity and conjuring up power associated with ambiguity.

My understanding of ambiguity as potentiality, as a source of possible de-ordering and re-ordering, is based on anthropologist Mary Douglas’ work on ambiguity and anomaly. Anomaly and ambiguity (she treats both as concepts not “passing the filter”) do not fit a given classification. Anything that does not fit in the standard pattern of assumptions and/or is open for multiple interpretations is unsettling, since it is human nature to long for clear lines, classifications, structure, and clarity. This is not to say that dealing with ambiguity is necessarily an unpleasant experience, since in poetry, and other art forms, ambiguity is a source of richness, as it deepens the experience of an art-work.

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<sup>74</sup> The word she uses in the original in Swahili is *kimizungu*, which is derived from *mzungu*, white person. It refers to technological inventions associated with white people, such as a plane flying in the air, but which also *could* be explained as witchcraft.

<sup>75</sup> “Maanayake wangindo wapande waya halafu wateremke kimizungu ya unyago. Kuna waya unafunwa uupande halafu uteremke siwangindo tu kwa mfano nawatanga wajire kuteremka.” WhatsApp communication with Furaha, August 30, 2020.

As Douglas puts it: “The richness of poetry depends on the use of ambiguity.... Aesthetic pleasure arises from the perceiving of inarticulate forms” (2001: 38). But ambiguity does create a tension within the normal ordering of things, a source of potential re-ordering that must be dealt with. *How* the resulting tension changes anything is relatively easy to see in terms of individual experience: “we can deliberately confront the anomaly and try to create a new pattern of reality in which it has a place. It is not impossible for an individual to revise his own personal scheme of classifications” (Douglas 2001: 39-40). Individuals can thus re-evaluate their ideas, or choose to ignore the anomaly altogether. It becomes more complicated for culture at large: “A private person may revise his patterns of assumptions or not. It is a private matter. But cultural categories are public matters. They cannot so easily be subject to revision” (Douglas 2001: 40). And yet any culture *has* to come up with ways of dealing with de-ordering events and forms. One such way is to come up with a space to incorporate anomaly into structure at large: ritual. In ritual, ambiguity is used to enrich, much like in poetry. Anomaly is not shunned. In ritual, anomaly can exist alongside the given classification, because the ritual frame ensures that the normal ordering of things is not threatened by these anomalies. While it is problematic in the normal ordering of things, within the ritual framework anomaly is not shunned. On the contrary, anomaly can become potent: “Within the ritual frame the abomination is then handled as a source of tremendous power” (Douglas 2001: 166).

This is also reflected in Victor Turner’s work on ritual, *societas* and *communitas*. Turner bases his understanding of ritual on Arnold van Gennep (1909), who has shown that all rites of passage are characterized by three stages: separation, in which the initiate is detached from an earlier point in the social structure/state; liminality, in which the initiate is in an ambiguous state, passing through a realm that differs from the past or coming state; and aggregation, in which the initiate is in a stable state again and is expected to behave in certain ways. Turner understands the initiate’s position of liminality as neither here nor there, betwixt and between, ambiguous, indeterminate, and refers to the social modality of this unstructuredness as *communitas*. But the normal order of things, or *societas*, is not truly threatened by *communitas*: “Communitas cannot manipulate resources or exercise social control without changing its own nature and ceasing to be *communitas*. But, through brief revelation, it can ‘burn out’ or ‘wash away’ —whatever metaphor of purification is used—the accumulated sins and Sunderings of structure” (Turner 1969: 185). There seems to be a continuous dialogue between structure and anti-structure, in which the latter is needed to shape—but can never replace—the former: “Society (*societas*) seems to be a process rather than a thing -a dialectical process with successive phases of structure and *communitas*. There would seem to be .... a human ‘need’ to participate in both modalities” (Turner 1969: 203).

As Turner makes clear, society *needs* a “counter-modality,” an anti-structure, in order to continue to be shaped *as* a society. Ritual should thus not be

seen as separate from normal structure but existing within it, embracing and transforming the disruptive forces that may be present.

Female sexuality in Zanzibar can be regarded as such a disruptive force. Sociologist Fatima Mernissi, one of the founders of Islamic feminism, regards female sexual power as active, aggressive even, and having un-settling qualities: “The Muslim woman is endowed with a fatal attraction which erodes the male’s will to resist her and reduces him to a passive acquiescent role. He has no choice; he can only give in to her attraction, whence her identification with *fitna*, chaos, and with the anti-divine and anti-social forces of the universe” (2002: 303). According to her, veiling in Islamic societies is an attempt to neutralize this powerful capability of female sexuality to evoke *fitna*. Thus, veiling, covering, rendering something secret, is a sign of its potentiality. The ambiguous nature and semantic opacity of unyago songs make them a source of power of transformation; of the bride-to-be, as she walks the line from un-initiated to initiated, but also of the existing gendered power relations. In this light, the fact that female sexuality is celebrated in unyago and msanja songs yet suppressed and veiled in everyday Zanzibari society is a confirmation of its disruptive power.

And yet, even in unyago and msanja songs ambiguity is employed, and with good reason: “By settling for one or other interpretation, ambiguity is often reduced” (Douglas 2001: 40). Thus, strategically employing ambiguity is de-ordering, and can have an effect of redistributing power. This also applies to the larger discourse surrounding the ritual. The following excerpt from a conversation I had with Mariam illustrates this:

CH: You told me before your father did not want you to become initiated. Why was that?

Mariam: Because he was a very religious man. And people thought that you were taught lesbianism there. Or that you might become prostitutes.

CH: And what about Zanzibari men? Do they want their brides to have the inner unyago?

Mariam: Not really, because there are rumors that during this initiation women are taught to have *mafigo matatu*, three cooking stones. This means three men, three boyfriends in their lives. You can’t rely on one, you can’t rely on two, you need three for security.<sup>76</sup>

The rather emancipating idea of women having several men to make sure their needs are met that Mariam suggests here, shows how circulating stories and speculations of what really happens during an unyago initiation contribute to its power. If indeed some Zanzibari men are afraid that women will learn

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<sup>76</sup> Conversation with Mariam Hamdani, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

things that may disrupt the marital order, and thereby the gendered power relations at large, during an initiation, women have all the more motivation to continue practicing unyago and sustain the discourse of secrecy, regardless of whether or not these stories and speculations are ‘true.’

Thus, the ‘anomaly’ here is female (sexual) power, which is not only powerful inside the ritual frame, but continues to be potent in the larger framework of everyday life too. It therefore seems that the secrecy surrounding unyago and msanja, and the ambiguity found in some song texts, ensure that women can maintain the power associated with it. As anthropologist Kjersti Larsen puts it: “Knowledge perceived as a form of secrecy is potentially powerful precisely because it sustains possibilities and potentialities of transformation through reinterpretation of established orders” (2015: 233).

At times, this has led to frustrating experiences in the field, but they were enlightening too. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes illustrates a difficult meeting with a nyakanga, ritual instructor, that may have influenced access beyond this particular person:

Thursday December 12, 2019. This morning I went to see Bi Muhimu, a nyakanga that Mariam set me up with. She lives in Kikwajuni, in the Ng’ambo area in Zanzibar City. She was waiting at the entrance gate when I arrived. We exchanged the prescribed respectful Zanzibari greetings in Swahili (“*Shikamoo! Marahaba!*”), and she invited me in. We walked across the walled concrete terrace to her house. She was wearing an informal dress, patterned, with glitter applique of the kind that is popular as ‘at home’ wear these days in Zanzibar. A black and white kanga as headscarf covered her white short braided curly hair, and she was barefoot. At her entrance door I took off my shoes, and, upon her invitation, entered her front sitting room.

We talked in Swahili, sometimes interspersed with English. She told me her full name, and said she is 83 years old. She immediately got up again and disappeared behind the floral patterned curtain separating the front living room from the private spaces. When she came back a few minutes later, she showed me her birth certificate. The certificate also stated that her mother was a Makonde woman, and a *shamba* (field) laborer. *The fact that her mother was a Makonde woman interests me, since it is believed that unyago is brought to Zanzibar by Ngindo, Yao, Makua, and Makonde women during the slave trade.* I asked her if I could take a photo of it, and she said that that was no problem. Then I told her my name, my family’s names, and what I am doing in Zanzibar. *She already knew this information since she had spoken to Mariam and had apparently been waiting impatiently for my arrival.* I asked her if I could interview her and turn on my recorder. She told me: “No, wait, not yet.” I asked if I could take notes instead. Again, a negative answer: “First we talk as friends!” Then, Bi Muhimu told me about how a Canadian woman had come to her house to learn about unyago, from public to private, theory and practice—and how much she had paid. At first she said this amount was 60,000 USD, but then she amended and said “no, it was 5,000 USD”. *Mariam had already told me that Bi Muhimu would want money but this exceeded all my expectations.* She told me: “If you want the secret knowledge, you have to pay.” I told

her I would be able to offer her financial compensation but that I was surprised about these amounts. Again, she got up, more slowly and painfully this time. She disappeared behind the curtain. This time I waited longer, maybe 10 minutes. She came back with a notebook in which she had written down some notes—I could make out the words “unyago” and “msondo.”

“Carolien!” she exclaimed. “So I may have told you the wrong amount. The correct amount is 600 US dollars.” She told me: “600 dollars or nothing. For 600 dollars you can get all the inside information, but you cannot write about everything.” She emphasized how she knows a lot, and that whatever others may tell me, they are wrong. I told her I respect her profession and her knowledge and that I appreciate the secrecy of unyago—but that it put me in a difficult position since it is not my money and thus not my decision to make. I told her I would have to talk to my supervisors at my university first. Then she called in her great granddaughter. A young woman of about 16 years old dressed in a pair of kanga came in from behind the curtain and greeted me, and sat down on the chair perpendicular to mine. *I’m not sure why she called her great granddaughter—maybe to emphasize the seriousness of it?* I repeated what I had told Bi Muhimu in Swahili, now in English to her great granddaughter, and she translated it back to Bi Muhimu. *It seemed like she didn’t believe me.* She raised her voice: “You come here all the way from Sweden and you have no money? Of course you have money! They give you the money!” *I tried to be as tactful as I could, but she seemed almost angry, and the atmosphere became rather unpleasant. I could feel myself getting frustrated about this. Outwardly calm, I felt my cheeks burning and I wanted to leave her house because I felt so uncomfortable.*

Bi Muhimu then called Mariam on the phone to discuss the matter with her. She made Mariam speak to me as well, and I tried to be as tactful as I could, saying that I would have to talk to my employer about this. *I could hear some displeasure in Mariam’s voice, as if I had somehow screwed up. It is difficult to not step on anyone’s toes here, as everyone knows everyone’s business, and Mariam had told me to go to Bi Muhimu so I could not have NOT gone.*

The great granddaughter disappeared behind the curtain again.

Bi Muhimu then said: “Many people come to me, hundreds have come. They say, I know how to have sex, I have children! But they don’t know anything, not the Zanzibari way!” She continued to say that she has taught all the secrets about sex, at which time she was moving her hips slightly in her chair. “I teach you EVERYTHING you need to know.” I nodded. She looked at me and said: “You have to pay, Carolien.” I told her I understood, that I would discuss this with my supervisors and then contact her again. The goodbye was short.

Perhaps Bi Muhimu understood my inability to instantly agree on the large sum of money she mentioned as a negotiation technique, or perhaps as a sign of my *mzungu* arrogance that I can just come and ‘take’ the knowledge I need. Or perhaps it never was about paying the amount of money, but rather about asserting power associated with secrecy. Either way, our conversation went awry, despite my best efforts. Bi Muhimu is a well-known nyakanga with



many contacts and relationships, not all of them clear to me, but I know she knows Mariam well, as well as many of the musicians that Mariam works with. After this rather unnerving meeting I returned to my hotel, wondering what to do next, but happy I still had an appointment in two days to accompany Furaha, a singer and dancer and member of a ngoma group, to a wedding where they would perform during a singo (a ritual massage of the bride-to-be). However, on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, the day after my meeting with Bi Muhimu, I received the following message from Mariam about my upcoming meeting with Furaha:

[13:40, 12/13/2019] Mariam Hamdani: I called her as she has [a] problem with her phone.

She told me, she is extremely sorry as they were informed that tomorrow there won't be Singo but special Unyago which is restricted. They gave them cards and uniform special dira. Only very few invited ones. This she says is so special has not seen something like this. She doesn't understand what is going to take place.

So she is very sorry for tomorrow it's not possible to go with you.

As for Sunday if bi [Salama] invites her she'll attend.

[13:41, 12/13/2019] Mariam Hamdani: I hate these changes! It's v[ery] disappointing!<sup>77</sup>

In this message, Mariam is informing me that Furaha told her that I will not be able to accompany her to her performance, since it won't be singo but "restricted unyago." Mariam emphasizes the exclusivity of the event—through reiterating Furaha's words—by stating that there are "cards" involved (which I understand to be invitation cards) and special "dira": long-sleeved dresses, in this context used as a festive uniform for the performers. Mariam further underscores the event's restricted access by stressing that there are only a few people invited (and thus I, as an outsider, could logically not expect to be a part of it) and that it is so special that Furaha has "not seen something like this" and that "she doesn't understand what is going to take place."

I have no way of knowing if me being disinvited from accompanying Furaha to the wedding has a direct link with the meeting with Bi Muhimu from the day before, but I do wonder to what extent Mariam was following the Zanzibari ethics of concealment and following her own adage that in Zanzibar you have to keep things a secret. She was obviously sympathizing with me in her message ("I hate these changes! It's v[ery] disappointing!"), and I understand from her message and the details she gave in it, that she was balancing

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<sup>77</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mariam Hamdani, December 13, 2019.

several social relationships at the same time, trying not to hurt anyone. She even apologizes on Furaha's behalf and offers some good news right after: that Furaha will be there at Bi Salama's place for a recording that I agreed on (provided Furaha will be invited by Salama). I cannot help but wonder, however, if indeed there would be special unyago rather than singo at this wedding, why this would not be known by the musicians performing at the wedding beforehand. Was it to ensure secrecy and to add to the exclusivity of the event? Or were there social ties behind my disinvitation, invisible to me but felt and negotiated by Mariam?

Yet, it does not really matter why I was being blocked now. Rather, the point I want to make is that this example constitutes an illustration of how secrecy sustains possibilities and power. As long as something is secret, it remains powerful. Thus, not being allowed to be part of the secret and write about it positions me as an outsider, sustaining the powerful discourse surrounding unyago. Indeed, as a researcher I am walking the line, but not all the way.

In this chapter I have addressed how the Zanzibari language ideology of concealment and discretion can be seen, on the one hand, as something restricting for women's speech. However, a closer look at unyago and msanja songs, the language that is used in their lyrics, and the discourse that surrounds these songs, suggests that the ambiguity found in their meaning is actually opening up the possibility for re-ordering and a redistribution of power. Strategically employing secrecy and ambiguity especially with regards to female sexuality gives Zanzibari women the possibility of positioning themselves as powerful sexual agents. In the following chapter I will address this 'disruptive force' of female sexuality by providing an analysis of unyago and msanja songs that focus on female sexual desire—as opposed to the song representations of sexuality in line with the official discourse as addressed in Chapter 3.

## 5. Waist Beads, Palm Trees, and Cigarettes: Female Desire and Power Relations

*Hakuna utani ulozidi ya mtende*

There is no joke about the growth of  
the mtende tree

*Shanga zako tano ukiwe kitandani  
utombwe<sup>78</sup>*

If you are in bed with your five [waist]  
beads you will be fucked

This msanja song is one example of how Zanzibari women view, and sing about, female sexual agency. The song suggests that there is nothing that will stop a man from getting in the mood after he sees a woman's waist beads: a *mtende* is a large palm tree and is used here as a metaphor for penis, and there is no doubt ("no joke") that it will grow after said sight.

*Shanga*, waist beads, are worn by Zanzibari women as part of their daily attire, underneath their clothes.<sup>79</sup> They are typically worn around the waist, hips and/or pubic area, and form part of a woman's arsenal of seduction. They are worn only by married women. Waist beads are usually made of small colored glass beads that can be found all over East Africa; these beads are used to make other jewelry such as necklaces and bracelets too. Sometimes they are assembled with more expensive beads made of gold or gemstones. Only when the beads are strung on a thin rope and worn around the hips do they take on their association with sex. Women usually own several sets of waist beads, the colors and combinations may vary on a daily basis, depending on personal taste. Women can wear them to bed and display them to their partner; for the man they form an additional visual stimulation and/or something to play with during sex, and they can be used as a physical stimulation for both partners when rubbed over skin or genitals. During sex instruction before marriage, young women are told to put the beads on before they sleep with their

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<sup>78</sup> Jambiani, July 15, 2021. In my recording the women sing the song first in KiJambiani, the local dialect in Jambiani, and the second time in Kiswahili. For ease of reading I have chosen to include only the text in Swahili.

<sup>79</sup> Waist beads are worn by women all over Africa, but their meaning and practical use may vary. Here I only focus on waist beads in Zanzibar.

husbands, and they are taught what to do with them. As one of my interlocutors told me: “You have to put your *utunda* (a string of waist beads) on, often two, sometimes three. You wear one around your waist, and one down there, and then your husband plays with them.... A man will be very surprised if you do not wear them. He will ask: ‘Are you a man like me?’”

I recorded the song presented above in July 2021 on the beach in Jambiani with three female singers, Bi Hadija, Bi Rehema, and Bi Neema. After we finish recording the song, the women ask me if I understand what it means and if I know what waist beads are. To illustrate the latter, Bi Rehema hops up, looks around the beach to check if nobody is watching, and then quickly hoists up her skirt to show me the waist beads she is wearing: three strings of red and blue beads around her hips. When I tell her that they look beautiful, the women tell me they will make me *shanga* too. Hadija beckons me over and takes the thin fabric belt off that I had wrapped around my dress, to use it as a measuring device: she wraps the fabric belt around the top of my torso, right above my breasts, because, as she says, this is the same size as around the hips, and then knots it to signify the appropriate length. She says she will take the fabric belt home, go to the market to buy the beads, and then string them along a thread which is cut to the desired length according to the measurements she just took.

The next day we meet on the beach again and Hadija gives me my custom-made waist beads: two pieces, one consisting of two strands, the other of three strands, in the colors orange, green, white, and red (Figure 29). The women know that my family is accompanying me on this particular field trip, and when I meet them again after a few days for another recording session, Bi Rehema asks me with a grin if I am wearing my waist beads and if they are to my husband’s liking.



Figure 29. *The waist beads. Note there are five strands, as in the song presented above.*

This chapter deals with female sexual agency and discourse on sex as expressed in *msanja* and *unyago* songs. It takes a closer look at sexual power relations, and, through an analysis of *unyago* and *msanja* songs and the discourse around them, aims to illustrate how Zanzibari women position themselves as having sexual authority and agency. As we have already seen, there is a discrepancy between an ‘official’ discourse, and what is actually said and done. There is a difference between the official understanding and performance of sexuality, and private—or rather, practical<sup>80</sup>—expressions of it. As became clear in Chapter 3, the official performance of sexuality is focused on men taking the initiative, and women following their lead. When a man is in the mood for sex, he will make his advances, and the woman is expected to follow his lead and satisfy his sexual needs. Thus openly, women are always the object—both of men’s sexual advances and in discourse and songs about sex. Women are supposed to be passive, obedient, serving. However, this chapter shows Zanzibari women as *subjects* rather than objects: as individuals who have desire and sexual prowess, and who are to express themselves as sexual agents. This chapter thus presents analyses of songs that form counter-

<sup>80</sup> For a critique of the public-private dichotomy see Chapter 6.

narratives to the dominant narrative of male sexual agency as presented in Chapter 3, and shows female Zanzibari sexuality in a different light.

## Sexual selves

Sexuality in this thesis is understood from a framework of social constructionism, which understands sexuality as a cultural construct, shaped by various social contexts (Spronk 2012). As has become well established by now, people from different cultures understand sexuality differently. As anthropologist Pat Caplan notes: “What people want, and what they do, in any society, is to a large extent what they are made to want, and allowed to do” (1987: 25). Sexuality is thus not a homogeneous practice, but rather has a myriad of articulations that depend on social context, and that change continuously. In this thesis, sexuality is conceptualized at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, religion, technology, and tourism.

First, sexuality is inextricably linked to another cultural construct: gender. As discussed in Chapter 2, Zanzibari society is highly gendered. Women and men each occupy distinct social spheres. There are clear expectations on what it means to be a Zanzibari woman, and what it means to be a man. On the Swahili coast, the categories of biological sex and gender largely overlap, so when someone is pronounced a girl at birth, that child will be raised and expected to behave as a woman in terms of dress, behavior and communication. However, this does not mean that gender switching does not take place, where a person adopts characteristics that are traditionally associated with another gender. As anthropologist Gill Shepherd (1987) has shown in her study of homosexuality in Mombasa, in same sex relationships partners can and do adopt certain roles, attitudes, and status positions that are associated with another gender, depending on their role in the relationship. In Mombasa, like in Zanzibar, women are supposed to be passive, gentle, and shy, and men should support their wives and take the initiative, both economically and sexually. Shepherd shows how gay Kenyans express this heteronormative binary passive (attributed to women)—active (attributed to men) in their relationships. The partner who supports the other economically is the active (male) one, whereas the partner who is paid assumes the “passive role during intercourse” (Shepherd 1987: 250). This means that while the two partners have the same biological sex, they adopt attributes that are associated with different genders. Gender, in this sense, can be said to infuse all sexual relationships along the Swahili coast, and there is always a complementarity between the feminine and the masculine (see also Larsen 1995).

Gender switching may also occur when Zanzibari are embodied by spirits. As anthropologist Kjersti Larsen (1995) has documented, women and men can become embodied by male and/or female spirits. During a particular ritual called *ngoma ya kibuki*, the human body changes gender depending on the

gender of the spirit indwelling the body. Women's bodies can be indwelled by male spirits, which leads to "a continuous change in women's bodies into female and male, male and female" (Larsen 1995: 254). Thus, when a woman has a male spirit, she will engage in male behavior, for example dressing like a man, speaking like a man, or drinking alcohol. According to Larsen, being indwelled by a spirit of the opposite sex allows people to reflect on, and negotiate, Zanzibari gender categories.

Sexuality is also intertwined with ethnicity. Sociologist Joane Nagel calls this entanglement the *ethnosexual*, which she defines as "the intersection and interaction between ethnicity and sexuality and the ways in which each defines and depends on the other for its meaning and power" (2003: 10). Nagel argues that ethnicity is a sociocultural construct as well, and a situational one at that. Depending on where an individual person resides, ethnicity may be solely defined in relation to ideas of race, or ideas of race may not be part of its definition at all (Nagel 2003). For example, the ethnicity of a Tanzanian in Tanzania is not primarily determined by race, but rather by ethnic and/or religious associations. When the same Tanzanian appears in Sweden, their ethnicity would primarily be understood as Black by a majority of Swedes.

Zanzibari ethnicity is historically constructed as a mix of various influences: Arab, Swahili, Shirazi, Indian. As historian Jonathon Glassman (2000) notes, race and social class were often regarded as coinciding, with race determining class, i.e., Arabs equalled high rank landowners, Indians were merchants, Africans were low rank workers. However, Zanzibari historian Abdul Sheriff warns us that these divisions were not as clear cut as they have often been made out in non-Zanzibari discourse. He writes: "With a cosmopolitan population that has shared a common language, religion and a common history over many centuries, these categories were not frozen in Zanzibar" (Sheriff 2001: 307). Rather, these categories underwent fundamental change throughout history, as a result of various influences, among which the colonial administration. At the dawn of the colonial period, for example, Swahili people rarely thought of themselves as only Swahili, and "individuals constantly crossed and straddled ethnic boundaries" (Glassman 2000: 396), whereas in the 1930s people stopped referring to themselves as Swahili altogether because the term had become a pejorative reference to people of slave descent (Sheriff 2001). Thus, Zanzibari ethnicity is flexible, but is always tied to 'Africanness' and Islam.

African sexualities, as feminist sociologist Sylvia Tamale notes, are shaped by "colonialism, globalization, patriarchy, gender, class, religion, age, law and culture" (2011: 2). From the early colonial period, African sexualities have been portrayed as savage, primitive, male-dominated, polygynous and associated with disease—as opposed to Western sexuality, which was seen as healthy and monogamous. The global North has long been interested in sexual practices in Africa, sometimes displaying a voyeuristic and ethnopornographic perspective. For example, social historian Timothy Parsons points out

the western colonial obsession with the “uncontrollable sex drives” of African soldiers recruited for the King’s Africa Rifles (a colonial army created by the British to maintain dominance in East Africa, and elsewhere), allegedly resulting in the assault and rape of civilian women. He writes: “There is, however, no evidence that askaris [African soldiers] were more inclined to sexual assault than other imperial troops.... yet African soldiers serving overseas were often victimized by derogatory racial stereotypes. In Southeast Asia, askaris complained British officers warned local women that Africans had penises “down to their knees,” which would kill anyone who had sexual intercourse with them” (Parsons 1999: 159).

Thus, in colonial times there was a focus on ethnosexual stereotypes, and on sex rituals and polygyny, among other things, followed by a surge of attention to sexual violence and female genital mutilation in the 1970s and 1980s, and then a focus on HIV/AIDS in the 1990s (see for example the well-known, and heavily disputed, article “The Social Context of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa” by demographer John Caldwell, anthropologist Pat Caldwell, and demographer Pat Quiggin, 1989). African sexuality (singular) was conceptualized within a “tripartite framework of morals, reproduction and dysfunction” (Tamale 2011: 29-30), leading to a construction of African sexuality as primitive, problematic, and/or immoral. Tamale stresses the importance of engaging with African sexualities in the *plural*, not only to engage with the multiple forms of orientations and identities, but also to avoid essentializing African sexuality from “normative social orders and frameworks that view it through binary oppositions and simplistic labels” (2011: 11) and to uncover the multiple dimensions and meanings.

Certain stereotypes prevailed also in the colonial-era representation of Islamic sexuality. Anthropologist George Murdock for example, put forward a theory on the existence of two different kinds of society with regard to regulation of the sexual instinct: societies in which sexual prohibitions are internalized during the socialization process, and societies that rely on external safety precautions to regulate sexuality due to failure of internalization of prohibitions (Murdock 1965). According to Murdock, most Western societies belong to the first type, and societies where veiling exists belong to the second. He thus sees men living in (Islamic) societies where women veil themselves as failing to control their sexual urges. In present times, this construction of Islamic sexuality, as written by white male (Christian) researchers from the global North, has been subjected to serious challenge. Sociologist Fatima Mernissi, one of the founders of Islamic feminism, criticizes Murdock’s theory on the existence of these two different kinds of society with regard to regulation of the sexual instinct. She argues that the difference between these two kinds of societies should not be explained in terms of internalization of sexual prohibitions or failure thereof, but rather in terms of conceptualization of female sexuality. She writes: “In societies in which seclusion and surveillance



of women prevail, the implicit concept of female sexuality is *active*; in societies in which there are no such methods of surveillance and coercion of women's behavior, the concept of female sexuality is passive" (Mernissi 2002: 298, emphasis mine). As we have seen in Chapter 2, Islam is inherently positive about sex and erotic pleasure, both for men and women, and sees it as a healthy part of a marriage. Within marriage, sexual pleasure is not only desirable, but even linked to divine power (Boudhiba 1985). Sexual desire should not be oppressed or eradicated, but satisfied—within certain prescribed boundaries (i.e., marriage). Both men and women should enjoy sex.

It is in this sense that sexuality also must be seen as intertwined with religion. As anthropologist Katrina Thompson shows, through participation in the performance of embodied sensual ritual practice (the *singo*), women's identities *as* Muslims are developed, as they are socialized into ways of communicating about sex and being sexual beings. Through massage and ritualized speech, women learn how to act and talk like a married Muslim woman. Thompson thus argues that Zanzibari women see specific talk about sexuality, and that the practice of sexual acts is part and parcel of their "religiously obligatory roles as Muslim wives" (2015: 171). Therefore, Zanzibari sexuality cannot be seen as separate from Islam.

Finally, Zanzibari sexuality is shaped by modern technologies and tourism. The constant and increasing influx of tourists, who wander around town and on the beaches—often scantily clad—has a direct influence on Zanzibari notions of sexuality. Anthropologist Nadine Beckmann points out the rhetoric of moral decline used by Muslim essentialists, in which "the sphere of sexual mores takes centre stage: scantily clad tourists and mainland migrant workers come with money and far more liberal attitudes to non-marital sex, sexually provocative music clips are screened on TV, pornographic material is freely available on the Internet, numbers of bars and guesthouses are increasing and HIV prevention campaigns put the discussion of sexuality in the open, so that even children can 'know about sex by themselves now' without having their sexuality activated in the appropriate setting" (2010: 629).

Anthropologist Henrike Hoogenraad has documented how especially Zanzibari men adjust and reinvent their understandings of sexuality through interaction with Western women who come to the East coast on holiday or as expats working as hotel managers (2012). While at first glance the practices of Zanzibari men at the beach might indicate the "moral decline" Beckmann is talking about, Hoogenraad shows that Zanzibari men at the beach strategically combine Zanzibari notions of sexuality (such as secrecy about extra-marital practices) with other sexual practices (such as engaging romantically with multiple Western women at the same time) to reach certain set goals—financially, socially or businesswise. Sociologist Altaïr Despres argues that Zanzibari men reinvent the pillars of masculine sexuality through sexual relations with female tourists. Zanzibari masculinity is predominantly grounded in eco-

conomic power and sexual performance, but Zanzibari men who engage in romantic/sexual relationships with white women recompose the balance between these two elements, foregoing the traditional economic power—since they often receive financial support from their white lovers—in favor of sexual expertise and competition with other men (Despres 2021).

While Zanzibari women rarely engage romantically with Western men (or women),<sup>81</sup> their life worlds are affected by tourism and technology as well: indirectly, through Zanzibari men changing orientations to their own masculine sexuality, and directly, through the presence of scantily clad tourists in their spaces—whose “polluting behaviours” such as drinking alcohol and exposing the body should be avoided (Demovic 2016: 9). Despite the fact that guidebooks and travel websites mention the necessity of modest dress in Zanzibar and that many hotels advise guests to cover up, either on their website or through guidelines displayed in the hotel lobby, Western men and women dressed in what locals regard as inappropriately revealing clothing, continue to roam around the streets of Stone Town and in the villages beyond the resorts on the coast, their bodily exposure evoking shame and anger in Zanzibari due to inversion of Zanzibari moral codes: by dressing scantily, tourists “transform public into private space” (Larsen 2000: 211). On the coast, inappropriately dressed tourists have led to additional local initiatives to put up signs in various locations, reminding people to cover up when not on the beach, an example of which can be seen in Figure 30.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> I have been offered female (sexual) companionship when out in bars—but in general, this is something that is frowned upon by most Zanzibari.

<sup>82</sup> It seems that the languages on the signs change in accordance with the provenance of the majority of the tourists. During the pandemic, Zanzibar received mostly Russian tourists since they were not limited by travel restrictions, hence the sign in Cyrillic script here.



Figure 30. Sign with request to avoid walking around in a bathing suit while in the village, Nungwi, January 2022. Photo: Ahmed Kassim

Additionally, Zanzibari women find their life worlds affected by the sexually tinged materials readily available online. Many women have either a smart phone or an internet connection and thus have free access to everything they could possibly look for. As one of my interlocutors put it: “Everybody knows what a penis looks like now!”

Thus, many Zanzibari are finding the need to adjust to their changing life worlds. On the one hand, as discussed above, sex is more in the open, but on the other, essentialist views on the body and sexuality are gaining popularity—also with regard to embodied practices such as drumming and dancing. Zanzibari sexuality is increasingly privatized and individualized. This essentialism is linked to the Islamic revival in Zanzibar in general, which was discussed in Chapter 2, and it includes a framing of certain ngoma and ritual practices that involve bodily movements and drumming as “un-Islamic” (Beckmann

2015: 138). As others have pointed out, this does not mean that ngoma and ritual practices do not take place anymore, but rather that the format of such practices is changing, from large-scale affairs where a group of young women was initiated at the same time in an elaborate way, to “increasingly private affairs, held in a back room by only a small circle of women” (Beckmann 2015: 138). Moreover, there is an increased sense of shame related to being naked and certain bodily movements. According to several of the women I work with, unyago initiation no longer involves being completely naked, but women are keeping their underpants on. Several (older) women lamented the fact that *unyago ya zamani*, unyago from the old days, is disappearing. They told me that the reason that there are so many divorces nowadays, is that many people are no longer properly taught what to do in bed. They told me: “kufanya mapenzi ni muhimu sana”; sex is very important.

## Playing with sexuality

Thus, Zanzibari sexuality is informed by many different factors and can be seen as continuously operating on an axis of private and open. Through an analysis of the following unyago and msanja songs, I demonstrate how Zanzibari women play with essentialist views on the female body that include covering up and keeping sexuality secret, and how they openly challenge notions of male dominance and female passivity.

The fact that sex is an integral part of Zanzibari married life, and one that can and should be practiced to the satisfaction of both sexes, and in all phases of sexual life, is expressed in the well-known song *Kung’oka meno* ([Track 07](#)).<sup>83</sup> The basic time-line pattern consists of five rhythmic cycles, each consisting of twelve beats (four groups of triplets):

⑫ [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..]

Then the kiongozi (leader) sets the tone of the song with the following opening line:

### ***Kiongozi:***

*Kuwa na mti si utuzima eee*

### **Leader:**

To have a large one is not maturity

<sup>83</sup> <https://uppsala.box.com/s/5saj5gj5rnb0mj0xctn0r987k2rs32>



Figure 31. Kiongozi call

This first phrase (Figure 31) is sung on a descending melody, spanning an interval width of a third, taking small scale steps down to reach the resting note e' on the vocalization "eeeeeee." The maqam in this opening line is Ajam muadil (Figure 32):



Figure 32. Maqam Ajam muadil

Thus, the opening line starts on the tonic g', moves down towards the sixth degree e', and rests there, creating a musical tension that opens up the song through the anticipation of the tonic g' in this particular maqam.

The chorus affirms this first line by ululating and whooping elaborately, as if to emphasize the pertinence of the statement. Then, the following call and response unfolds:

**Kiongozi:**

*Kuwa na mti si utuzima  
Kung'oka meno si utuzima  
Bora mashine*

**Leader:**

To have a large one is not maturity  
To lose teeth is not maturity  
Just your machine

**Kiitikio:**

*Bora mashine iwe nzima*

**Chorus:**

As long as your machine is still  
working

**Kiongozi:**

*Aahhh bora mashine*

**Leader:**

Ah just your machine

**Kiitikio:**

*Bora mashine iwe nzima*

**Chorus:**

As long as your machine is still  
working

The last call and response, “Just your machine—As long as your machine is still working,” is repeated several times, emphasizing the message.

This song celebrates an active sexual life by suggesting that a (sexually) mature age is not defined by physical characteristics, such as having a large penis, or having no teeth. *Mti* literally means tree, which, as we already have seen, is a common metaphor for “penis.” Instead, maturity is seen as defined by whether one is sexually active or not. As long as “your machine is still working,” i.e., as long as you are having sex, you are still well and alive. There are different versions of this song, with different negations of maturity in the first part (for example, to grow gray hair is not maturity) —but the final line is always the same: “As long as your machine is still working.” Note that “machine” here can be interpreted as referring to both male and female sexual body parts. However, *Kung’oka meno* as it is performed by and for women, is first and foremost a celebration of sexuality by women, enabling women to assert themselves as sexual subjects, addressing and celebrating an active sex life.

One of my interlocutors told me that the lyrics of this song are originally not from unyago, but from a different ngoma called kidumbak, or female informal drumming songs, which is often performed publicly at weddings. This suggested provenance is in line with the inherently hybrid character of unyago, incorporating various influences, from various geographical regions, as noted in Chapter 2, but also from different music styles.

In the unyago song below, *Ndondondo*,<sup>84</sup> a young woman (“my little one”), the woman who the unyago ngoma is being held for, is invited to come without hesitation. The women singing this song invite the young woman to come forward, to become active, and the song can thus be interpreted as a socialization into an active role.

The basic time-line pattern consists of 3 rhythmic cycles:

⑫ [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..] [x..x..x..x..]

Over this pattern, the following call and response unfolds:

***Kiongozi:***

*Njoo njoo njoo*

**Leader:**

Come, come, come

*Njoo njoo njoo kichunga changu  
peremba eee*

Come come come, my little one,  
without hesitation

***Kiitikio:***

*Njoo njoo njoo*

**Chorus:**

Come, come, come

*Njoo njoo njoo kichunga changu  
peremba eee*

Come come come, my little one,  
without hesitation

<sup>84</sup> Bi Kidude, 2009. *Unyago*. Sauti za Zanzibar Studio.

The mood in the song *Ndondondo* is playful, the melody goes down and up, alternating between duplets and regular eighth notes.<sup>85</sup> To me, this alternation of hemiolas and regular rhythm evokes a sense of flirtatiousness because it breaks with the fixed pulse (Figure 33):

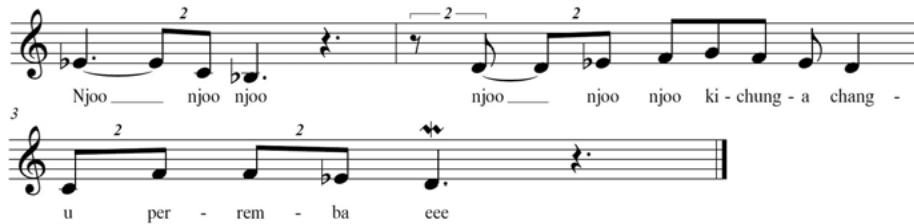


Figure 33. Melody of kiongozi call as well as kiitikio response

The maqam is Ajam (evoking a “major scale” impression), starting on B flat, and both the maqam and its rhythmic and melodic treatment contribute to the flirty, happy mood of the song.<sup>86</sup> This song thus is an encouragement for the young woman to step up and not hesitate to take the initiative.

Women taking the initiative is also the topic of the following unyago song, *Kuitwaitwa sitaki*.<sup>87</sup> This song is a protest against a situation where the man takes the initiative for sex, and the woman is expected to follow him and satisfy his needs. Rather, the female subject in this song makes it explicit that she does not want to be summoned every time her husband wants to make love, but rather that she will come herself when *she* wants. Thus, the song is an expression of an inversion of the official discourse of Zanzibari sexual power relations, suggesting that women have sexual agency and control over (at least part of) the sexual relationship, and that they can instigate sex when *they* want to have it.

The basic timeline pattern consists of four groups of triplets, grouped into larger cycles consisting of four patterns. Over this basic timeline pattern the following call and response unfolds:

<sup>85</sup> In the underlying 12/8 time.

<sup>86</sup> It should be noted that maqam Ajam does not *always* have the same happy mood associations that a Western major key does (see Farraj & Shumays 2019: 13), but in this song its use may evoke a celebratory character to the listener.

<sup>87</sup> Bi Kidude, 2009. *Unyago*. Sauti za Zanzibar Studio.

**Kiongozi:***Kuitwaitwa sitaki**Na nikitaka nitakuja mwenyewe**Kuitwaitwa sitaki***Kiitikio:***Nikitaka nitakuja mwenyewe***Kiongozi:***Kuitwaitwa sitaki***Kiitikio:***Na nikitaka nitakuja mwenyewe**Kuitwaitwa sitaki**Nikitaka nitakuja mwenyewe***Leader:**

To be called and called I do not want

If I want [to have sex] I will come myself

To be called and called I do not want

**Chorus:**

If I want I will come myself

**Leader:**

To be called and called I do not want

**Chorus:**

If I want I will come myself

To be called and called I do not want

If I want I will come myself

Note that in the first call and response, it is the leader who ‘instructs’ the chorus with the whole message of coming for sex when *she* wants. The women that make up the chorus can be seen as a representation of young Zanzibari women who are learning about sexual behavior. In this first call and response, the chorus here only repeats a part of the message of the instructor. In the second call and response, however, the chorus only needs to be prompted by one line from the instructor and then continues to perform the full message, having internalized the goal and meaning of the words. The teaching/learning process is thus represented in the setting of the lyrics. The maqam used is Rahatul arwah, which is Huzam on B half flat (Figure 34):



Figure 34. Maqam Rahatul arwah

Important to note in this song is the melodic movement around the tonic in the (last line of the) chorus (Figure 35):





Figure 35. Last line of kiitikio

This line is thus not only delivered on the lowest notes, but is also centered around the tonic, with a duplet on *mwenyewe* (myself). This duplet only occurs on the word *mwenyewe* throughout the entire song,<sup>88</sup> which draws the ear in and focuses the listener's attention on this word. Thus, the theme of female sexual initiative and agency is underscored musically in this song in various ways.

An expression of female sexual power can also be found in the unyago song *Wamemfunga wanaume wao*,<sup>89</sup> which can be translated as "They have tied up their men."

Over the basic timeline pattern, consisting of four groups of triplets, grouped into larger cycles consisting of four patterns, the following call and response is repeated:

**Kiongozi:**

*Watu wa Mwera kwa uheke wao wa*

**Leader:**

People of Mwera with their laughter

**Kiitikio:**

*Wamemfunga wanaume wao*

**Chorus:**

They have tied up their men

Mwera is a village east of Zanzibar city, in the Mjini Magharibi region of the island. This song refers to the marriage practice in this region,<sup>90</sup> where female family members of the bride tie up the groom right before his wedding night, and refuse to let him go until he pays them some money or offers them a small gift. One of my male informants explained that this is a joking practice, with some sexual undertones: "When bound, a girl can come, especially an older one, and say, if you don't pay, take me instead of her! While he is bound, they can even tease you and keep tickling you or touch you, even privately." He then continued to explain that the man is not tied up with force, and no physical pain is involved, but that it is all about teasing him. The song is thus an assertion of female dominance, where women control when the groom gets to

<sup>88</sup> "Duplets," or rather, polyrhythms, are very common in unyago rhythmic patterns so it is striking that it only occurs on the word *mwenyewe* in this song (see also Chapter 2 for an introduction to unyago rhythmic patterns).

<sup>89</sup> Bi Kidude, 2009. *Unyago*. Sauti za Zanzibar Studio.

<sup>90</sup> This practice can mainly be found in urban Zanzibar, including Zanzibar City and Mwera.

go and have sex for the first time with his new wife. While the practice of tying up grooms has now become rare, it continues to be alluded to in the performance of *unyago* songs, which assert that women potentially can exercise control over the satisfaction of men's sexual desire.

Control over the sexual part of the relationship is also established through another value: the exchange value of sex. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the duty of a good Swahili wife is to have sex with her husband, even if they have been arguing during the day. But sex is not gratuitous; there is an exchange value of satisfying a husband's needs. Katrina Thompson observes that the "exchange of corporeal intimacy for money or a husband's permission during the course of a Muslim marriage is an extension of the 'orderly exchange between women and men' that begins during the wedding" (2015:194). This orderly exchange is based on a long Islamic tradition of dowry, a sum of money paid directly to the bride as an economic safety net, since men have a unilateral right to divorce, without an obligation for long-term alimony. Thus the payment of a dowry mitigates the economic risk for women when getting married. Muslim feminist scholar Kecia Ali also points to another dimension of exchange regarding the payment of a dowry: apart from being linked to male-initiated divorce, Ali says, dowry is a compensation for legitimate sexual access. Thus, men pay for a degree of control, both over their wives' reproductive capacity, and their sexuality (Ali 2016: 5). Ali points out a discrepancy between the interpretation of dowry in contemporary Muslim thought and classical texts. In modern interpretations, men are said to provide a dowry and economic support during marriage in exchange for women taking care of all the household chores. Ali states that this understanding of the exchange value of financial compensation is not in line with classical Islamic texts, but rather, its exchange value should be found in the sexual dimension: "Those texts, while sometimes suggesting that women have a religious obligation to manage the household, generally stress that the husband maintains his wife in exchange not for household services but for her sexual availability to him" (2016: 6). In short, men remunerate their wives for sexual access to them.

Receiving financial compensation for sex does not preclude some degree of control on the part of the woman, however. In Zanzibari practice, support is not just given for sex; sex is also given for support. In other words, women may choose to have sex with their husbands when they want to travel somewhere without him, or when they need him to do something for her—in addition, of course, to when they desire sexual satisfaction. In this sense, seemingly vulnerable women are powerful at the same time, since they exercise control over the sexual part of the relationship and thus are able to negotiate, partly through sex, what they want for themselves. However, one of my interlocutors stressed that this potentiality depends on the husband in question, and that a woman should rely on her own judgement: "If a man is very much in love with you, controlling him through sex will work. But if he doesn't care,

he will just go out to find another lover; some have many women. It all depends on the character. You know who you are living with.”

In addition to being socialized into the exchange value of sex in relationships, Zanzibari women are taught that women have sexual needs, and that this is good. They should experience pleasure during sex, and are taught how they can achieve this pleasure during sex during pre-marital sex instructions. As mentioned on page 45, part of teaching women how to have pleasure is through practicing a dancing technique called *kukata kiuno*, “to cut the waist.” This is a hip-gyrating movement, which can be executed in slow or fast motion, and which can be used to increase sexual stimulation both for the man and the woman.

The *msanja* song below refers to this technique, presenting a female subject who uses her mastery of this technique as a source of sexual confidence:

*Bwana dereva nipigie honi*  
*Nitizame nyuma na usoni*

Driver, please give me a honk  
Get a good look at my backside and  
my face

*Mambo yote yapo kiunoni*<sup>91</sup>

Everything else is in the hips

The subject in this song wants to be seen, admired, looked at. She invites the “driver,” which can be understood as a metaphor for men in general, to acknowledge her female form by honking at her and taking a good look at her bottom and her face. Not only does she invite the male gaze, but she wants it to be followed up by some action as well: “everything else is in the hips.” This line is a reference to the technique of *kukata kiuno*, and can be seen as an invitation to sexual intercourse, as well as a confirmation that this is going to take place. The subject in the song knows that she has the movement skills to increase sexual pleasure for herself and her potential sex partner. Whether this potential sex partner is her husband or boyfriend, or whether the subject is seducing someone new remains unclear, but, in any case, the song allows a woman to assert her own sexual confidence and power. The message seems to be that once the man has taken a look at the woman’s physical assets and has heard that she has these skills, he has no choice but to succumb to her advances. The initiative thus lies with the female subject: she is the one who actively pursues the man for sex, instead of the other way around.

Women as people having desire and sexual agency is also expressed in the following *msanja* song:

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<sup>91</sup> Jambiani, January 9, 2020.

**[Mwanamke:]**  
*Bwana Juma mbona umelala*

**[Woman:]**  
Bwana Juma why are you sleeping?

**[Bwana Juma:]**  
*Selala [sikulala] nautia kasi<sup>92</sup>*

**[Mister Juma:]**  
I am not sleeping I am putting it in strong

**[Mwanamke:]**  
*Urefu kama sigireti  
Upana kama kibiriti  
Jaribu kama haupiti*

**[Woman:]**  
The length of a cigarette  
The width of a match  
Try [to enter] the vagina!

**[Bwana Juma:]**  
*Selala [sikulala] nautia kasi<sup>93</sup>*

**[Mister Juma:]**  
I am not sleeping, I am putting it in strong

This song is a mock dialogue between a woman and a man called Bwana Juma (“Mister Juma”). Both the voice of the woman and the voice of Bwana Juma are performed by the same female singers. The woman is asking why her partner is sleeping when she is in the mood for sex. He answers that he is not sleeping but is making a serious effort, after which she makes fun of his penis by comparing it to a cigarette and a match. The singers explained that the man’s penis is not really physically small, or that he does not have an erection, but that the man is not doing what the woman wants, and therefore his penis is being ridiculed.

The comparison of a man’s penis to certain objects, or the focus on a man’s penis in general, is a way, in song, to put pressure on the man to deliver the sexual goods. Consider again the first song quoted in this chapter, *Hakuna utani* (Track 08):<sup>94</sup>

*Hakuna utani ulozidi ya mtende*  
*Shanga zako tano ukiwe kitandani*  
*utombwe*

There is no joke about the growth of the mtende tree  
If you are in bed with your five [waist] beads you will be fucked

<sup>92</sup> In some of the msanja songs, some of the lyrics are in Kijambiani, the local dialect in Jambiani. In such instances I have placed the Swahili equivalent within brackets.

<sup>93</sup> Jambiani, July 15, 2021.

<sup>94</sup> <https://uppsala.box.com/s/5saj5gj5rnb0mj0xctn0r987k2rs32>



Figure 36. *Hakuna utani*

As can be seen in Figure 36, the two phrases this song consists of are contrasting sections melodically. The vocal range of the song is quite wide: an octave. An important message, “you will be fucked,” is delivered on the lowest notes of the octave, thereby emphasizing the relevance of this statement. That the woman will receive sexual pleasure is beyond doubt, since the man’s penis is likened to a large palm tree in the first line. Again, by comparing a man’s penis to an object, the responsibility to perform well sexually falls firmly on the man.

However, there is an interesting contrast between the metaphors used in the songs *Hakuna utani* and *Bwana Juma*. An inability to perform is mocked by comparing a man’s penis to small modern household items such as cigarettes and matches, whereas a satisfying, large penis in action is compared to a naturally growing palm tree. As others have noted, modernity and tradition on the Swahili coast do not form a binary—rather, people may use modern concepts to follow tradition (see Caplan & Topan 2004). I understand the incorporation of modern metaphor such as cigarettes and matches into msanja song as an expression of *kwenda na wakati* (to go with the time, i.e., development): an example of assimilation and change which has always been essential to Swahili culture, as we have also seen in Chapter 2.

The unyago and msanja songs presented above construct female subjects as active, lustful, and skilled. Moreover, in the performance of some songs, transgressions of sexual boundaries regarding female lust and sexual morals are not only expressed, but also celebrated. Take the msanja song *Nasafiri mie* (Track 09).<sup>95</sup>

<i>Nasafiri mie nda [naenda] Pemba</i>	I am travelling, I’m going to Pemba,
<i>nalia</i>	I am crying
<i>Sina vya kutenda [kufanya] migogo</i>	I don’t have other big penises [lit:
<i>mingine miraba kenda [tisa]</i>	logs] to do

<sup>95</sup> <https://uppsala.box.com/s/5saj5gj5rnb0mj0xctn0r987k2rs32>

**Kiitikio:**

*Togoa [umia] na uchu wako togoa*  
*[umia]*<sup>96</sup>

**Chorus:**

Be hurt by your desire, be hurt

In this song we encounter a subject who is sad that she has to travel and that she lacks any big penises to have sex with. Both the reference to *other* penises, i.e., a penis not belonging to the subject's partner/husband, as well as the use of the plural (multiple penises) are interesting here, since both suggest something other than the socially approved context of marital sex, or, at the very least, sex with a long-term boyfriend. The sexual desire of the subject is further emphasized by a hyperbolic reference to the size of these other penises. The expression "*miraba kenda [tisa]*," referring to the size of the penises, is a hyperbole and comes from the expression "*miraba minne*," which literally translates as four squared, and which is used to describe a sturdily built person. In order to emphasize the size of the penises in this song, however, the expression is transformed into "*miraba tisa*," which could be translated as nine squared: i.e., extra large. Zalika, one of the singers, made this point by grabbing my 1,5 liter water bottle to make sure I understood how big these penises would be: "It is about the size of the penis," she explained. "You see," she said, holding my water bottle and laughing, "this, this is big." The other women burst out laughing. "But this," she continued as she took my voice recorder in her hand and looked at it with raised eyebrows, "this is small. You understand?"

The verse of this song thus acknowledges the sexual desire of a woman, while the chorus warns the subject not to be so lustful as she might metaphorically get hurt. The chorus, "Be hurt by your desire, be hurt," can be understood as a representation of societal expectations: Zanzibari women are expected to exhibit modesty in everyday life. Incorporating a moral warning in the song is in line with these expectations. The contrast between the frivolous, ad libitum melody of the verse and the solemn character of the chorus underscores the dichotomy between female sexual agency and societal expectations. In the pitch contour graph in Figure 37, the contrast between frivolous verse and more solemn character of the chorus is illustrated by wildly fluctuating lines, and more dense lines and plateaus, respectively:

<sup>96</sup> Jambiani, January 9, 2020.

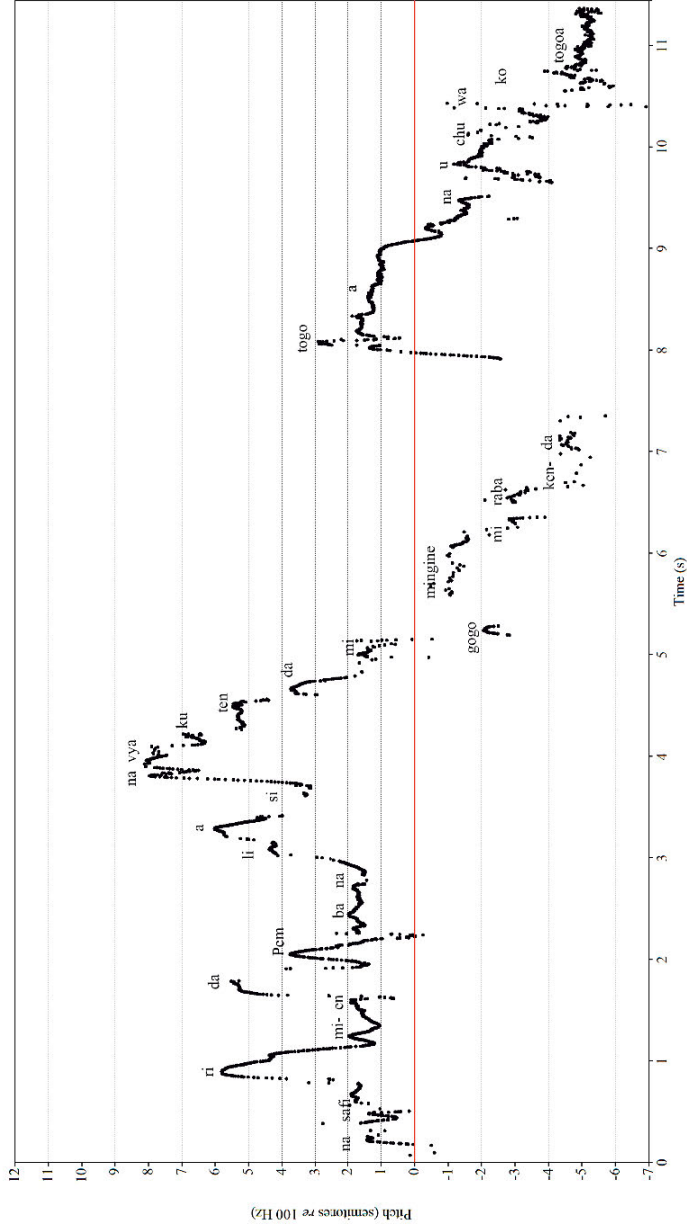


Figure 37. Pitch contour graph of Nasafiri mie

The transcription in staff notation in Figure 38 reveals also that the chorus, as a representation of societal norms, is delivered on the lowest notes, giving more weight to its message (“You will be hurt by your desire”):

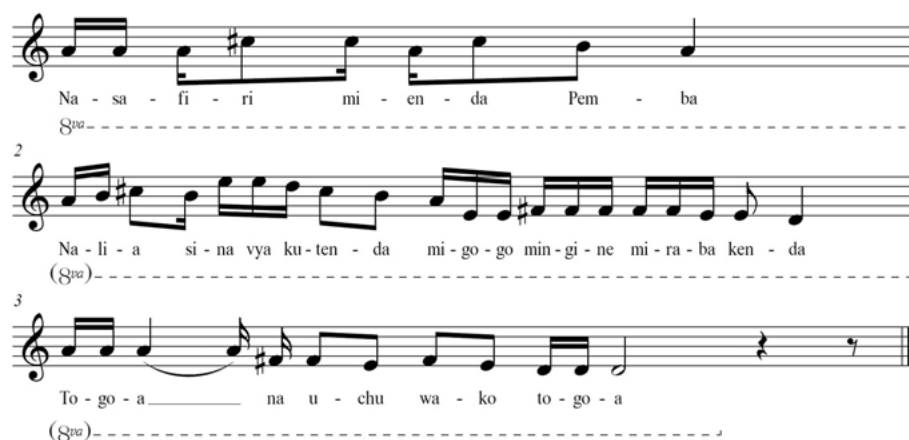


Figure 38. *Nasafiri mie*

Like in the song *Hakuna utani*, a direct message for the listener (“You will be”) is sung on the lowest pitches of the tonal range of the song. This suggests a hierarchy of weight and centrality connected to pitch, in reference to which the lowest-sung lines could be heard as the central theme or topic, in which the text of lines sung at higher pitches ought to be understood as reflections, or glosses.

Despite appearances, however, the message of the song is *not* that a woman should not desire casual sex. Let me illustrate this by incorporating another song where the same distinction can be found, and where the same melody is used in both verse and chorus:

<i>Maji niyiotia udungini [mboo]</i>	The water thrusting from the penis
<i>hayapenyeza tunduni hona ajabu</i>	does not infiltrate the hole, this is
	surprising
<i>kungia tumboni</i>	[that something] entered the belly

**Kiitikio:**

*Togoa [umia] na uchu wako togoa*  
*[umia]<sup>97</sup>*

**Chorus:**

Be hurt by your desire, be hurt

<sup>97</sup> Jambiani, January 9, 2020.



This song is about a woman who engages in illicit sex, has her partner retract his penis before he ejaculates, and then acts surprised that she becomes pregnant. Again the chorus warns the listener that this kind of behavior can hurt her. An extra-marital relationship is seen as sinful for Zanzibari men and women, but especially damaging to a woman's heshima, her respectability. It can have severe consequences for a woman's social standing. The chorus of this song, however, is not necessarily a warning that a woman should not engage in illicit sexual relationships at all, but rather that she should be more *careful* when doing so in order to avoid devastating social consequences.

Several scholars have pointed out that what is important for women in Zanzibar is not avoiding 'immoral' behaviors, but rather to keep them a secret: "It seems that what is important is not necessarily to refrain from transgressing moral values and ideas," writes Kjersti Larsen, "but, rather, to be able to conceal these transgressions" (1995: 216). This concealment applies to anything that falls outside the normal daily order, but especially to the management of extra-marital sex. Nadine Beckmann notes: "In order to be able to navigate illicit relationships in a socially more accepted way, they need to be managed as secret encounters" (2015: 122). Of course, keeping illicit sex a secret does not mean it is no longer immoral, but it does make it more socially acceptable. This is in line with the Zanzibari ideology of keeping personal and sensitive things *ndani*, i.e., inside, as we have seen in Chapter 4.

For those reasons, I do not take the chorus of the two *msanja* songs above as a negation of the celebration of female sexual agency, but rather an ironic reflection on Swahili societal expectations regarding female sexuality: by including the moral warning in the chorus of the songs, and setting it apart musically from the rest of the song, women play with moralistic ideas on female sexuality.

In this chapter I have presented songs that form a kind of counter-narrative to the normative male-dominated interpretation of Zanzibari sexuality. We have seen how sexuality in Zanzibar is entangled with many different factors, and how, through the performance of and discourse on songs, Zanzibari women position themselves as having sexual authority and agency. In distinction to the official performance of Zanzibari sexual relations, where men take the initiative, and where men's desire is central, the songs presented in this chapter foreground another dimension of sexual life. They show women as subjects rather than objects: having desire and sexual prowess and seeing and expressing themselves as sexual agents.

## 6. Inside and Outside: Of Changing Spaces and Other Space

### Sounds and spaces

I exit my front door in central Stone Town, right on busy Jaws corner. Men are sitting on the baraza around the little square, some of them are selling fruits, others are playing bao, a board game. Freshly brewed coffee, poured into tiny cups, is available from vendors with large metal dispensers. The sounds of scooters zooming past and bicycle bells ringing mingles with the jingling of coins in the hands of cashew sellers and people shouting out as they push past with large wooden trolleys. Walking along one of the narrow streets through the old town, I take in the faded but still beautiful architecture of this part of town, tall Arab style houses up to five stories high, with elaborately carved balconies—the view often slightly obfuscated by telephone wires and laundry drying on lines between two balconies. Zanzibari doors mark the entrance to such buildings, giving access to an inner courtyard with dark wooden staircases that lead to the individual rooms or apartments. During the day these large doors are often open, and one can hear the sounds of what is going on inside pouring out: women laughing and talking, children playing, the sound of metal cooking utensils, television. After a few winding, narrow streets I reach Benjamin Mkapa Road, once a creek but now a wide road that separates the old town from Ng'ambo—literally, the other side—the part of town that was constructed during the colonial period to house African laborers. While today there is a wide socio-economic variety of inhabitants in both parts of the city, the houses here look different. Less tall and elaborate, more concrete.

Finally I reach Mariam's house. I ring her doorbell. I wait for her to look down from her living room window on the first floor onto the street so she can see it's me. After a minute or so she opens the outside front door for me with a rope from upstairs, so she does not have to come down. I go in and walk through her entry hall towards the stairs. After climbing them, I take off my shoes when I reach her sitting room,<sup>98</sup> where she is already waiting for me. She is wearing a white printed kanga skirt and a silk top with short sleeves, and no headscarf. Like last time, I think that this means we have met often enough so that she sees me as part of her private space—and therefore doesn't

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<sup>98</sup> In most Zanzibari houses, the sitting room is the first room one enters upon arrival in the house.

feel the need to dress up. We exchange greetings and start talking about the planning for the next couple of days. She tells me she will introduce me to Bi Zubeida, who is a good friend of Mariam and board member of the Zanzibar Broadcasting Company. Bi Zubeida has undergone her unyago initiation when she was already married and had two children—she went to Bi Kidude back in the days. Mariam tells me that Zubeida mentioned that unlike stories from the old days, she kept her underpants on during the initiation. I look forward to meeting Zubeida and hearing her stories. I will send her a message on WhatsApp after my meeting with Mariam so we can set up a date to meet each other. We talk some more about the unyago stories Mariam knows, until the doorbell rings again. Mariam opens from upstairs, without being seen, and hurries away to get dressed. The musicians from the Tausi Women's Taarab Group that Mariam leads are arriving for their rehearsal. One by one they enter the living room, wearing pairs of kanga or long black dresses, and headscarves. Mariam's living room starts to feel smaller and smaller with more and more women coming in with their instruments: ud, violin, qanun. Then Mariam comes back, wearing a beautiful red dress with long sleeves, with a matching headscarf. I take this as my cue to leave because her sartorial change signifies that the rehearsal is about to start, so I thank Mariam for her help thus far and wish everyone a good rehearsal.

As this brief vignette illustrates, spaces in Zanzibar are not public or private in themselves but can change their modality through a change of its inhabitants and the interaction that is to take place between them. Furthermore, it highlights how, contrary to the women/private—men/public dichotomy that is generally reproduced in the literature on Islamic societies, spaces can be non-private when there are only women present. In the example above, this change of modality is visually noticeable through sartorial change, a theme I will return to below. Mariam's sitting room begins as a private space, when it is only her and me talking informally. Mariam does not feel the need to cover herself up, since she is in her own home *and* it is only me coming by for a chat. However, when the other women arrive for their ensemble rehearsal, Mariam's sitting room changes its modality. Since there are now more people, who are coming together for the more formal occasion that is a rehearsal, Mariam changes her clothes to suit the higher degree of publicness of the space. As anthropologist Kjersti Larsen points out, whether or not a space is "public" is not just contingent upon gender but "many arenas where only women are present should equally be considered public. Activities in which only women participate—such as home visits in the afternoon and early evening, social gatherings within neighborhoods, as well as several sequences of wedding celebrations—constitute public space" (2015: 213). My example of the female only rehearsal above illustrates that a gathering of women for a socio-musical activity changes a space into a more public one.

As we have already seen in previous chapters, an analysis of unyago and msanja songs indicates that the boundaries between the public and the private are rather blurry. Certain songs reflect ‘public’ gender expectations (as demonstrated in Chapter 3), while others push back and renegotiate gendered power relations (as seen in chapters 4 and 5). Kjersti Larsen argues that this difference comes from public versus private performance, where public performances include songs that focus on male (sexual) agency and desire and female compliance, while privately performed songs in a female-only setting may include a contestation of this dynamic with a more active role for women (2015: 232-235). However, as I will argue in this chapter, the distinction between private and non-private is not so clear-cut, and the presence of music may complicate this distinction even further.

I therefore aim to develop a critique of the classic private-public dichotomy in favor of a more fluid, contingent approach of space. I argue that spaces in Zanzibar are not private or public in themselves but are constructed as such by the people present and the activities taking place, and that women continuously negotiate, adapt or challenge what is expected of them related to the space they occupy. I come to this fluid understanding of space through a perspective of music as an Other space, a heterotopia in the Foucauldian sense, where different rules may apply. In the performance of, and the discourse on, ngoma, women are not only able to challenge existing norms, but are also able to actually change them in that very moment.

## Modalities of space

A fluid understanding of space, as contingent upon its inhabitants and their interaction, is not new. In fact, a lot has been written about public and private space in Islam, and from the 1990s onwards, different authors have problematized this binary in different ways. Before I discuss and develop these criticisms, I will briefly account for the foundation of this once popular and readily expressed dichotomy.

A basis for the classic understanding of public space can be found in the work of Jürgen Habermas. In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he puts forward the idea of public events and occasions as those that are available to everyone: “We call events and occasions ‘public’ when they are *open to all*, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs—as when we speak of public places or public houses” (Habermas 1989: 1, emphasis mine). He traces the origins of notions of what is “public” back to Ancient Greece, reveals the shifts in meaning attached to this concept, and contrasts “the public” with what is “private.” Taking into account yet another dichotomy, the state versus society, he then comes to a definition of public space as synonymous with a bourgeois, male public space, which arose in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in Germany and France. Public sphere here is inclusive and universal,

however, inclusive and universal for white male individuals only. This bourgeois public sphere emerged from the private sphere: it was private people coming together as a public and as such operating “in the tension-charged field between state and society” (Habermas 1989: 141). Thus, the public sphere can be seen as a mediation between the state and the private person (see also Crossley and Roberts 2004). While Habermas’ work remains central to debates on public space, it has also been criticized heavily. Before I address and develop some of these critiques, I will turn my attention to a conceptualization of the public and the private in Islam.

Philosopher and theologian Mohsen Kadivar notes that the terms “public” and “private” are not rooted in the Quran, hadith, or Islamic jurisprudence (2003). He conceptualizes the notion of “private” as related to three factors: the personal (or, that which is exclusive to the individual); that which one keeps a secret from others; and that over which the individual exercises exclusive authority and control (Kadivar 2003: 661). He sees the private as defined by the latter two (he deems the first factor unclear). The private sphere thus is the “sole prerogative of the individual: others may not decide for or even dispense advice regarding matters in this sphere” (Kadivar 2003: 661). Islamic ethics and jurisprudence prescribe that one should not pry into other people’s affairs, and one should not disclose any information about others to a third party. Thus, Islamic law accommodates the private sphere. According to *sheria*, Islamic law, all matters are private first, until they are proven to belong to the public domain. Thus, the private is ontological: first and foremost, matters are private, and only after justified religious legal argument can they become public. The private goes hand in hand with personal free choice, for in the private sphere an individual is free to do whatever he or she wants, provided it does no harm to others—even if it is a sin. However, the individual should not disclose his or her sins, nor seek knowledge of or disseminate the private sins of others. However, as soon as an individual enters the public domain, immediately there are limitations with regard to his/her clothing, (sexual) behavior, and other forms of social conduct (Kadivar 2003: 670). Thus, the public sphere entails a limitation of personal freedom.

Such limitations to what people can say and do in public in mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar are expressed by anthropologist Thembi Mutch. She argues that the streets of Dar es Salaam and Stone Town are public, and there are clear limits to an individual’s behavior, clothing, and interaction. She writes: “These may be public spaces, but in fact tacit permission is being constantly sought and negotiated between groups using this space, and consensus sought for appropriate behaviour” (Mutch 2012: 108). In fact, she states that *although* the streets are public, there are limitations on one’s behavior, but, following Kadivar’s conceptualization of space above, it is rather *because* the street is public i.e., not private, people are limited in their behavior. Furthermore, Mutch argues that public space is highly gendered and not necessarily accessible to everyone equally: “In Zanzibar, women are low-key in public. It

is rare to find Zanzibari women laughing, arguing or doing anything loudly in public” (2012: 106). She describes how women in Zanzibar, who want—or most of the time, *need*—to work constantly renegotiate and justify their working lives to themselves and others (with work being indicative of being in the public domain), whether this is through working from their own homes or through relying on their upper class background which seemingly gives them more freedoms.

During my own fieldwork in Zanzibar I also visibly noted separate spheres for women and men in Zanzibar. Women and men occupy different social and spatial areas; there are organizations for women, and groups for men, and men and women tend to occupy different physical spaces: this can be seen in town with men sitting on Jaws corner, for example, whereas women are more on the move in the streets of Stone Town: it is rare to see women sitting on the baraza sipping a coffee. However, during festive occasions, such as Eid al Fitr, women *do* stand in the streets as part of family gatherings, to socialize and celebrate. And during music performances, for example taarab and rusha roho concerts, women are in the foreground: they dance elaborately, without headscarves, and intermingle with men openly.

Therefore, it seems that focusing on gender only as a determining factor in the conceptualization of the public sphere is a too-limiting approach. In fact, the idea that public space is male, and the private domain is female, is one that has long been criticized by Islamic feminist historians. As Islamic scholar Asma Afsaruddin notes, the concepts of private and public must be connected to and understood from the particular power and social relations in a certain period of time, and gender is not the only determining factor in whether something is public or private. She challenges the male-public vs. female-private trope and the alleged mutual impenetrability of these domains: “the private and public spheres have often been anything but bipolar and [...] the two may be plotted along a continuum yielding far more points of contact with the other in varying historical and social circumstances” (Afsaruddin 1999: 3).

A helpful starting point for thinking about space in Zanzibar can be found in the work of sociologist Shampa Mazumdar and environmental design scholar Sanjoy Mazumdar (2001). Drawing on fieldwork in India and Iran, they note that spaces are not public or private in themselves, but rather *become so through the people who inhabit them and who interact in them*. In other words, the conceptualization of public and private is contextual. A key factor in their approach is the concept of *mahram*, which refers to people of the opposite sex with whom marriage is forbidden (thus, for a woman, brothers or fathers). With people that do not belong to this category, there are restrictions in interaction imposed by Islam. This means that when non-*mahram* guests arrive in the home, part of the home is redefined as public. In Swahili houses, there is usually a “public” living room for such purposes (the bedroom always stays private, *ndani*). A visitor must always call “*Hodi!*” (knock knock) before entering, and wait for the official invitation to enter: “*Karibu!*” (welcome),

possibly preceded by the question “*Nani?*” (who is it) if the visit is unexpected. This gives the people inside the house time to determine to what extent their living room will remain private or rather change its modality, as in the opening vignette of this chapter.

For spaces outside the house, Mazumdar and Mazumdar offer a tripartite typology of Muslim public space: male public areas, where women are allowed limited or no access; gender-neutral public areas, where men and women both can engage in activities, such as parks and gardens; and female public areas, where men have limited or no access, such as female-only prayer sites. They note the flexibility of space conceptualizations: “Depending on the social context, spaces within the home and neighborhood can be defined and re-defined as public or private. In this schema, males and females have their own public and private spaces and both experience differential levels of inclusion and exclusion” (Mazumdar & Mazumdar 2001: 310). This typology is an important expansion of the narrow, classic definition of public space in the Habermasian sense and counteracts the ‘public space = male’ trope.

While their analysis of public and private is largely informed by gender, which as we have seen is not the only determining factor for the modality of spaces in Zanzibar, I do find it helpful to think of spaces not as private or public in themselves, but rather as fluid constructions based on who is there and who is interacting with whom. Moreover, in a footnote Mazumdar and Mazumdar mention a crucial point when thinking about spaces: “Focusing then only on the gendering of spaces and the exclusion of women from specific areas and activities dismisses women’s activities and roles” (2001: 315). Indeed, focusing on gender only automatically means thinking about spaces from a male-dominated perspective. And, as others have noted, spaces where exclusively women are present can also be seen as having a high degree of publicness—again, as in the vignette above. Thus, my understanding of public/private, or rather, *ndani/nje* (inside/outside) in Zanzibar is a continuum, a gliding scale where spaces can change their modality rapidly and continuously. Instead of speaking of public space and private space as fixed concepts, I will therefore speak of a *degree* of privateness, or, more generally, of the modality of a space. Moreover, I follow Kadivar’s conceptualization of the private as ontological, and thus I start from that which is *ndani* (inside), the private. This means I conceptualize spaces as *ndani* or less *ndani* (instead of public), based on who is in that space and what is happening. For women, the outside space thus operates in the intersection of physical location, inhabitants of that location, and situation/occasion.

## The sartorial/spatial relationship

Before I discuss the relation of music to space, I must address the concept of the veil in Zanzibar and its connection to the modality of space. I use the concept of the veil for two reasons: firstly, because it can be a visual clue to the degree of privateness a Zanzibari woman deems herself in, and, secondly, because the concept of the veil is a helpful concept in understanding how music acts as an Other space.

As we have already seen in Chapter 3, modesty in dress is expected when people go outside the house in Zanzibar. This applies to both men and women, and in practice this means that men wear long trousers (shorts are for boys or tourists) and shirts, sometimes paired with a kanzu, a long white robe, and a kofia, an embroidered cap. Women wear dresses with long sleeves, pairs of kanga, or a buibui (a long black dress with long sleeves), always with a headscarf. There are also women who choose to wear the *niqab* (a veil that covers the face but leaves the eyes free).

Much has been written about Muslim women, the veil, and the assumed power relations behind the veil. A detailed analysis of veiling in Zanzibar falls outside the scope of this thesis, but I must emphasize the complexity of this phenomenon along the Swahili coast. Firstly, it is important to recognize not only religious motives for women to don a veil, but also cultural ones. In her 2013 book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod counteracts the stereotypical notion that Muslim women are to be rescued from their male oppressors and she attacks the generalizing and essentializing discourse on Muslim women wearing conservative clothing and a veil. Instead of understanding veiling practices as signs of oppression rooted in religion, she argues that veiling is part of a cultural identity and that different forms of covering have different meanings in different contexts. Veiling is part of the sartorial norms in certain cultures as much as there are sartorial norms in *every* culture. As she writes in an earlier article: “As anthropologists know perfectly well, people wear the appropriate form of dress for their social communities and are guided by socially shared standards, religious beliefs, and moral ideals, unless they deliberately transgress to make a point or are unable to afford proper cover.” (Abu-Lughod 2002: 785). Thus, dressing modestly and donning a veil does not only mark piety for many educated Muslim women, it is also a sign of sophistication and modernity (Abu-Lughod 2013: 39).

In discussing the ambivalence of the veil, postcolonial theorist Robert Young addresses issues of power, social status, and gender, and focuses on agency: who chooses to wear the veil and who does not, and what does this mean in terms of assertion and defiance? And why should the veil appear to disempower women, but empower men? Young sees the answer to this question in the fact that this is “not intrinsically a gender issue, but a situational one” (2003: 88). He explains that “the veil .... can only be read in terms of its



local meanings, which are generated within its own social space. A reading from outside will always tend to impose meanings from the social space of the viewer” (Young 2003: 89).

Focusing on such local meanings of veiling along on the Swahili coast reveals that wearing a veil not only has roots in religion—though it accommodates Islamic norms of modesty in dress—but in class and race as well. According to anthropologist Laura Fair (1998, 2004), the veil has historically been important in distinguishing Zanzibari individuals of higher class from members of the lower classes. Omani aristocratic men in the nineteenth century wore a *kilemba*, a kind of turban consisting of several meters of cloth wrapped around the head, while Omani women were never seen in public without a veil and an elaborately embroidered facemask. On the other end of the social ladder were the enslaved people, who were not allowed to cover their heads. Wearing elaborate clothes and headdress signaled membership of the highest class, both for men and for women: “The bodies of the élite were also elaborately adorned and almost entirely covered, while those of the poor or servile were concealed only to the extent that an individual’s social and financial position allowed” (Fair 1998: 74). The veil was a symbol of social status. After slavery was abolished in 1897, formerly enslaved people started to appropriate forms of dress which were previously forbidden to them. This also involved wearing a headscarf for women, as well as covering themselves to a greater extent. Covering up became a symbol for (newly found) freedom and status.

According to Fair, veiling is still connected to status in Zanzibar today. She points to the trend that appeared in Zanzibar in the early 2000s where more and more women started to wear the buibui with a *niqab*, a veil that covers the face but leaves the eyes free, and that is often embellished with embroidery or rhinestones. A *jilbab*, or overcoat, is often worn to complete the look, which can be made of different materials and colors as well. In contrast to popular Western belief, she found this had nothing to do with religion, but rather with being fashionable: “Zanzibari women have always taken fashion and style quite seriously, and one of the many attractions of the *niqab* is its range of styles.... The variable and constantly changing styles of the *niqab* and *jilbab* make them the preferred veil worn by younger women, and those with expendable income” (Fair 2013: 16). Thus, wearing a *niqab* is a way for women to appear fashionable and show that they have money to spend.

Based on Hanna Papanek’s term “portable seclusion,” Abu-Lughod has dubbed the veil and the associated coverings of the body “mobile homes” (2013: 36). For my analysis it is helpful to think of the veil as a kind of portable private space, and to take visual clues from the level of covering as to how private a space is deemed. In this regard, anthropologist Angela Demovic’ concept of “exteriority” —which in turn is based on Janice Boddy’s concept of interiority—is useful. Demovic borrows the term “interiority” from Janice

Boddy as “a model for the social meanings of spaces on the gendered landscape” (2016: 11). She sees the gendered landscape in Jambiani as existing in concentric circles around a woman’s home. Right around her residence, which is mostly inhabited by female family and neighbors, and thus is conceptualized as feminine space, a woman can move and work freely. As she moves further away from her home, she enters another, larger circle, which requires different behavior and clothing, and so on. Demovic uses the term exteriority to describe how a woman’s sartorial choices are a reflection of the circle she is currently in. I do not necessarily agree with her statement that the space around her residence is *feminine* space because this alludes to the private = female, public = male trope; I would rather call the space directly around someone’s house more *ndani*, inside. The concept of exteriority is productive, however, because it allows for a more fluid interpretation of space.

The veil, then, as a visual clue to the modality of a space, and an indication of the level of privateness of a situation. A portable seclusion, easily removed or put back on if the need arises, a piece of clothing that enables women to dress according to the situation but also make statements about that situation. A mobile private space, a protective *layer* that separates that which is *ndani*, from the everyday outside world, without rendering it completely invisible or inaudible. It is these characteristics of the veil that make it a helpful concept in the understanding of music as an Other space.

## Music as Other space

July 2021. I have spoken to Hadija about the possibility to record a *msanja ngoma* with a group of women, accompanied by a percussionist. Up to this point, my recording sessions with Jambiani women have followed more or less the same pattern: we sit down on a mat on the edge of the beach, close to the rock barrier, as far away from the ocean as possible. Then, we go through the songs one by one. The women sing one song, then tell me the lyrics, help me write them down, and explain them to me. Then, they sing the song again so I can record it. Being outdoors has made it possible for me to keep working with my (older) research contacts in Jambiani during the pandemic, because even though I am fully vaccinated by now, my research contacts are not. The vaccine has not yet been made available here.

Going through the songs one by one has proven to be a great way to understand everything that the women are singing, and their interpretations of it, and I am now longing for something a bit more elaborate. Hadija has already told me that there are no weddings with *msanja* coming up in the near future, so recording a *msanja ngoma* with a group of women and a percussionist is a good alternative right now. But, she tells me, we have to find a location where we can record. It cannot be on the beach, because people would stop and stare,

and this would not be appropriate. Therefore, we need to find a location that is suitable. It needs to be *ndani*, she tells me.

With the pandemic in mind, we agree to find a location that is well ventilated. Another dimension that adds to *ndani/nje*: we need a location that is *ndani* enough to respect the women's privacy and notions of respectability, but also one that lets enough 'outside' air inside. After a few days of searching, I find what I think is a suitable location: the outdoor terrace of a local hospitality training institute, which is secluded by *makuti* mats (thatched coconut leaves) that you can lower all the way down so nothing can be seen. The spaces between the *makuti* strips let enough air in so it feels like a safe option for everyone. Hadija approves of the location.

On the day of the recording, I arrive early and wait for the group to arrive. There is a very strong wind, like every day these days. It is coming in from the Indian Ocean, rattling the *makuti* blinds. One by one the *ngoma* group members arrive: female singers Hadija, Neema, Rehema, Halima and Rasheda. And then there is a male drummer, named Kamili. The women are wearing colorful dresses made of *kitenge* (printed wax fabric) with headscarves or pairs of *kanga*, one as skirt and one as headscarf. Kamili is wearing sports trousers and a football T-shirt.

I thank them for coming and explain again that I would like to record a *msanja ngoma*, though Hadija has informed them of the goal of today's recording beforehand. Kamili positions himself on the side of the open space, on a chair, while the women stand in front of my camera and sound recorder. They begin singing, soon joined by the drummer. Figure 39 provides an illustration of the recording space and the position of the performers.



Figure 39. *Msanja ngoma* recording session, Jambiani, July 2021.

The women open the ngoma with a sequence of introductory songs:

<i>Bismillahi ndiyo ya kwanza ya kuondokea eee</i>	In the name of Allah, this is the first time of things to go
<i>Mpe kibao cha kukalia mgeni wako eee</i>	Give your guest a seat to sit on, eee
<i>Akikuaga mpe ruhusa mwana na kwao eee</i>	If he leaves give him permission, the boy and the family, eee
<i>Na matandiko tandike sawa chumba cha nana we</i>	And the bedsheets put them properly in your room
<i>Ni mti mwema wa kuegemea kwenye kivuli</i>	It's a sweet tree to lean on that has shade <sup>99</sup>

The women dance slowly, shifting their body weight from one foot to the other. After a couple of songs, the ngoma begins to take off, with continuous drumming and a higher tempo. The dancing becomes more intensive now, with several women taking turns to demonstrate *kukata kiuno*, suggestively moving their hips in circles. The content of the songs becomes more explicit too:

<i>Uwani kwangu ee nimepanda mgomba x2</i>	In my courtyard I grew a banana tree
<i>Kila zikiota ndizi akula komba</i>	Once the bananas come up, the bush baby eats them
<i>Kama sijui kucheza nawe hujui kutombwa</i>	If I don't know how to dance, you don't know how to be fucked

And:

<i>Bwana Lei weee mie kantende x2</i>	Bwana Lei he did something to me
<i>Kunyachia shingo kunema</i>	Moving the neck in awe
<i>Kigongo mkononi hee</i>	The thick stick [penis] in the hand, heee
<i>Kisahani chako heee</i>	Your saucer [small vagina], heee

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<sup>99</sup> For a transcription and analysis of this msanja opening sequence, see Chapter 2.

While singing this last song, Hadija approaches the camera and looks directly into it. When the song is finished she thrusts her pelvis forward, points to her lap and says: “*Kisahani: tembo!*”<sup>100</sup> Vagina.” She holds up her hand closed into a fist, making circular motions with her wrist: “*Shingo kunema yaani mboo, mboo inanema kama hivi. Inanema, mboo. Weeeeeeeee!*” (The thing moving the neck, that is, the penis, the penis moves like this. It moves, the penis. Weeeeeeeee!). The other women burst out laughing.

This vignette problematizes notions of public and private, even if we think about these notions as being on a gliding scale. First, while we are technically behind closed (makuti) walls, they are not soundproof. My partner, who was playing on the beach with our son close to the recording location, told me afterwards that they could hear the music very well, and that many people stopped to listen. Of course, I had discussed this with Hadija before the recording event, but she dismissed my concern about the *musical sound* not being private. Second, even though we are having an invitation-only event, the women keep wearing their headscarves—except for Hadija, who takes it off at some point but keeps her veil cap on (the tight bonnet that many Zanzibari women wear underneath their hijab). Third, the women do not shy away from using direct, even profane language and gestures when explaining the lyrics to me—which would not be expected since there is a man present *and* I am making a video recording. So, the fact that we are in a *music* event seems to make a difference here.

Apparently music provides some sort of artistic and protective *veil* that enables behavior that would not be possible in daily life. As musicologist Martin Stokes has pointed out, music is associated with pleasure, freedom, and exploring social boundaries, which makes it an experience that is “distinctly ‘out of the ordinary’” (1994: 13).

Musicologists have long embraced the thought that music not only happens in society, but society happens in music, too. This means that a society’s values, ideas, and social order are articulated in its musical performances, but also that musical performances negotiate and shape values and identities (Frith 1989, Seeger 1987). Musicologist Simon Frith, for example, argues that music plays an important role in the construction of identity because “it offers so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective” (1996: 110). He argues that the practice of music expresses in itself an understanding of group relations and individuality. Music expresses a reality that is in it, rather than reflecting a reality that is behind it. This means not that social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities, but rather they get to know themselves as groups through cultural activities.

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<sup>100</sup> *Kisahani* literally translates as “saucer,” and she explains here that it is used as a synonym for *tembo*, which is used in Jambiani and Makunduchi as slang for vagina.

Cultural activity, and music, is thus essential for the formation of a social identity. Music in itself forms a context in which other things happen, it is “socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them” (Stokes 1994: 5).

Music thus enables people to feel in touch with their communities by evoking a sense of belonging. But what is more, music not only forms a reflection of social values, it is also able to *transform*. Music forms a relatively safe way of expressing defiance, of pushing back boundaries, of challenging existing power relations. Stokes describes this quality of music as follows:

Music .... does more than underscore, or express difference already there. Music .... provides an arena for pushing back boundaries, exploring the border zones that separate male from female. (1994: 22)

This exploration of border zones can be found in different musics in Zanzibar, notably in the very popular genre of *rusha roho*, or modern *taarab*. Previous fieldwork showed that in *rusha roho*, the Zanzibari ethics of concealment are contested (Hulshof 2011a, 2011b). As discussed in Chapter 4, an ethics of keeping personal, emotional and sexual matters to oneself underlies most Zanzibari social behavior. One should not talk about sex and other private matters openly. Self-restraint and modesty are important in all areas of life. However, the lyrics of *rusha roho* songs are very direct, and discuss matters like love, sex, jealousy, and rivalry very openly. Take the following excerpt from the *rusha roho* song *Dua la Kuku* (Prayer of a Chicken) by the group Spice Modern Taarab, for example:

*Haaaa vaibreshen*  
*Haaaa imekushinda kalkuleta,*  
*utaweza kompyuta? Ansa za kwes-*  
*hen*

Haaaa vibration  
 Haaaa you couldn't use a calculator,  
 will you be able to use a computer?  
 Answer the question

*Kama waitaka shari nnaiongojea*  
*Na kama uko tayari nimeshaamua*

If you want a quarrel, I'm waiting  
 for it  
 And if you're ready, I have already  
 decided

*Wewe bado mtoto ndogo, hauwezi*  
*kucheza na sisi*  
*Hebu nenda uko huna mpango,*  
*hauwezi kudili na sisi*

You're still a little child, you can't  
 play with us  
 Go, you don't have a plan, you  
 can't deal with us

*Kwanza tucheki chetu kiwango,  
hauwezi kudima na sisi*<sup>101</sup>

First you check your level, you  
can't compete with us

This type of direct language with lots of insults is used to express rivalry between different rusha roho groups, but the songs can also be used by individual women to communicate things that they would not be able to say out loud openly. Women can act out existing feuds and express personal conflict during live performances of rusha roho through the act of kutunza, tipping (see also Chapter 4). When a particular song is performed, a woman can go to the stage, and hand the singer notes of cash, accompanied by more or less elaborate hand movements, dancing, and suggestive looks toward another person that she deems the song appropriate for. The song presented above, for example, could be used by a married woman who knows another woman is involved with her husband: by practicing kutunza very clearly when this song is performed and giving the other woman meaningful looks, she can make her disdain for the mistress apparent (Hulshof 2011a). Transmitting messages to express personal conflict is also done via the radio. It is possible to request a particular rusha roho song for someone on the radio. When the person for whom the song is meant hears it on the radio (the names of the requester and the person for whom it is meant are usually mentioned in the announcement of the song), they understand the message in it is for them. Modern taarab songs on the radio can be used in an even more direct way as well. As one of my interlocutors told me: “For example, I am a woman, and I have a quarrel with you. You are my neighbor, and we share a piece of land. Then, when a song comes along on the radio that I think is perfect for you, I turn on my radio [in the house] so that you hear it and get the message. And then, when you hear a song on the radio that fits me, you can do the same.”

Additionally, rusha roho performances challenge the normal social and sartorial order of things in Zanzibar. Women who wear a buibui and a headscarf during the day, may be seen in a short sleeveless dress and bare-headed during a performance. They can also mingle and dance openly with men during these occasions.

The contestation of social norms is also illustrated in the vignette on the msanja recording session presented above. Take the following song again:

*Uwani kwangu ee nimepanda  
mgomba*

In my courtyard I grew a banana  
tree

*Uwani kwangu ee nimepanda  
mgomba*

In my courtyard I grew a banana  
tree

*Kila zikiota ndizi akula komba*

Once the bananas come up, the  
bush baby eats them

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<sup>101</sup> Lyrics collected and translated in Zanzibar City, March 26, 2010.

*Kama sijui kucheza nawe hujui  
kutomba*

If I don't know how to dance, you  
don't know how to fuck

This msanja song unfolded when the ngoma was in full swing, and it was introduced by the male drummer, Kamili, who provided a continuous rhythmic background on his ngoma. First, he sang the full song once. Then, the women sung the song, then Kamili again, and so on.

One of my research contacts explained the meaning of the lyrics: "It means that the guy planted his banana plant but once the banana plant comes out it is the bush baby who is eating them. So, you like someone, someone [will] come out and take her. For example, I have a fiancée, I am trying to support her, I buy clothes, food, I take care of her, and someone comes by and takes her." The last line, "If I don't know how to dance, you don't know how to fuck" is directed at the man who has taken away his woman, and is a final insult at his address. The subject acknowledges that while he may not know how to 'dance,' i.e., play the game of seduction, the man who takes his lover does not know how to fuck.



The melody and the rhythm as played by the ngoma can be transcribed as follows (Figure 40):<sup>102</sup>

The musical score for 'Uwani kwangu' consists of four systems, each with a Voice part (treble clef) and a Ngoma part (bass clef). The time signature is 12/8. The lyrics are: 'U - wa - ni kwang - u eee ni - me - pan - da m - gom - ba', 'Ki - la zi - ki - o - ta ndi - zi a - ku - la kom - ba', 'ka - ma si - ju - i ku - che - za na - we hu - ju - i ku - tom - ba'.

Figure 40. *Uwani kwangu*

The structure of the song could be summarized as AABA'. The main melodic characteristic of line 1 (bars 1-2), line 2 (bars 3-4), and line 4 (bars 7-8) is an oscillation between the notes a and b, with a slight variation in line 2 (bar 3 in the transcription in Figure 40: the occurrence of the c'#). However, in the first half of line 3 (bar 5) we can see different melodic material, while bar 6 returns to an oscillation between a and b. This new melody corresponds to something new in the lyrics as well: lines 1 and 2 are a description of someone planting a banana tree (which means, according to my research informant, investing in

<sup>102</sup> The rhythm played by the ngoma is variable during the 6 repetitions of the song that I recorded. I have transcribed the underlying basic rhythmic pattern. I have not accounted for performance errors/rhythmic irregularities in the transcription.

a relationship with a woman), while line 3 describes the ripening of the bananas (which corresponds to a ripening of the relationship, so that the woman is ready for engagement or marriage). In the last line, which compares not knowing how to dance to not knowing how to fuck, there is a concordance between text and music in that both parts (not knowing how to dance, and not knowing how to fuck) have the same melody, i.e., the melody in bar 7 is exactly the same as in bar 8.

This song constitutes a contestation of the normal social order in several ways. First, the directness of the lyrics seems out of line with the normal Zanzibari ethics of concealment, especially the word *kutomba* (to fuck) in the last line. As was amply illustrated in Chapter 5, these kinds of profanities are not unusual in unyago and msanja songs, but in this particular setting they seem even more out of the ordinary since we are in a mixed gender setting, visually obscured but not audibly so, and the ngoma is being recorded on video.

Furthermore, during the performance of this song, one of the singers illustrated the lyrics by grabbing the armrest of a nearby chair and performing *kukata kiuno*, moving her hips in circles, moving her pelvis closer and closer to the armrest, drawing explicit embodied parallels with 'fucking.' Towards the end of the song, she positioned herself on the floor, lying on her back, combining the circular movements of *kukata kiuno* with vertical thrusts of her pelvis.

Furthermore, the song addresses issues that should not normally be discussed openly. A first glance at the lyrics of the song suggests a man who 'loses' his woman to someone else, and if it would only be sung by a male singer, could be understood to encompass a warning against investing in morally loose women. However, the song is sung by women also, ululating in a celebratory way and dancing explicitly. Thus, by performing this song, women are able to express that ultimately they are the ones who decide whom they will have sexual relations with. The song may thus be seen not as a warning against sexually frivolous women, but rather a celebration of female sexual agency.

Moreover, in their explanation of some of the songs on sex and sexual relationships, the singers were very direct. Consider again the following fragment:

Hadija approaches the camera until she is very close, and starts to sing:

*Bwana Lei mie kantende*  
*Bwana Lei mie kantende*  
*Kunyachia shingo kunema*  
*Kigongo mkononi hee*  
  
*Kisahani chako heee*

Bwana Lei he did something to me  
 Bwana Lei he did something to me  
 Moving the neck in awe  
 The thick stick [penis] in the hand,  
 heee  
 Your saucer [small vagina], heee



*Figure 41. Bwana Lei*

As can be gathered from the transcription in Figure 41, the song has a wide melodic span, an octave. The melody of the first two lines (bars 1-2 and bars 3-4) is the same, consisting of a step-wise descending motion spanning the entire octave. In bar 5, where we find the third line of the lyrics, the melodic material consists of a fragment of the first melodic phrase, namely the descending motion from c' to g. Then, in bar 6, corresponding to line 4 of the lyrics, we see a slight variation of that fragment, reiterated in 7, corresponding to line 5. Thus, as the lyrics progress from general to more specific and direct, the melodic material also 'zooms in' to greater detail. The pitch contour graph in Figure 42 visualizes this in a concrete way:

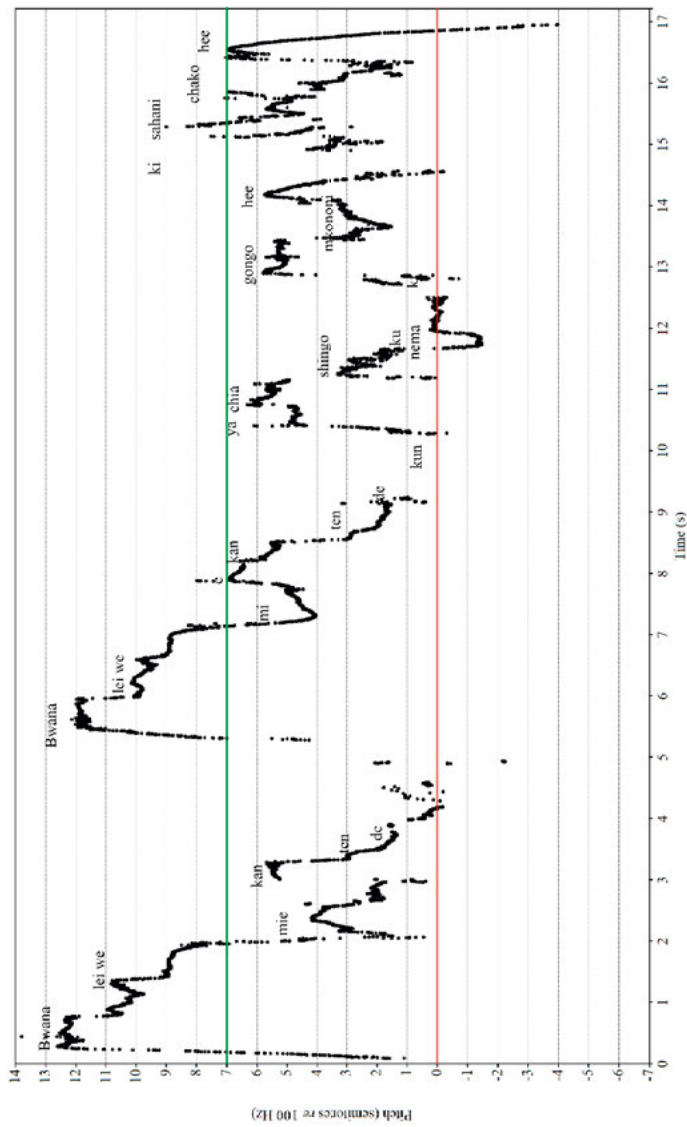


Figure 42. Pitch contour graph of Bwana Lei

This graph visualizes in a different way that the material from bars 5 to 7 (from about 10 seconds to 17 seconds) is extracted, as three reiterations, from the melodic material in bar 2 (from 2 seconds to 4 seconds).

While singing, Hadija looks directly into the camera, slowly shifting her weight from one foot to another in the rhythm of the song. With her body, she emphasizes the first and third beat of each bar in the transcription above. In line 4 (bar 6), she holds up her right fist with her left hand around the wrist and moves it in circular motion to illustrate the movement of the “thick stick” (penis), and in the final line (bar 7) she thrusts her pelvis forward to draw attention to the word *kisahani*, saucer –which is a metaphor for vagina. Then she explains into the camera:

<i>Kisahani: tembo.</i> [thrusts her pelvis forward and points at her pubic area]. Vagina.	Saucer: cunt.
<i>Shingo kunema yaani mboo, mboo inanema kama hivi.</i>	Vagina. The thing moving is the penis, the penis is moving like this.
<i>Inanema, mboo: wheeeeeeeeeee!</i>	It is moving, the penis: [it goes] wheeeeeeeeeee!

Hadija uses very clear, direct language to talk about male and female sexual body parts such as *mboo* (penis) and *tembo* (slang for vagina), as well as explicit gestures: thrusting her pelvis, pointing to her vagina, and imitating a large penis with her hand and wrist held up.

As Katrina Thompson has shown in her analysis of a singo, using direct and profane language is a way for women to assert verbal authority, and is used to socialize a young woman into her future role as a wife (2015). During a singo, which takes place indoors, married women under the direction of a *kungwi* (instructress) massage the bride and socialize her into the practice of being a married woman whilst also teaching her how to speak as a married woman. The focus of a singo is largely on sex, and the use of the body during sex, and the language used is direct, with words such as cunt, cock, fuck, etc.



Figure 43. A singo massage aimed at tourists as advertised by the Mrembo Spa in Stone Town, June 2019.

The main difference between a singo taking place behind closed doors, and this msanja ngoma recording is that the latter is taking place outside, in a mixed gender setting, with an outsider present. As Thompson argues: “in public, formal, or mixed-gender settings, women are likely to remain silent, use respectful forms of speech, or speak in ways that reproduce their society’s (positive and negative) expectations of them” (2015: 201). However, during the msanja ngoma and the following discussions thereof, the women are not withholding profanities and are not reproducing ideal versions of Zanzibari women’s speech. I understand this to be possible because music is an experience “out of the ordinary” (Stokes 1994: 13), which enables people to display ‘out of the ordinary’ speech and behavior. Music—whether performed live,

played on the radio, or talked about—is both tied to a society’s boundaries and is able to push them back at the same time.

This dual nature of music can be framed in terms of the concept of *heterotopia* by Michel Foucault. Foucault mentions this concept for the first time in his preface to *The Order of Things* where he discusses two different spaces that stand apart from the normal order: utopias and heterotopias. He writes:

*Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold .... *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names.... [They] dessicate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences (2002 [1966]: xix).

Foucault does not come back to the concept of heterotopia until a lecture he gave in 1967, based on a text that was published only much later, in 1986: *Of Other Spaces*. Here, he elaborates on the two different spaces which are related to all the other spaces which we occupy, but “in such a way as to suspect, neutralize or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault 1986: 24): the utopia, a site with no real place, which represents society itself in a perfected form, and the heterotopia. The latter is a place that actually exists, “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1986: 24). Foucault emphasizes that all societies have heterotopias, but that they might take on different forms. Examples are the crisis heterotopia, a privileged or sacred place reserved for individuals who are—in relation to society—in a crisis, such as adolescents, menstruating women and the elderly; and the heterotopia of deviation. This refers to those places where individuals whose behavior is deviant from the norm in their society are placed, such as prisoners and psychiatric patients. An existing heterotopia can be made to function in a different way throughout history. A key characteristic of heterotopias is that they can juxtapose several different spaces which are otherwise incompatible in a single space, such as the theater or the garden. Heterotopias are often linked to time, such as museums (linked to the accumulation of time) or fairgrounds and festivals (linked to the temporal mode of time). Heterotopias are not freely accessible like public places; there are certain prerequisites for one to enter, they “presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (Foucault 1986: 26). Entering a heterotopia is conditional: one must have permission, possess certain qualities or characteristics, or behave in a certain way.

Important to note here is that heterotopias are in *relation* with all the other space and that they *do* something: “Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life

is partitioned, as still more illusory [...] Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault 1986: 27).

While music as such is not a physical, actual site, it is inextricably tied to, and informs our sense of, space. It is a marker of social space, and it can transform space: it creates a space that is Other, a space in which different rules apply. I understand music therefore as functioning *as* a heterotopia, but in the form of a utopia, much as Foucault describes the mirror. The mirror is a placeless place, an “unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface” (Foucault 1986: 24), but it is also a heterotopia because it does exist in reality, rendering the place that one is in at once real *and* unreal. Like a mirror, music exists in space (and in time): as sounding material, even though it is ephemeral, and it has the capability to transform the normal order of that space.

An example of how music transforms space can be found in musicologist Birgit Abels’ analysis of the *Regatta Lepa* festival of the sea-nomadic Sama Dilaut in Semporna, Borneo. Her analysis shows how during the *Regatta Lepa* festival, constituting of the gathering of decorated boats with music ensembles and celebrations, a temporary sonic realm comes into existence and everyday social hierarchies are suspended (Abels 2017). The music that is played during the festival is essential for a feeling of Sama Dilaut identity, along with the broader sonic landscape: “For the duration of the festival, several gong ensembles play independently of one another on the boats, wrapping the small mooring area, its waters, and everyone within hearing range in a thick, dense cloud of sound. The constant motorboat noise and the sound of carnival barkers, kids playing around the pier, and people socializing all add to the emerging sonic complexity” (Abels 2017: 22).

As mentioned, the Sama Dilaut are a sea-nomadic people, and movement is an analytical concept that is central to understanding their spatiality: they are not tied to a geographic location that evokes a sense of belonging; rather, their social space is a network of social relations based on permanent mobility. It is the invocation of movement in the music of the gong ensembles, both in terms of musical characteristics as well as the moving of the performing boats *and* the attending audience, that evokes a strong sense of Sama Dilautness: “The sensation of how one’s felt body merges with others in following sonically mediated suggestions of movement is precisely what lies behind the power of the *Regatta Lepa*. It’s how Sama Dilautness comes about musically here—as an atmosphere, forever transforming as it keeps moving through space. Like sea-nomads” (Abels 2017: 32).

In everyday life, the Sama Dilaut are relegated to the social fringes of the Semporna community, but during the festival the normal social order is suspended and Semporna becomes a distinctly and exclusively Sama Dilaut space, because music is a “place-making practice” (Abels 2017: 33, see also Solomon 2000).



However, this transformation of space only lasts for the duration of the festival, and when it ends, the normal social order is restored. In the msanja ngoma as described in this chapter, however, the normal order of things could be suspended after the musical sound had ended. For example, after the performance of the songs, the women continued to explain and discuss the lyrics of the songs they had just performed, using direct and sometimes profane words and gestures. And a couple of days after this event was recorded, I was able to talk to Hadija again, about the lyrics and the meaning of them, and again she used the same kind of language and gestures—different from everyday speech and movements.

Msanja ngoma and unyago ngoma take place in space and time, enacting the real sites and power relations that exist in Zanzibar, while at the same time neutralizing, challenging, inverting them. Female ngoma is a force that disrupts the normal order of things, to speak with Foucault. That the musical sound during the msanja recording session described above was not private, i.e., could be heard by outsiders, does not matter, precisely because the sound *itself* is what creates the Other space. Like the veil, music demarcates a space, and creates a separation between the everyday outside world and another world that is sectioned off yet existing in the everyday.

Furthermore, the music event enables not only the direct performance of profane lyrics but also the discussion of them afterwards without changing anything in the space's settings, inhabitants and relations. The Other space created by music thus escapes the temporality and spatiality of the music event itself; that is, it lasts after and beyond the event and space during which it is produced.

In this chapter, I have argued for a more fluid interpretation of space, escaping the public-private dichotomy. I have illustrated how spaces in Zanzibar are not public or private in themselves but take on a particular modality depending on who is inhabiting that space, who is interacting with whom, and what is happening. I have argued that spaces in Zanzibar can be understood to be fundamentally *ndani*, inside, and depending on inhabitants, interactions, movement and activity, can become less *ndani*. Moreover, when there is a musical performance, the normal order of that space is suspended, even if the inhabitants and setting do not change. Music transforms a space into an Other space, a space in which different rules apply, where different behavior is possible and where (gendered) norms such as modesty and refraining from direct or profane language are contested. Music can thus be said to function as a Foucauldian heterotopia, as it both represents social norms and turns them upside down.

## 7. Final Lines

“Your husband has loaded his gun. You are just waiting for him to fire.”

-Mariam, December 14, 2019

“Each song has its time and its action. The song may be short but the action  
is long.”

-Matona, December 13, 2020

*Hakuna anayemshinda mwanaume kama mwanamke*

Nothing can overpower a man like a woman – Swahili proverb

In this thesis, I have focused on the songs of two female ngoma that are associated with weddings in Zanzibar: unyago and msanja. Wedding ngoma in Zanzibar, like all ngoma, are events that signify change: in this case, a woman changing her status from unmarried to married. But ngoma do more than just represent change. They are also spaces of production, both in a metaphorical sense as well as in an actual, very real, way.

Two distinct, yet interconnected, lines in the writing emerged: one that lead to an understanding of music as an Other space, a space which is both connected to Zanzibari society, as well as existing separately in it and from it; and one that embodies a musicological approach to music from the African continent with the aim of showing that an engagement with musical properties of unyago and msanja song can deepen our understanding of how Zanzibari women play with societal expectations and norms through the performance of, and discourse on, these ngoma. Thus, two sets of connected conclusions can be drawn.

After an introduction of the two ngoma that are central in this thesis, with a discussion of their main musical features and context, the chapters thereafter presented unyago and msanja songs along different themes, starting with normative ideology, and thereafter walking the line via ambiguousness to subversion. I started with an exploration of songs that express the norms and gendered expectations for women in Zanzibar. These songs articulate how to be a ‘good Zanzibari wife’: a woman should be modest and follow her husband’s lead, she should keep the house and herself clean and be ready and willing to satisfy her husband’s sexual desire: she waits for her husband to fire his “loaded gun,” as my research associate Mariam put it. In short, these songs

sound out what is considered to be the official discourse on gendered power relations and related expectations.

In addition to these kind of songs, there are also songs that are considerably more ambiguous. I took an unyago song titled *Mpanda waya* (Walker of the Line), as a starting point to examine how the ambiguity of the Swahili language, and its use in unyago and msanja songs, enables Zanzibari women to say things without actually saying them. I illustrated different options for equivocal communication available to women. Furthermore, I explored how women carefully construct and guard a realm of secret knowledge—knowledge that is only available to those who have ‘walked the line’—which allows them to challenge notions of vulnerability and power. Ambiguity is thus understood as a potentiality for the re-ordering of power relations.

Finally, I presented songs that transcend this ambiguity, into explicit contestation and transgression. I focused on female sexual agency and discourse on sex as expressed in unyago and msanja songs, to show how women position themselves unequivocally as having sexual authority and agency through the performance of them. Here, Zanzibari women are subjects rather than objects, individuals who have desires and sexual prowess, and who explicitly express themselves as sexual agents. Women sing about female desire and sexual pleasure, about them taking the initiative to sex, and may resort to mocking a husband who is not able to satisfy a wife’s desire. These songs can thus be said to form a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative of male sexual agency, and a presentation of female Zanzibari sexuality in a different light.

Unyago and msanja thus not only reflect Zanzibari society, representing Zanzibari norms and expectations, but also exist separately from it and in it. Music is a modality of its own, but exists *in* the modality of everyday life. As an instance of what Victor Turner has termed *communitas*, music is simultaneously a moment in and out of time, as well as in and out of social structure. Music, too, provides a space where the norm and the anti-norm can co-exist and where existing power relations can be expressed, and turned upside down, at the same time. Unlike Turner’s *communitas*, however, the msanja and unyago songs I describe and analyze do not necessarily form a (female) anti-structure as opposed to the (male) structure as such, but rather constitute an expression of a joint contextual and lived structure, in which the official norm may be reiterated, negotiated, critiqued and inverted. As I have argued, this quality of music can be framed in terms of Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, sites that “suspect, neutralize or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault 1986: 24). While music as such is not a physical site, it can transform space and create a space that is Other, where different rules apply. Msanja and unyago take place in space and time, enacting the real sites and power relations that exist in Zanzibar, while at the same time neutralizing, challenging, and inverting them. As others have noted, ngoma are a way of “articulating and commenting on processes of transition or transformation” (Van Dijk et al.: 7) and can produce power to reorder

social relationships. I argue that ngoma can produce this power because they function *as* a heterotopia.

In the chapter preceding this conclusion, I also argued for a less fixed understanding of spaces in Zanzibar in general. As I have shown, there is no clear-cut distinction between private space and public space in Zanzibar. Rather, I present a more fluid understanding of space, where the modality of a space depends on its inhabitants as well as the interactions and the activities that take place. Drawing on Angela Demovic' concept of exteriority, where spaces are seen in relation to the distance from a person's home, I propose a continuous movement along the line *ndani—nje*, inside—outside. Following Mohsen Kadivar's conceptualization of space in which the private is ontological, a perspective where *ndani* comes first allows for thinking about spaces from a female perspective instead of a male one, and thus positions women as the norm and as having agency. Moreover, when there is a music performance, the normal order of a space is suspended, even if the inhabitants and setting do not change. Framed in terms of heterotopia, music can transform a space into a space in which different rules apply, where different behavior is possible and where (gendered) norms such as modesty and refraining from direct or profane language are contested.

Thus, the performance of *unyago* and *msanja* songs enables women to walk the line between this musical Other space and the everyday life space. Moreover, the discourse *about* this Other space extends the boundaries of that space. This means that by talking about the songs, women can still enter that space where different rules apply and can still include what is excluded in daily life. As we have seen in Chapter 4, discursive space as Other space is also examined by Katrina Thompson in her analyses of Swahili speakers talking about *Popobawa*: a giant bat-winged demon who visits people at night in their bed and sexually assaults them. She contends that Swahili speakers, especially women and queer men, are able to transgress (gendered) boundaries into a space where they can reveal aspects of their sexuality that are taboo in everyday life, regardless of whether they believe in the supernatural or not: "Popobawa creates a space where women's and men's experiences that deviate from dominant norms can be familiarized and possibly talked about" (Thompson 2017: 12). Talk about Popobawa thus creates a space where people can transgress cultural norms, position themselves as authoritative subjects, and critique normative power structures. Likewise, talk about *unyago* and *msanja* creates a discursive space in which women are able to refrain from reproducing ideal versions of Zanzibari women's speech and instead transgress these norms to renegotiate, contest, and subvert gendered power relations. Thus, in this thesis discursive space—emerging from musical space—is seen as an extension of the Other space generated by the performance of the songs. The song may be short, but the action is long, as my research contact Matona described it.

Furthermore, this thesis embodies a musicological approach to music from the African continent. The analytical methods and theories employed here aim to strike a balance in the *context* vs. *text* debate with regards to the analysis of African music, in order to show that both perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive. On the one hand, there are scholars who argue that studying African music in context, and excluding it from any kind of formal analysis, has not contributed to the decolonization of African musicology—on the contrary, it has turned ethnomusicology into a “difference making machine,” perpetuating problematic conceptions such as the myth of African music as rhythm, or the reduction of African music to a functional phenomenon. These scholars argue for a close reading, listening, and analysis of the music, as it too carries meaning in itself and is not just functional (Agawu 2003, Euba 2000, Scherzinger 2001). On the other hand, other scholars have pointed out that the application of (Western) formal analytical methods may precisely affirm Africa’s liminal position in musicological discourse, because it results in the incorporation of African music into the European musicological canon, the latter again becoming the standard against which the former is to be measured (Meintjes 2006, Solomon 2012). As such, an engagement with formal analytical methods may be seen as a neo-imperialist endeavor.

However, recognizing the importance of contextual background does not preclude an engagement with the music itself. As Kofi Agawu duly notes: “African discourses about music generally stress holism over atomism, integration over separation .... at the same time, however, several properties revealed in quantitatively oriented analyses are compelling enough to engender further enquiry” (Agawu 2006: 6). Indeed, I argue that if holism is the preferred approach to any engagement with African music, musical, textual and contextual parameters should be included in our analyses.

As I have shown through transcriptions and analyses of unyago and msanja songs in chapters 2 to 5, an engagement with the music, in addition to the lyrics and social context, can lead to a more profound understanding of how Zanzibari women play with, and challenge, societal expectations. Music can underscore the meaning of the lyrics, aid in the teaching and learning process, or it can alter the meaning of lyrics, or render them ironic.

Furthermore, an analysis of rhythmic and melodic properties is what can show a connection between female wedding ngoma in Zanzibar, and other ngoma and music genres from the islands and the Swahili coastal area at large. Unyago ngoma is interconnected with other ngoma and music genres along the Swahili coast both contextually as well as musically. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the basic unyago rhythmic pattern

⑫ x . . x . . x . . x . .

is similar to one of the basic *chakacha* rhythms, a female *ngoma* originating from the Kenyan coast (Campbell and Eastman 1984: 476). Like *unyago*, *chakacha* is performed at weddings as well. *Chakacha* in turn is suggested to be an adaptation from *msondo*, a female *ngoma* from Pemba, another island in the Zanzibar archipelago (Topp Fargion 2014). *Msondo* in Pemba, like *unyago*, teaches women about married life and sex.

Furthermore, Janet Topp Fargion (1999) has noted the use of the basic *unyago* rhythmic pattern (as shown above) as well as the dance technique called *kukata kiuno* in both *taarab* and *kidumbak*. And as I have shown in my analysis of several *unyago* songs in chapters 2 through 5, *unyago* in Zanzibar has adopted melodic material from *taarab* in the form of *maqams*. Thus, musical analysis may shed light on patterns of migration and change.

Engagement with the musical properties of coastal Swahili *ngoma* also reveals the need for further inquiry. I looked at two *ngoma* in Zanzibar, but there are many more *ngoma* and other music genres. Some of them, such as *chakacha* and *kidumbak*, are said to have musical similarities to *unyago*, which warrants a musical analytical examination of these genres as well. Others need further documentation and analysis, such as *shindwe* and *dandaro*, wedding dances with music from Jambiani. How might these *ngoma* be connected to *msanja*, and to other wedding *ngoma* from coastal East Africa? I therefore argue for the importance of further musicological examination of coastal Swahili music genres, including *ngoma*.

This also brings me to one of the main limitations in my research. *Unyago* is fairly well documented, but *msanja* much less so. *Msanja* has been documented to exist in coastal mainland Tanzania since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bakari 1981, Askew 1999), with the use of drums, struck idiophones, and horns. The origins of *msanja* on the island of Zanzibar are not explicitly documented anywhere,<sup>103</sup> but it is likely that *msanja* has existed on the islands off the coast since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well. One of the main differences between *msanja* as described in coastal mainland Tanzania and the *msanja* I recorded in Zanzibar seems to be instrumentation: *msanja* in Zanzibar may use drums, but no other instruments, unlike *msanja* from mainland Tanzania. Thus, whether *msanja* was brought to rural Zanzibar from the coastal mainland, and has since changed its musical form, or whether *msanja* in Jambiani has developed independently into its own form and with the same name, remains unclear. However, another *ngoma* called *dandaro* has been documented in coastal mainland Tanzania (Bakari 1981), which is another *ngoma* that is currently found in Jambiani, tentatively suggesting a link between Jambiani and the mainland. Musical analysis of *dandaro* in both locations might open new vistas as to the history, interrelationships, and dissemination of this *ngoma*.

As with all music traditions, *unyago* and *msanja ngoma* are subject to change. Many of the ritual experts and performers are older women, and there

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<sup>103</sup> To my knowledge

are few women from the younger generations who are equally invested in the continuation of these traditions. Unyago and msanja are still performed at weddings, but more and more weddings include other types of music or ritual, such as rusha roho or a singo. As one of my interlocutors stated: “Young people don’t appreciate this tradition, they prefer disco music.” It thus seems that for the same context, a different kind of music is preferred. However, the reverse also seems the case: the ritual need for unyago and msanja may be decreasing, the music is still performed, and lives in the minds and voices of women. A remark by an unyago expert summarizes this change succinctly: “the ngoma (musical part) has not changed very much but the *sehemu* (place, location) has changed.”<sup>104</sup>

Overall, this thesis contributes to the growing body of discourse on Zanzibari women as discursive, sexual, and musical agents. The songs, and more particularly the women singing them and explaining their meaning to me, are the focal point in this thesis—in terms of both material and analysis. Through their selection of songs and their explanations, the singers have guided me in my interpretation and have shaped the musical space that arose. On a broader level, msanja and unyago ngoma enable women in Zanzibar to portray themselves as subjects rather than objects, as active instead of passive. They are the ones constructing a particular world, rather than only being constructed by that world. Thus, in this thesis women are walking the line in different ways. In daily life, they are continuously moving along the line from *ndani* to *nje*, adjusting their sartorial and communicative expressions as they go. The performance of, and discourse on, female wedding ngoma allow women to walk the line towards knowledge about gendered expectations, and towards the ability to contest existing power relations at the same time. By walking the line between a musical Other space and everyday life space back and forth, women can sing in different voices.

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<sup>104</sup> Personal communication with Bi Nyota, June 13, 2019.

# Glossary

<i>Aibu</i>	Shame, dishonor
<i>Askari</i>	Security guard (for example for hotels)
<i>Bao</i>	A board game in which seeds need to be moved across pits in a wooden board
<i>Baraza</i>	Stone benches in front of, and attached to, houses in Stone Town
<i>Buibui</i>	Long black robe with long sleeves, which covers one's day outfit
<i>Chakacha</i>	Female ngoma from the Kenyan coast
<i>Daladala</i>	Minibus, in Zanzibar they are often converted trucks with open backs
<i>Dandaro</i>	Wedding dance from Jambiani; ngoma from coastal mainland Tanzania
<i>Heshima</i>	Honor, respectability
<i>Hijab</i>	Headscarf
<i>Jilbab</i>	Overcoat
<i>Kanga</i>	Colorful printed fabrics with a proverb or saying printed along one border, often sold in pairs
<i>Kanzu</i>	Long white robe with long sleeves, worn by men
<i>Kidumbak</i>	Female informal drumming songs
<i>Kiitikio</i>	Chorus
<i>Kinganga</i>	Middle drum in unyago
<i>Kiongozi</i>	Leader
<i>Kitenge</i>	Colorful printed wax fabric, sold by the meter
<i>Kofia</i>	Round-shaped embroidered hat, worn by men
<i>Kukata kiuno</i>	"To cut the waist," a hip-yrating dance technique
<i>Kungwi</i>	Ritual instructor
<i>Kutunza</i>	To reward, to tip; act of tipping at music performance
<i>Liwa</i>	Sandalwood
<i>Madrasa</i>	Qur'an school
<i>Makuti</i>	Roof thatching made from interwoven palm leaves
<i>Maqam</i>	Arabic mode
<i>Msanja</i>	Wedding ngoma from Jambiani; ngoma from coastal mainland Tanzania
<i>Msondo</i>	Largest drum in unyago; wedding ngoma from Pemba



<i>Mzungu</i>	White foreign person (pl.: <i>wazungu</i> )
<i>Ndani</i>	Inside, private, hidden
<i>Ng'ambo</i>	"The other side," the part of Zanzibar City east of Creek Road
<i>Ngoma</i>	Drum; music-dance event or ceremony
<i>Niqab</i>	Veil that covers the face but leaves the eyes free
<i>Nje</i>	Outside
<i>Nyakanga</i>	Ritual instructor (pl.: <i>manyakanga</i> )
<i>Purdah</i>	Physical separation of women from men
<i>Rusha roho</i>	Modern taarab
<i>Shamba</i>	Fields; used to denote all rural land outside of Zanzibar City
<i>Shanga</i>	Beads
<i>Sheria</i>	Islamic law, sharia
<i>Shindwe</i>	Wedding dance from Jambiani
<i>Singo</i>	Pre-wedding full body massage
<i>Taarab</i>	Classical music from the Swahili coastal area, with lyrics in Swahili, Arabic maqams and Western scales, Arabic, African, and Western instruments and Arabic ornamentations
<i>Unyago</i>	Wedding ngoma from East Africa, in Zanzibar found in Zanzibar City
<i>Vumi</i>	Smallest drum in unyago

## Swedish Summary: Svensk Sammanfattning

I denna avhandling beskrivs två former av *ngoma* på Zanzibar. Ngoma är en typ av musik- och danshändelser, och de två ngoma-former som avhandlingen fokuserar på, *unyago* och *msanja*, praktiseras av kvinnor och är intimt förknippade med Zanzibars bröllopsritualer. Genom sång, musik och dans förbereder dessa två ngoma en kvinna för det äktenskapliga livet. Textinnehållet i sångerna behandlar teman som mäns och kvinnors fysionomi, sexualitet och moral, åtrå, begär och orgasm. Zanzibar är ett huvudsakligen muslimskt samhälle, med avgränsade sociala sfärer för män och kvinnor, och separata normer och förväntningar rörande tal, klädsel och uppförande. I *unyago*- och *msanja*-sånger representeras sådana normer och förväntningar samtidigt som de kan omförhandlas och utmanas.

I avhandlingen ställs följande övergripande frågor: hur är *unyago*- och *msanja*-sånger sammankopplade med Zanzibars samhällsliv, med dess köns- och genuskodade förväntningar? Hur och i vilken grad kan man avläsa att kvinnor kommenterar, omförhandlar, utmanar eller undergräver befintliga köns- och genusmässiga maktförhållanden genom framförandet av, och diskurser om, dessa bröllopssånger för kvinnor? På ett övergripande plan anlägger avhandlingen ett musikvetenskapligt perspektiv på *unyago* och *msanja*. I en grundlig undersökning av musiken, jämte sångtexterna och det sociala sammanhanget, presenteras en fördjupad förståelse för hur kvinnor i Zanzibar experimenterar med, och omförhandlar, sociala förväntningar.

Materialet till studien insamlades under fyra fältarbeten, i juni 2019, december 2019, januari 2020 och juli 2021. Inspelningar, intervjuer och dokumentation av informella samtal utgör fältarbetets metodologiska grundpelare, där de olika dokumentationsmetoderna är tätt sammanflätade. De analytiska verktygen i avhandlingen utgörs av diskursanalys och analys av musikinspelningar. Med anledning av att avhandlingens huvudsakliga analysobjekt utgörs av sånger – i praktiken en sammansmältning av musik och text – är de två angreppssätten är sammankopplade. Utöver analysen av sångerna uppmärksammas dessas vidare diskursiva sammanhang, främst hur kvinnor kommunicerar genom sånger samt hur de talar om sångerna och med vilka ord och det språk detta sker. Det analytiska perspektivet sammanfattas i undersökningen av ngoma som 'text i sin kontext'.

Oavsett om musik framförs live, spelas på radio, eller talas om, är den kopplad till gränsdragningar och normer i samhället, och till sin egen förmåga

att utmana eller överskrida dessa, ett dubbelt tillstånd. I avhandlingen behandlas musikens detta dubbla tillstånd med hjälp av Michel Foucaults begrepp *heterotopia*. I en heterotopi kan olika kulturella uttryck mötas, ifrågasättas och omdefinieras. Trots att musik inte är ett fysiskt rum är den bunden till rymd, och den formar sinnes- och uppfattningsmässigt det rum i vilket aktörer och andra närvarar. Musiken blir en markör för det sociala rummet och kan också omvandla detta rum. Musiken skapar ett rum som är 'det Andra', där gängse sociala regler och normer inte nödvändigtvis gäller. I avhandlingen analyseras därmed musikens funktioner *som* en heterotopi.

I avhandlingens olika kapitel samordnas musikanalys, etnografi och teori. Balansen och samspelet mellan perspektiven varierar mellan kapitlen. Efter en introduktion till avhandlingen och de huvudsakliga musikaliska faktorerna i unyago och msanja i kapitel 2, följer i kapitel 3 en analys av unyago- och msanja-sångers uttryck för könsbetingade moraliska förväntningar i Zanzibar. I såväl msanja- som unyago-sånger kan man finna normer och värderingar som ses som avgörande för en blivande hustru. De sätt på vilka kvinnor sjunger dessa sånger lär en kvinna hur hon ska vara 'en god zanzibarisk hustru'. Detta innefattar antingen bejakandet av det normativa samhällstillståndet eller en kritik av en motsatt och negativ bild. Bland sångerna finns de som artikulerar hur 'en god zanzibarisk hustru' bör vara och vad hon ska göra. Hon ska vara ödmjuk, hålla sig för sig själv, ta hand om hemmets miljö, ta hand om gäster, samt se till att hennes make är bekväm, och hon ska tillfredsställa hans sexuella begär.

Sällan följer vardagens liv strikt det föreskrivna idealet. Kapitel 4 tecknar en övergång från normativ ideologi till flertydighet i analysen av sånger. Analysen visar hur vaghet och flertydighet i ngoma-sångernas texter skapar en potential för något annat: den ger kvinnor på Zanzibar en möjlighet att uttrycka saker utan att uttryckligen säga dem. En närläsning och närlyssning av unyago-sånger visar att dubbeltydigheten i några av dem öppnar för möjligheten att i sång konstruera om normativa maktförhållanden. I kapitel 4 utforskas även hur kvinnor skapar och bevakar gränserna för en domän av hemlig kunskap – det handlar om kunskap tillgänglig endast för dem som har 'walked the line'. Sådan kunskap tillåter kvinnorna att utmana rådande uppfattningar om (kvinnors) utsatthet och (mäns) makt. En flertydighet och ett strategiskt hemlighållande av inte minst kvinnlig sexualitet ger kvinnor på Zanzibar möjlighet att med sångerna positionera sig som aktiva subjekt och aktörer med viss makt. I kapitel 4 diskuteras också avhandlingsförfattarens möjligheter att som fältarbetande forskare själv 'walk the line'.

Kapitel 5 leder analysen från frågor om ambiguitet till det mer direkta utmanandet och undermineringen av de normativa diskurser som rör köns- och genusmässiga maktförhållanden. Kapitlet fokuserar på kvinnors sexuella begär och på deras agens. I kontrast till de sånger som analyseras i kapitel 2, i vilka kvinnor skildras som tillbakadragna, passiva och lydiga, tecknar de sånger som analyseras i detta kapitel en annan bild. Zanzibariska kvinnor är

här subjekt snarare än objekt i sångerna, som individer med egna sexuella begär, med makt och mod, och som uttrycker sig själva genom en påvisbar sexuell agens. I kapitlet analyseras alltså sånger som tecknar alternativa berättelser till det dominerande narrativet om uteslutande manlig sexuell agens, i språk och praktik. Det zanzibariska samhällets sexualitetsnormer framträder i kapitlet i ett annorlunda ljus.

I analysen av ngoma-sångerna i kapitel 3, 4 och 5 framträder gränserna mellan det publika och privata livet som relativt porösa. Vissa sånger återspeglar 'offentliga' förväntningar mellan män och kvinnor, medan andra förskjuter eller omförhandlar maktrelationer baserade på kön. Genom att belysa musik från perspektivet av 'det Andra' – alltså en heterotopi i foucauldiansk mening där olika regler gäller och samexisterar – presenteras i kapitel 6 en kritik av den vanligt förekommande distinktionen offentlig–privat till förmån för en mer flytande och kontingent syn på rum. I detta kapitel framförs argument för att rumsligheter i Zanzibar inte bör betraktas som privata eller offentliga i sig själva, utan att de konstrueras till vad de blir utifrån de aktiviteter som inträffar inom rummet. Här beskrivs hur kvinnor genom ngoma fortlöpande omförhandlar, omformar eller ifrågasätter vad som förväntas av dem i det rum de beträder.

Slutkapitlet sammanknyter två separata men ömsesidigt beroende linjer eller perspektiv som tecknats i avhandlingen. Det första perspektivet framhåller att musik och ngoma kan betraktas som 'det Andra' rummet, alltså ett rum där kvinnor har möjlighet att agera på sätt som annars inte vore möjliga i det dagliga livet. Det andra perspektivet visar att en ingående analys av musiken i unyago- och msanjatraditioner väsentligt kan fördjupa förståelsen av hur kvinnor experimenterar med förväntningar och normer som har att göra med kön och genus. Slutkapitlet identifierar även möjligheter till fortsatt musikvetenskaplig forskning om ngoma-traditioner från Zanzibar och Swahili-kustområdet mer generellt. En förhoppning är att nya perspektiv härmed kan anläggas rörande sammanhängande traditioner, migration och förändring av musiktraditioner i regionen.

I avhandlingen ses kvinnor vandra sin väg ('walking the line') i olika riktningar. I sina dagliga liv förflyttar de sig kontinuerligt mellan mer privata till mer offentliga rum och de anpassar sin klädedräkt och sina språkliga uttrycksmedel under denna rörelse. Framförandet av, och samtalen om, kvinnors bröllops-ngoma tillåter kvinnorna att vandra en väg där kunskapen om köns- och genusförhållanden står i centrum, samtidigt som denna kunskap erbjuder möjligheter att sätta existerande maktrelationer i nytt ljus. Genom att vandra vägen mellan det musikaliskt 'Andra' rummet och det dagliga rummet ger kvinnornas sång uttryck för alternativa röster.

# Appendix 1: Overview of Collected Ngoma Songs and Lyrics

Songs:

Ngoma	Song title	Collection date(s)	Number of recordings	Overall topic
UNYAGO	Aiche	Jun-19 and Dec-19	2	Introduction to unyago: come in and listen to the drums
	Mkurugwa	Jun-19	1	Song addressed to the respected mother of the bride, at whose house there is an unyago ngoma being held
	Mwanikalia	Jun-19 and Jan-20	2	One should not gossip about others
	Kala marombe	Jan-20	1	“Eat your maize you gorilla”; mocking song

	Kuku lala	Jun-19	1	A young woman should play hard to get when a man is chasing her
	Ndondondo	Jun-19	1	Song addressed to a young woman, instructing her to come forward without hesitation
	Naliparamanda	Jun-19	1	A woman's husband's desire will follow her wherever she may run
	Unyago manjenje	Jun-19	1	Description of crazy unyago that is going on
	Ngondo	Jun-19	1	Mother of the bride accompanying her daughter into married life
	Kacheche	Jun-19	1	A man's penis is compared to a small bush animal
	Chauongo	Jun-19	1	One should not hide one's own sins while exposing others'
	Wamemfunga mwanamme wao	Jun-19	1	The women of Mwera have tied up their men; teasing song

	Kapayagira	Jun-19	1	A man is after a woman
	Kung'oka meno	Jun-19	1	As long as one is sexually active one is still well and alive
	Ndaure	Jun-19	1	The prophet has passed by Zanzibar
	Mapandawara	Jun-19 and Jan-20	2	Walker of the line
	Kuitwaitwa sitaki	Jun-19	1	To be called and called I do not want, I will come on my own terms
	Mtendeeni mwenzenu	Jun-19 and Jan-20	2	Perform unyago today at your place, tomorrow at mine
	Sikia msondo	Jun-19, Dec-19 and Jan-20	3	Listen to the msondo drum
	Wenye unyago walala	Jun-19	1	The people of unyago are going to sleep
<b>MSANJA</b>	Bismillahi	Jun-19 and Jul-21	3	Bismillah (in the name of Allah)
	Mpe kibao	Jun-19 and Jul-21	2	Give your guest a place to sit
	Ni mti mwema	Jun-19	1	It is a sweet tree that has shade

	Akikuaga mpe ruhusa	Jun-19 and Jul-21	3	If your husband wants to go, let him leave
	Na matandiko	Jun-19 and Jul-21	2	Make the bed properly
	Mume akiondoka	Jun-19	1	Close the door at night when your husband is away
	Hiyo ni ila	Jun-19	1	Don't eat with your mother, eat with your husband now
	Baba kanunua ng'ombe	Jan-20	1	The man of the house bought a cow and the woman can deal with the mess
	Maji nyiyotia	Jan-20	1	Woman has unprotected sex and is surprised to be pregnant
	Nasafiri mie	Jan-20	1	Female sexual desire
	Mwanangu mdogo asiende	Jan-20	1	Uncertain
	Mwanangu mdogo mtunzie	Jan-20	1	My child take care of the heart
	Kiroboto	Jan-20	1	One should not be envious of others
	Bi Kikongwe	Jan-20	1	A warning against evil
	Kuna ila	Jan-20	1	You should clean yourself after sex



	Bwana dereva	Jan-20	1	Female sexual desire
	Ukaoza mwana	Jul-21	1	Uncertain
	Siku ya harusi	Jul-21	1	The wedding day
	Hakuna utani	Jul-21	1	When a man sees a woman's waist beads, he will be in the mood for sex
	Lelea bwana Juma	Jul-21	1	Female sexual desire
	Sidumbo	Jul-21	1	Female sexual desire
	Nachuchia	Jul-21	1	I am crying
	Mwanangu lia	Jul-21	1	Song about a European penis
	Mtaimbo wa kizungu	Jul-21	1	A penis with two balls
	Bwana Juma mbona umelala	Jul-21	1	Bwana Juma why are you sleeping
	Cheni yangu	Jul-21	1	Cheating wife
	Nyumba ya ghorofa	Jul-21	1	A woman with a bad reputation
	Kula we	Jul-21	1	"Eat your mango"; celebratory song
	Kuna ila moja ila	Jul-21	1	There is one flaw, and your mother has it as well

	Uwani kwangu	Jul-21	1	Someone else takes away my love interest
	Bwana Lei	Jul-21	1	Bwana Lei has a big penis
	Mkaliona	Jul-21	1	If you see a soft penis you should approach it (to make it hard)
	Kunguru	Jul-21	1	There are many crows in our house
	Wana wa Geza	Jul-21	1	The people of Geza are drunk
	Tembo kidonda	Jul-21	1	The vagina is looking for a penis
	Kutomba huo	Jul-21	1	A song about sexual intercourse
	Biti Ambari	Jul-21	1	Practical domestic duties

Lyrics only:

Ngoma	Song title	Collection date(s)	Number of versions	Overall topic
MSANJA	Hiyo ni ila	Jun-19	1	Do not eat with your mother, eat with your husband
	Najambo sijambo	Jun-19	1	Do not tell these secrets as you and your family will die
	Baba wakiume	Jun-19	2	Keep your husband happy sexually

## Appendix 2: Audio Tracks

**All tracks can be found here:**

<https://uppsala.box.com/s/5saj5gj5rnbff0mjq0xctn0r987k2rs32>

Track 01 “Aiche, Aiche.” 2009. Track 01 “Aiche” on *Bi Kidude: Unyago*. Zanzibar: Sauti za Zanzibar Studio.

Track 02 “Bismillahi.” Recorded June 2019 in Jambiani, Zanzibar.

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Track 04 “Kiroboto.” Recorded January 2020 in Jambiani, Zanzibar.

Track 05 “Kuku Lala.” 2009. Track 04 “Kukukakaka” on *Bi Kidude: Unyago*. Zanzibar: Sauti za Zanzibar Studio.

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Track 07 “Kung’oka Meno.” 2009. Track 13 “Kung’oka meno” on *Bi Kidude: Unyago*. Zanzibar: Sauti za Zanzibar Studio

Track 08 “Hakuna Utani.” Recorded July 2021 in Jambiani, Zanzibar.

Track 09 “Nasafiri Mie.” Recorded January 2020 in Jambiani, Zanzibar.

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