

Ritual practices, hypnotic suggestions and trance-like states in Swahili written literature

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This article suggests an interdisciplinary analysis of Swahili written literature from Tanzania through the principles of hypnosis, such as trance-like states, post-hypnotic suggestions, therapeutic metaphors and negative autohypnosis, produced during the performance of traditional ritual practices such as initiation rituals and witchcraft acts. The objective is to illustrate how the hypnotic trance, induced by ritual performances, can be interpreted as a channel to convey Afrocentric knowledge and wisdom. The selected fictional works explored are the following two novels and four plays: *Mwendo* (Lema 2004), *Mirathi ya Hatari* (Mung'ong'o 2016), *Embe Dodo* (Makukula 2015), *Kija: Chungu cha Mwanamwari wa Giningi* (Kitogo 2009), *Kivuli Kinaishi* (Mohamed 1990) and *Ngoma ya Ng'wanamalundi* (Mbogo 2008).

Keywords: Swahili literature; post-hypnotic suggestions; trance-like states; witchcraft; rites of passage; hypnosis; epistemology; Afrocentric knowledge.

1. Introduction

In this article, I am suggesting an experimental analysis of Swahili literature, which involves a field of research, namely *mila za jadi* or traditional ritual practices in Tanzania, which I have been investigating alongside my focus of interest that is an interdisciplinary analysis of Swahili literature on HIV/AIDS.

My interest in traditional ritual started during my second fieldwork experience¹ in Tanzania in 2014 – 2015, when, while conducting research on HIV/AIDS in Swahili literature, I was also “initiated” to *unyago*, the rites of passage into adulthood for young women.

¹ I have been awarded fieldwork research grants three times during my student career. Firstly, I was awarded twice during my Bachelor's (2011 - 2012) and Master's (2014 - 2015) degrees of the exchange student scholarship awarded by “L'Orientale” University of Naples under the bilateral agreement between “L'Orientale” and the University of Dar es Salaam. Then, I had an approved fieldwork during my PhD degree (2018 - 2019) approved by the School of Oriental and African Languages of London.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge Dr Shani Omari and Prof Magabyuso Mulokozi from the University of Dar es Salaam for their lectures on the topic. I am also grateful to the old *somo* or *kungwi* (the *unyago* instructor), who agreed not only to be interviewed² but also to give me permission to attend a performance as a participant observer. This performance was performed during the period of *kumbi*, maidens' isolation, which was part of the *unyago* ritual taking place in her village in that period.

In fact, in December 2014, I visited this tiny rural village, Mtepera, which is part of the Kilwa district among the wonderful landscapes between the ocean and the forests that characterize the Kilwa region, located on the south-eastern coast of Tanzania.

On the 29th of December, I attended a *tambiko* performance, which implies the invocation of *mizimu*, ancestors' spirits (Mbiti 2010; 2011; Ruel 1997; Swantz 1986; Swantz 1990; Giles 1996) to whom people perform offers in exchange of their *baraka*, benediction and protection, so as to ensure a safe transition or passage for the initiands. During that dance performance the women reached an ecstatic trance-like state by repeating the following refrain: *ngongole ngongole ngongolioko upile* ("Angels, good spirits of our ancestors, come, come here where you are needed"). The songs were sung in *kingindo*³ the native language of the local ethnic group of the Ngindo inhabiting that region.

After this experience, I investigated the *unyago* rituals through the lenses of Ericksonian hypnosis (Dargenio and Nicolini 2017), examining how the hypnotic suggestions imparted during the ritual trance can be recalled by post-hypnotic suggestions, even many years after the ritual performance, becoming an effective form of STIs (sexually transmitted infections) prevention.

Hypnosis is a well-known ancient practice connected to magic and rituals, which was completely redefined by the psychiatrist Milton Erickson (1901 – 1980) as a clinical practice. By hypnotic trance, we mean: "a cognitive state, which is characterized by "focused attention," resulting from both a reduced awareness of the surrounding environment, and a sharpened openness to accept suggestions" (Mammini 2018: 20; Granone 1989). In fact, it has been demonstrated that behavioural changes can be produced by means of metaphorical storytelling and teaching tales conveyed during hypnotic trance (Erickson 1983; Haley 1993).

Here, I dare to conduct a peculiar analysis of selected titles of Swahili written literature, namely plays and novels, in which traditional ritual practices and their component elements (songs, storytelling, myths and metaphors) are described. I argue that those ritual practices are instruments

² Interviewed on the 29th of December 2014, Mtepera village (Kilwa District).

³ Ethnologue: Ngindo [NNQ].

used to induce hypnotic trances in which therapeutic metaphors (Gordon 1992) and hypnotic suggestions (Erickson et al 1979) are embedded.

Thus, the aim of this experimental and multidisciplinary research is to highlight how Swahili literature describes traditional forms of trance-like states that articulate hypnotic suggestions and what are the specific aims of these suggestions.

2. Ritual practices, hypnosis and literature

In this section, I am going to provide a short description of, firstly, life-cycle rituals, not only initiation rites, but also healing practices involving divination and witchcraft; secondly, the principles of Ericksonian hypnosis; and, finally, how both rituals and hypnosis enter into Swahili literature.

Jando and *unyago* (Mamuya 1975; Swantz 1986) are the rites of passage for adolescent young boys and girls respectively, which mark the transition into adulthood. Those rites are the traditional customs passed on through generations, which consist in teachings aimed to prepare the initiands to take the right role in their family and in society. The main teachings are taught during the phase of isolation (*kumbi*) or liminality (Turner 1967; 1969) when the *mwali*, young initiand, is separated from both parents and the community. These teachings are imparted by the leading figures of initiation rituals, *somo*, *kungwi* or *ngariba*, who particularly in the case of *unyago* – the female rituals, are the paternal auntie and the maternal grandmother (Swantz 1986; Swantz et al. 2014; Mulokozi 2011; Halley 2012; Fair 1996). The period of *kumbi* can last, according to many different factors such as the environment and the economic conditions of the family, from a few days to many months, during which the teachings are imparted to the initiand through different performance formats. At the end of the liminal period, the *mwali* is permitted to re-enter the community, and this stage is marked by the ritual ceremony of *unyago* (Van Gennep 1960; La Fontaine 1986; Ruel 1997; Richards 1956; Tumbo-Masabo and Liljestrom 1994; Liljestrom and Rwebangira 1998).

Not only do the rites of passage introduce the initiands to the spiritual world of the ancestors when they symbolically experience the process of dying by living isolated in the forest, but they also incorporate the reborn initiands into adult life as a communal way of life (Mbiti 2011). This ritual rebirth implies to share moral communal knowledge and values among the full-grown members⁴ of the community (Masolo 2004).

⁴ According to some initiation rites' traditions, it is a practice to leave a sign or a modification on the bodies of the initiated young women, which marks their new status inside the community (Fusaschi 2003). In Tanzania, the practice of female circumcision (*ukeketaji*), which has been declared a crime in 1998, is practised secretly only in the country's northern regions,

The rites of passage are an “institution concerned with regeneration and continuity of the clan” (Ntakula 1994: 96). Not only do these rites maintain continuity with ancestors, by worshiping the spirits of the deceased to obtain their favour for the continuing life of the community, but they also mark the transition of the adolescents into adulthood distinguishing gender roles (Kyalo 2013; Ntakula 1994). Both life cycle and life crisis (healing) rituals occur at a specific time and place in the life of individuals and their community (Kyalo 2013). The rituals, which are religious ceremonies made up of a “a system of symbols” (Geertz quoted in Appiah 2005: 29), pass on knowledge through symbolic metaphors (Ntakula 1994) connected to culturally specific cosmologies: “knowledge itself is a force, transmitted by the ancestors to the living” (Hamminga 2005: 67).

In addition to the initiation rituals into adulthood, another kind of initiation exists, which is conducted by the *waganga*: the traditional healers, who can either be medicine men such as diviners and herbalists (*mganga wa kienyeji/asilia/jadi; mwaguzi* or *mpiga ramli/bao*) or witchdoctors (*mganga wa uchawi*; Swantz 1990; Langwick 2011). This distinction illustrates the double faces of magic, which is believed to be the power of controlling mystical and supernatural forces in certain individuals’ hands (Mbiti 2010: 166). Since the mystical forces of the universe are neither good nor evil, they can be instrumentalised to either heal or harm (Pavanello 2017; Rödlach 2006), to do magic bewitching people or to undo magic exercising evil spirits “thrown” (*kutupiwa majini*) by angered people (Stroeken 2012; 2017) through the interventions of superior healers (*waganguzi*). The socially approved use of magic is to heal from and overcome witchcraft; whereas the anti-social use is sorcery (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 176).

The Swahili root of *uganga* means to heal, physically and psychologically, preventing or countering misfortune, by doing magic and accessing the unknown (Acquaviva 2018: 145). Divination is not only “a way of exploring the unknown in order to elicit answers (oracles) to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding” (Tedlock 2001: 189), but it also is “a dynamics system of knowledge, or, a way of knowing” (Peek 1991: 10-11). In fact, diviners are capable of cross-world communication and rapport with ancestors or other spiritual disembodied entities. The wounded healers, who discover to be born with the gift by experiencing themselves a period of severe ailments and psychophysical malaises, seek for a balance of power between human and non-human agents (Peek and Van Beek 2013:12; Swantz 1990; Swantz 1986). Diviners are mainly diagnosticians whose diagnostic

such as Dodoma, Singida, Mara, Arusha and Kilimanjaro, on about 15 % of initiated women (UNFPA 2019; UNFPA Tanzania: <https://tanzania.unfpa.org>). The *unyago* traditions described in my case studies do not entail any kind of female genital mutilation (FGM).

and therapeutic instruments are trance and possession rites. They establish a strong rapport between their clients and ancestral spirits of possession, which transmit an “incarnate memory” to the possessed persons (Beneduce and Taliani 2001: 19). In fact, clients’ bodies turn out to be the medium through which diviners and healers communicate with possession spirits (Beneduce and Taliani 2001).

The symbol of healing along the Swahili coastlines is the “*ngoma* (drum) rituals of affliction.” These *ngoma*-like collective rituals are a kind of possession cult and/or healing exorcism that venerates spirits as mediumship for the interpretation of misfortune (Janzen 1992).

However, “healing and harming is a salient pair in Africa’s history” (Feierman quoted in Pavanello 2017: 202) and witchcraft and sorcery represent the dangerous side of medicine.

It is usually believed that witchcraft implies innate psycho-physical powers inherited through unilineal descent from parent to child of the same sex, and that the biological transmission of the witchcraft substance is characterized by physical traits like the “red eyes” (Evans-Pritchard 1976; Mbiti 2010). Conversely, it is also believed that sorcery is not inherited/inborn as witchcraft, but is learned, and that it is the conscious practice of evil magic and medicine to harm the others (Rödlach 2006: 52; Moore and Sanders 2001).

African witchcraft is a form of historical consciousness, a component part of epistemology, and a “system of belief” (Crick quoted in Moore and Sanders 2001: 4) in unseen, occult, and magical powers that transcend human control and comprehension. This evolves in the interpretation of contemporary witchcraft as a factor for “social diagnostics” of modern uncertainties and inequalities (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geshiere 1997) in the form of occult practices, ritual murders and commodification of body parts (Moore and Sanders 2001: 2-3), which reveals human frailties (Moore and Sanders 2001: 20). African witchcraft is neither traditional nor modern, yet it is a flexible and plural concept (Sanders 2003).

I argue that all the ritual practices described share a common epistemology of magic, which Stroeken (2012) calls “epistemology of *shingila*,” the access. In fact by performing rituals, people make offers and sacrifices, with the goal of being granted privileged access to what they wish to achieve in their life. Magic can be either medicine or curse, because whichever access you obtain through its practice, you can never be sure. The basic ingredient for magic to work is accepting instability and uncertainty as part of life (Stroeken 2012: 1). Magic can be considered a life philosophy, an epistemology, and an experimental structure which determines human subjective experiences as “living with contingency” (Stroeken 2012: 2). Finally, magic is the administration of a moral power in an individual’s hands when they experience a situation of crisis.

Furthermore, the initiation to both adulthood and the practice of magic involves a ritual period of liminality also called “anti-structure” (Turner 1969; 1967). This period occurs when the initiands or neophytes, as “threshold people” “betwixt and between” their *communitas* (Turner 1969: 95), are prepared like a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which inscribe knowledge and wisdom as well as moral and cultural values of the group (Turner 1969: 103).

Those rituals are characterized by songs, dances, performances, storytelling, and myths narrated in an allusive, illusive and joking language rich in metaphors, proverbs, sayings, riddles and symbols. The anti-structure is also the period when new metaphors and symbols are produced (Turner 1982; 1974).

The period of anti-structure, which characterises initiation rites and life-cycle rituals, creates a fertile cognitive environment to develop both receptiveness and creativity inside initiands’ minds. Moreover, as previously described, it includes as key elements singing and dancing, which are, by their very nature, hypnotic actions imparting a deeper significance to communication. In fact, trance induction techniques directly act on the unconscious, thus making the sole understanding of the words less central and they produce “hypnotic suggestions,” which are codes stored in the unconscious.

Subsequently, the encounter with a “posthypnotic signal” triggers the suggestion previously received in the trance. By a “post-hypnotic suggestion” we mean an idea or a suggestion to carry out a certain action, introduced to the subject in a moment of maximum receptiveness, that is, in a trance-like state, then activated by a trigger which acts like a “post-hypnotic signal” recalling the suggestion received during the trance. The “post-hypnotic signal” induces, in turn, an “aware trance” during which the subject enacts the suggested behaviour. The moment of receptiveness corresponds to the trance formally induced when the attention is fixed on and totally absorbed by an issue that is extremely interesting and relevant to the subject (Granone 1989; Erickson et al 1979).

It has also been noted that the effectiveness of hypnotic suggestion depends on the deepness of the induced trance. This effectiveness is tightly linked to the delicate conditions experienced by the initiands at the time when the trance is induced, which can be either the puberty (menarche or spermatogenesis) in the case of the young *wali*, or a severe physical illness and psychosomatic malaise in the case of the forthcoming healers.

The mechanism of the “post-hypnotic trance” action and the consequent aware trance undergo processes of disassociation as, in recalling a message recorded in the unconscious during the rite, the signal interrupts the normal flow of conscious activity, replacing the dysfunctional behaviour with the desired post-hypnotic action (Dargenio 2009).

In the case of initiands, the passing on of the post-hypnotic suggestion is indirect, through associative networks that involve using different methods connected to the subject's childhood learning path. This procedure aims to create a context which, by analogy, through an ideo-dynamic process mediated by the unconscious, aids in the search, in its own time and manner, for new solutions to the problem (Erickson 1978; 1983).

Finally, traditional ritual practices are inserted into Swahili written literature by means of intertextuality (Allen 2000) and the technique of "entextualization," which is achieved through rendering "discourse as object of exegesis and as quotation, and which makes possible a fluid and dynamic realization of the text in performance" (Barber 2005: 276). In fact, "text depends on performance and performance on text" (Barber 2005: 264).

The descriptions of *miviga*, initiation and life cycle rituals, appear to be a theme especially in Swahili children literature such as Elieshi Lema's novels (Aiello Traore 2010a, b; 2013). Indeed, children literature is transculturally rich in description of hypnotic phenomena that are most welcomed by children, who frequently experience spontaneous hypnotic status during their games (Valerio 2009; Fasciana 2009). Likewise, storytelling and "story play" are instruments rich in metaphors capable of "awakening the inner child" hidden in our unconscious (Fasciana 2014).

3. Case Studies

In the case studies, I am going to highlight and analyse the elements explored in the theoretical background, drawn in the previous section, into Swahili literature. In particular, I investigate myths, metaphors and hypnotic suggestions included in both the female rites of passage of *unyago* and initiation rituals to the practice of witchcraft. The selected pieces of Swahili written literature are two novels and four plays.

On the one hand, the novel *Mwendo* ("The Motion;" Lema 1998, re-edited 2004) on Makonde's *unyago* tradition will be contextualised among the following two plays:

Embe Dodo ("The Small Mango;" 2015), Dominicus Makukula⁵'s play, which is set in Bagamoyo, the native city of the playwright, where he obtained a degree in performing arts from TASUBA (*Taasisi ya Sanaa na Utamaduni Bagamoyo*), the well-known Bagamoyo college of Arts; and *Kija: Chungu cha Mwana Mwari wa Giningi* ("Kija and the Pot of the Initiand of Giningi," 2005 re-edited 2009), a play written by

⁵ I conducted a formal interview with the author at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication – University of Dar es Salaam on November 13th, 2018.

Shani Kitogo about both *unyago* tradition and the Zanzibari myth of *Giningi* that is also the main theme of Said Mohamed's play *Kivuli Kinaishi* ("The Shadow Lives;" 1990).

On the other hand, initiation to magic and witchcraft will be analysed in Said Mohamed's play *Kivuli Kinaishi* ("The Shadow Lives;" 1990), Professor Emmanuel Mbogo⁶ play *Ngoma ya Ng'wanamalundi* ("Ng'wanamalundi's Dance;" 2008) and C.G. Mung'ong'o's novel *Mirathi ya Hatari* ("A Dangerous Inheritance;" 1977, re-edited 2016).

3.1. Myths, metaphors and positive post-hypnotic suggestions articulated through *unyago* initiation rituals

The novel *Mwendo* ("The Motion," 2004), dedicated to young girls, has been written by Elieshi Lema, editor in chief of *E&D Vision Publishing* in Dar es Salaam. During my last fieldwork research, I met Elieshi Lema personally, who is a writer, a novelist, a specialist of children's literature, and a feminist. I had both a formal interview with her on November 27, 2018 and other informal conversations.

She wrote the novel *Parched Earth* (2001) and especially many novels for children and young adults in Swahili. Not only we analysed together (27-11-2018) *Mwendo*, which deals with *unyago* traditions among the Makonde people, but we also discussed thoroughly the evolution of sexuality in the African society, the transformation and the progressive loss of traditional sexual teachings used to be taught during the female rites of passage of *unyago* and the issue of HIV/AIDS.

As we can better understand from Lema's own words:

"The concepts of sex and sexuality didn't used to be treated as taboos or secrets to be hidden in traditional African culture. In fact, observing the proper time, space and social groups relations, sex was a fundamental element to be discussed and taught in the society. For instance, nakedness does have power in Africa, for a woman to show own's naked body means rebellion, refusing to obey to a command. Sex is power for women, who have an actual control of their bodies through the expression of their will of either accept or refuse to have sex with their partners."

(Lema, November 27th, 2018, Dar es Salaam)

Lema defined *unyago* as a "channel" to articulate culturally specific knowledge. This epistemic channel guarantees the contact with traditional cultural knowledge and practices, as she explained:

⁶ I conducted a formal interview with Professor Mbogo at the Open University of Dar es Salaam on October 16th, 2018.

“Our customs are our past and our origins. Thus, it is necessary to evaluate critically from where we come and our traditional customs, before deciding to throw them all away in bulk. Even though not all the practices can be still considered as valid nowadays, these should be modified. Each one of us has a past, a present and a future. You cannot lose the contacts with your past completely!”

(Lema, November 27th, 2018, Dar es Salaam)

Mwendo is the story of Felisia a schoolgirl who recalls the personal experience she lived, both consciously and unconsciously, once she reached puberty and underwent her *unyago* rite of passage. Felisia’s *unyago* was led by her paternal auntie Shangazi Helena Magreta and her maternal grandmother *Nalobwa*, who respectively played the role of the girl’s father and mother on behalf of her biological parents during the rituals.

Lema mixed and merged different literary genres in the narrative prose of this novel, particularly oral genres such as songs, myths and storytelling characterized by metaphors and symbols (Finnegan 2012; 1979; 1992; Okpewho 1983) as well as “women’s maxims” (Omari and Senkoro 2018). The lasts are an example of verbal arts and popular literature in Tanzania, which either describes women’s images in the society or they can be self-addressed or addressed to a fellow woman.

Thus, I argue that Lema applied a technique common to postcolonial literatures described by Rettová (2021) as “generic fracturing” or different literary genres, mainly poetry and other oral genres and verbal arts, fracturing the prose of the novel. These fractures have the potential to subvert the old-style ideologies embedded in the novel as a genre, and thus, opening up the space for new ideologies, as well as alternative ontologies and epistemologies.

In the novel, the young protagonist Felisia recalls and narrates all the stages of her rite of passage, which lasted for two weeks, namely, *tambiko*, the ritual offer to the ancestral spirits of *mizimu*, Helena Magreta’s lessons and teachings, and finally, the core element of initiation, *ngoma za unyago*, the ritual songs and dances.

Ngoma za unyago performances induce trance-like states, create therapeutic metaphors (Gordon 1992; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Sontag 1991), and disseminate post-hypnotic suggestions (Erickson *et al.* 1979; Erickson 1983; Dargenio and Nicolini 2017), via the production of a strong rapport that links together the leader teacher (*somo/kungwi*), the initiand girl (*mwali*) and spiritual ontologies (*mizimu*). As we can see in the following excerpts drawn from the songs sung by the character of *Nalobwa*, Felisia’s grandmother:

Mfunde mtoto, mfunde
Kwa *methali na misemo* [...]

Teach the girl, teach her
By **proverbs and sayings** [...]

<i>Kwa maneno ya busara [...]</i>	By words of wisdom [...]
<i>Mpe ufunguo wake [...]</i>	Give her her own key [...]
<i>Mfundu mwali jamani [...]</i>	Women, teach the maiden [...]
<i>Mpe ngao kujilinda</i>	Give her a shield to protect herself
<i>Vita ni yake uwanjani</i>	The war is up to her in the battlefield
<i>Peke yake uwanjani [...]</i>	She will be all alone in the battlefield [...] ⁷

(Lema 2004: 49 – 51)

<i>Ujuwe wewe ni tunda</i>	Know that you are a fruit
<i>Lisilomalizika utamu</i>	That does not lose its sweetness
<i>Tena ujuwe wewe ni mbegu</i>	Know that you are a seed as well
<i>Mti wake ni wa dawa.</i>	Whose tree has healing powers.

(Lema 2004: 53)

By words of mouth and metaphorical tropes (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), the initiand girl is like a ripened ‘fruit’ or just a ‘seed’ on whose unconscious can be inserted all the knowledge needed to both elicit answers (the ‘key’) and tackle problems protecting (the ‘shield’) herself from the war waged by everyday life.

As shown, symbols and metaphors imply a representational system connected to the sense doors or perceptual gateways (sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch and proprioception) through which the human beings explore and represent the world.

Tales are anecdotes rich in metaphors, which by analogy, suggest solutions to everyday life struggles and conflicts both internal and external, between the individual themselves and the community. Metaphors are the representation of one’s own personal experience, and the signifiers are made up of signs which are drawn by a univocal cultural framework and individual worldview (Gordon 1992: 16). “Therapeutic metaphors” are instruments to gather information, and thus, they trigger, consciously or unconsciously, a personal research to cope with conflictual situations and to decode the right solution to current problems (Gordon 1992: 19). Since people are likely to cope with problems by retrieving lessons learned from their past, therapeutic metaphors refer to events previously

⁷ All the translation from Swahili to English are mine if not otherwise indicated. All emphasis are mine.

experienced by the individual; thus, metaphors result being instruments capable of breaking any resistance from the hearer part to the speaker (Haley 1993: 26-30). However, the relationship between real people and events, and people and events employed inside the metaphor, should be isomorphic, equivalent not equal, in order to be effective. Additionally, metaphors work via two NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) techniques of “Trance-Formations” (Grinder and Bandler 1981): “sub-modalities,” in other words, the representation of sensorial experiences and stimulus through which people acknowledge the world, and “synaesthesia,” like magic does (Stroeken 2012), in other words, the stimulation of a sensorial cognitive pathway which leads to the involuntary experience of a secondary sensory pathway or sub-modality (Niccolai *et al.* 2012). Metaphors are aimed to produce sensorial stimulus, which recall isomorphic sub-modality experiences, previously experienced, through a process of overlapping of sub-modality categories (Gordon 1992: 112). The fertile cognitive moment wherein those metaphors are produced is the hypnotic trance, which induces synesthetic models that, in turn, create sub-modality representations, which are isomorphic, equivalent not equal, to a previous sub-modality experience that is thus fetched from one’s unconscious in the form of hypnotic suggestion to be activated in the immediate present.

Likewise, myths, which are “an aesthetic, creative and cultural African resource” (Okpewho 1983: 265; Soyinka 2005) also communicate through symbols at the level of the unconscious. For instance, Lema’s novel *Mwendo* sprouts from the myth of *chawike*, in Swahili *mwendo*, or the motion, which is aimed to teach the importance of acknowledging and respecting cultural traditions at one’s own peace.

Therefore, as an actual evidence of the ritual’s power to induce a deep trance-like states and as a technique to produce indirect hypnotic suggestions (Erickson *et al.* 1979; Erickson 1978; 1983), I quote below Felisia’s description of the events she experienced:

Usiku ulipepea kwenye mbawa za ngoma na nyimbo. Sijui kama ulikuwa mrefu au mfupi. Sijui kama kulikuwa na giza au kama mbalamwezi uling'aa kwenye anga la usiku. Sijui. Ngoma iliniingia kwenye mwili: kifuani, tumboni, kichwani, nikahisi kama vile ngoma na nyimbo zimekuwa kitanda changu. Nami nimelala juu yake, tuli, kama maji yaliyotekwa kwenye bwawa kabla hayajajaa na kudai nguvu zake na kububujika nje na kwenda zake yakitafuta mkondo wake. Nilipagawa. Nguvu ya ngoma ilinijaa kila mahali, kwenye ubongo, kwenye mishipa ya damu. [...] Hisia za uchovu au usingizi zilinihama. Akili ikawa kama imenolewa kwa tupa. Woga ulinifanya nikawa makini. Woga wa kujua kwamba maisha yangu yanaundwa katika lile giza ambalo sio giza. Woga wa kufikiria kwamba wanayoniambia kweli ni ufunguo wa maisha yangu. Nalombwa na akina mama waliocheza ngoma na kuimba nyimbo walikuwa na nguvu za ajabu. Walikuwa wamenizunguka! Kila walilosema liliniingia kama vile maji yanavyoingia na kuzama kwenye ardhi na kupotea. Baadaye kabisa ndio mbegu iliyokuwa ardhini huota. Wakati huu mwili na akili vimeloweshwa chepechepe na ngoma. Aah, huwezi kuelewa hali hii mpaka ujikute uko ndani yake. Huwezi. Unapoona

Nalombwa, bibi kizee kabisa, anacheza kama vile ni kijana, shangazi na wenzake wanaimba, mishipa imewatoka shingoni. Roho zao zimepata nguvu iliyoonekana kama mionzi ya jua! Miili yao ilipata nguvu kama ya umeme, ikazingirwa na ule mkondo wa ngoma uliozunguka chumba! Huwezi kuamini! Mwili wangu ulipaa, ukaelea hewani, halafu ukashuka. Ulipaa tena, juu zaidi na kushuka tena. Ooh, siwezi kuelezea juu ya Nalombwa. Alinionesha mambo mengi. [...] Aliushika mwili wangu na kuzungumza nao lugha isiyoweza kurudiwa kwa mdomo. Ooh, ndani ya chumba cha unyago hakuna aibu.

(Lema 2004: 52-3)

The night blew on the wings of dance and chant. I cannot say whether that night was long or short. I did not realize whether it was dark or whether the moon shined in the night sky. I do not know. **The ngoma dance filtered into my body:** in the chest, in the stomach, in the head, I felt like those songs and dances were my bed. I was lying down on them, still, like water when, captured inside a pool, claims all its strengths and just before filling the pool up, it bubbles out and escapes to chase after its own stream. **I was possessed in a trance-like state. The strength of ngoma filled me up** until my brain and all my veins. [...] I lost any sensation of fatigue and sleep. **My mind seemed to have been sharpened by a blade. The fear raised my attention.** The thrill of knowing that my life was moulded in that darkness that was not so dark. The thrilling of thinking that what was said to me that night it was indeed the key to open my life. *Nalombwa* and the other women who were dancing and chanting had a **mysterious energy**. They were encircling me! **Everything they said entered me like water when it enters and sinks under the ground then it gets lost. Afterwards, the seed that was planted in the ground sprouts.** At that time, both my body and my mind were **doused and sodden of dances. You cannot understand this state until you experience it by yourself.** You cannot at all. When I saw *Nalombwa*, such an old lady, who was dancing like a young girl, my auntie and the other women singing with the veins that were surfacing their necks. Their souls were gifted by an **energy that shined like sunrays!** Their body had the **power of electricity** enclosed in the stream of the dance that was surrounding the room! You cannot believe it! **My body took off in the air then it landed. It took off again even higher and it landed once again.** I am not capable of explaining *Nalombwa*. She taught me many things. [...] She held my body and talked to it **by a language that cannot be repeated/uttered by mouth.** In the room of *unyago* there exist no shame.

A “post-hypnotic suggestion” is an idea or a suggestion to perform a certain act or behaviour, launched to an individual during a moment of sharp cognitive receptiveness. Subsequently, once the suggestion is triggered by means of a specific trigger, which is called “post-hypnotic signal,” it can retrieve the information that was previously received during the state of trance. The cognitive moment is the moment of trance itself, which can be induced either formally or informally. The induced trance affects the cognitive process and the capability of decision-making of the individual (Del Casale *et al.* 2012;

Ludwig *et al.* 2014). The hypnotic suggestions which remained safely stored inside the person's unconscious are ready to be retrieved by a post hypnotic signal, which working like a trigger, produces an "aware trance" during which the person can remember the suggestion previously received (Dargenio and Nicolini 2017: 52).

The durability of a post-hypnotic suggestion depends on the deepness and efficacy of the trance experienced as well as on the value and content of the messages transmitted (Berrigan *et al.* 1991; Trussel *et al.* 1996). Therefore, in the case of *unyago*, the following elements must be acknowledged: firstly, the patterns through which the messages are conveyed, such as the transmitters, who are the maternal grandmother and the paternal auntie; secondly, the tools by which this education is communicated such as metaphors, songs, mythological tales; thirdly, the language by which the songs are intoned, which is the native language of the ethnic group and not the national language Swahili, is an element not to be underestimated; fourthly, the symbolic value of ritual liminality, which represents the death of the child, who is born again as an adult. The separation and re-incorporation inside the social structure is portrayed as a bridge from childhood to adulthood (Turner 1969; Mbiti 2011); and finally, initiands' young age and their life phase, that is, puberty (menarche or spermatogenesis), which corresponds to a memorable period characterized by extreme cognitive receptiveness and openness of mind (Dargenio and Nicolini 2017: 52-53).

As proof of the deep state of trance induced by the *ngoma za unyago*, we have seen the phenomena described by the character of Felisia such as the loss of time perception, cognitive dissociation, distortion of reality in between dream and full consciousness, anaesthesia, etc.

In conclusion, I argue that an "epistemology of *kupagawa*" or "epistemology of spiritual possession trance" can be isolated in this novel. This epistemology of trance, whose ontology is the initiand's unconscious, articulates knowledge and teachings, which are transmitted during the ritual in the form of embodied epistemology, since they are known through the body and bodily perceptions (Jacobson-Maisels 2016; Senghor 1964; 1971), as well as in the form of post hypnotic suggestions conveyed in trance and then safely stored inside the unconscious (Dargenio 2009). Therefore, I also argue that the epistemology of *kupagawa* is an example of local epistemology, which articulates culturally specific knowledge connected to peoples' languages, beliefs and worldviews.

Through Felisia's eyes we experienced the Makonde's *unyago* rituals with the aim of recognising the value of traditional customs (*mila za jadi*). My second example, the play *Embe Dodo* ("The Small Mango;" Makukula 2015) illustrates the Zaramo traditions in Bagamoyo, especially the play focuses on the teachings about sexual behaviour, reproductive and sexual health education and HIV/AIDS imparted to the young maidens. The protagonist of this play is the young girl called *Mwali*, the initiand.

The play denounces bad sexual behaviour, particularly, networks of transgenerational sexual relationships, between schoolgirls and mature men, as well as the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.

The play starts with *Mwali's* *unyago* celebrations, which in Bagamoyo is celebrated during the season when mangoes are harvested. Thus, the young girl is metaphorically described as *embe dodo*, a small, ripened mango, because young women, according to coastal people's imaginary, are bodily shaped like the mango fruit, and also in Swahili *dodo* is a popular metonymy for the firm breast of a young girl.

Hakika dodo hauishi thamani ndiyo maana huja kwa msimu [...]

Dodo mbivu mtini ni kishawishi kwa inzi, wadudu wengine

[...] Nyigu wakali sana

[...] Wale wenye macho ya husuda katu [...] wakalitoboa walitie kidonda au uchachu, maana siku hizi kuna ugonjwa unaitwa uchachu ndani ya utamu wa dodo. (Makukula 2015: 2-5)

To tell the truth, the **mango** doesn't lose its value, instead it **obtains value with the passing of time** [...]

The ripened mango on a tree is a temptation for flies and other insects

[...] Especially the **wasps** with their stings (wasps' stings are a metonymy for **penis** that can pierce the girl's virginity)

[...] Jealous people should never be allowed [...] to pierce the fruit giving it a wound or "the **bitterness**;" in fact, nowadays there is a disease that is called "the **sourness inside the sweetness of mango**" (HIV/AIDS).

The excerpt quoted above clearly shows how the use of metaphors launches a synesthetic process through the overlapping of different categories of sub-modalities so as to foster an effective transmission of the message: the sight of young girls triggers males' desire to touch them that sounds like tasting mango fruits; however, a sour taste can be painful like an illness.

Finally, the play *Kija: Chungu cha Mwana Mwari wa Giningi* ("Kija and the Pot of the Initiand of Giningi;" Kitogo 2009) is set on Zanzibar island and tells the story of Kija, a special girl's initiation, in connection with the local myth of *Giningi* with the objective of recognising women's empowerment and agency.

Giningi in the Zanzibari lore is a marvellous realm ruled by witches, who rule the living dead (*vizuu*) and enslave the souls of the dead making them zombies (*ndondocho/misukule*) at their service. Bi Mkunago, Kija's maternal grandmother, is herself a witch with the power of awakening human souls

from death, and thus, she initiated Kija to both adulthood and witchcraft as her *kungwi*, the leader of her initiation. Kija's initiation is an allegorical tale concealed inside the interpretation of a dream, which appears as a deep trance, wherein the girl experienced a highly symbolic journey, *safari ya Giningi*, into the underworld, where she died and reborn again gifted of new knowledge and wisdom.

The play is featured with all the formulas of myth telling and Swahili folk tales patterns:

<i>Hadithi Hadithi!!</i>	Tell the story! Tell the story!
<i>Ngano Ngano!!</i>	Tell the tale! Tell the tale!
<i>Paukwa</i>	It came to
<i>Pakawa!!</i>	and it happened!!
<i>Hadithi njoo utamu kolea</i>	Let the story come, let the sweetness be great!
<i>Paliondokea na Mwana Mwari wa Giningi</i>	There was an initiand maiden from Giningi

(Kitogo 2009: 15)

Kija is such a special girl because she was born after the intervention of *mganga* Ngoja. In fact, traditional healers are real experts in healing sterility and bareness, and thus, Kija's mother was finally gifted of her daughter after performing offers and sacrifices to the shrines of the seven ancestor's spirits as prescribed by the healer; Kija is indeed *mtoto wa mizimu ya vibanda saba* ("the daughter of the spirits of the seven sheds;" Kitogo 2009: 22).

This play is rich in maturity rites symbolism such as *mwana hiti*, female fertility figure, which is the carving of a naked woman shaped like a phallus that remind Plato's androgynous myth (Beidelman 2001; Fair 1996; Swantz *et al.* 2014), and *chungu*, the clay pot that is the representation of the uterus of a girl who has reached puberty.

Kija's initiation has a double purpose womanhood and witchcraft as it is illustrated in the *tambiko* invocation below, which explains the development of a sixth sense that establishes rapports between human beings, the supernatural and spiritual ontologies:

<i>Asalaam alaykum</i>	Peace be upon you,
<i>Vizuu vya kichunguuni</i>	The living dead from the urn,
<i>Jini wa mapangoni</i>	The Jinn from the cave,
<i>Leo kwetu ni siku njema ya kuwatakasa wale wanawari saba</i>	Today is a good day to purify our seven maidens,
<i>Katika dhifa ya kichawi</i>	To the witchcraft banquet

*Zimwi mwema leo ni siku ya kumtia
Kija unyagoni
(Kitogo 2009: 12)*

Good **ghost** today is the day to
start Kija's **initiation**.

Inborn witchcraft is indeed inherited through unilineal descents of the same sex (Evans-Pritchard 1976). Therefore, *mkoba wa mizimu* (Kitogo 2009: 16), the magic urn of the ancestors, must be inherited from the grandmother to Kija. Bi Mkunago taught her granddaughter through a complex language of jokes, dark riddles, and revisited Swahili proverbs:

- *joka la mdimuni halitundi mzimuni* - the big snake of lemon trees doesn't pick the fruits not even in worship places;
- *kitendawili kigumu hakina ufumbuzi* - the most complex riddles cannot have a solution (Kitogo 2009: 16).

This language is a mixture of the language of *unyago* (*lugha ya unyagoni*, 26) and a magic language (*lugha za Giningi*, 38) rich in metaphors and hypnotic suggestions, which does not need words uttered by human mouths: *sikuambii neno jicho la tosha* ("I don't utter words an eye is enough," 30). Subsequently, the post-hypnotic suggestions will be activated by post hypnotic signals in the forthcoming: *watumia lugha gani ...lugha iliyotanda wazi? Majibu mnayo. Walimwengu ingieni kichwani mwangu mnitegulie mtego huu* ("what kind of language they will speak... an open language? You have the answers. I let the universe enter my head to disassemble this trap," 36).

The real witchcraft is the one inherited from one generation to the other inside the same clan or lineage and this inherited magic has a protective function for a witch, who when feels to be in danger can call for help by awakening ancestors' spirits from their graves:

Tena kumbuka uchawi mzuri ni ule unaotoka kuukeni ndio tumbo ulilolala. Uchawi wa kununua sio mzuri, sababu sio mkoba wenu (Kitogo 2009: 26-7)

Furthermore, remember that good witchcraft comes from the womb, the same stomach where you laid. Learned sorcery is not good because in not in our pouch

Ya uchawini huwezi kuyajua yote. Hii ni taaluma [...] Fumbo mfumbie mjinga mwerevu (Kitogo 2009: 32)

From witchcraft you cannot understand everything. It is an **expertise** [...] “A metaphor mystifies a simpleton, but the intelligent person perceives it”⁸

Kija’s *unyago wa koma* implies the initiation to a spiritual communication between human and non-human entities such as the spirit of the dead and *ngoma ya Giningi* is performed by *vizuu*, the living dead; However, she is a young woman, who needs to be taught about the ways to avoid becoming herself a slave of men and about the risks coming from husbands’ extramarital affairs by means of metaphors similar to the play *Embe Dodo*:

Embe shomari mpenzi karibu tuitoe hamu (Kitogo 2009: 32)

The beloved ripened **mango** is about to generate desire for itself.

Mume wangu alifuata asali ya mapangoni. Asali ya pangoni tamu kuliko ile ya chini ya ardhi [...] pembeni yake kuna nyoka mkubwa [...] Kula asali, ujue hatari (Kitogo 2009: 33)

My husband followed the honey inside the caves. **Honey inside caves** (: illicit sexual relationships) is sweeter than the honey in the ground [...] close to it there is **a big snake (: sexually transmitted infections)** [...] Lick the honey but be aware of the risks.

A woman should not be enslaved by a man:

Dhahiri yangu ni asali, dhamiri yangu ni sumu (Kitogo 2009: 32)

My outer aspect is like honey, my superego is like poison

In conclusion, we have seen how *Mwendo*, *Embe Dodo* and *Kija* describe *unyago* rituals and trance like states full of synesthetic metaphors and post hypnotic suggestions, that are aimed to transmit educational messages to empower and protect women from risks while they are coping with all the struggles of adult life.

⁸ <http://swahiliproverbs.afirst.illinois.edu/foolishness.html>

3.2. Negative Autohypnosis and Images Articulated through Witchcraft Initiation Rituals

In this section, I am going to illustrate the harmful side of negative post-hypnotic suggestions induced through witchcraft and black magic practices.

U-giningi is the frightening legend, popular among people from Zanzibar and Pemba, about a secret and marvellous realm inhabited by witches and wizards that exists inside the unconscious of people and it conjures during their nightmares.

The play *Kivuli Kinaishi* (“The Shadow Lives;” Mohamed 1990) tells the story of Mtolewa, who experienced the initiation to witchcraft and black magic, by travelling to the secret and marvellous realm of Giningi, through the allegorical folktale told by his grandmother. The tale induces a peculiar state of deep trance, which, at the same time, is a mixture of both a dream and an aware trance experienced by Mtolewa. The leader of this realm of magic is the powerful witch Bi Kirembwe, whose power is the capability of enslaving initiands’ minds to feel and do whatever she wants, making them humble people at her service, who in turn becomes the queen of a people of zombies.

<i>Malkia wa Giningi</i>	The queen of Giningi
<i>Mfalme wa wafalme</i>	The king of the kings
<i>Mchawi wa wachawi</i>	The witch of the witches
<i>Mjua yote</i>	Who knows everything

(Mohamed 1990: 34-5)

Bi Kirembwe, the “queen witch of Giningi” does not get tired and old, nor does she die; she has endless strengths and the sharpest mind. She can both read inside people’s mind and control them breaking any resistance and stopping critical thoughts:

Nani anakataa? Nani anapinga? Hakuna hakuna (“Who’s refusing? Who’s opposing (my command)? Nobody does,” 37); *Yupo mwenye swali?* (“Does someone have a question? There is none,” 40).

The power of Bi Kirembwe is based on *unga wa ndere*, a magic flour, which according to the legend is made up of killed human body parts. This black powder can be used either as a love spell or to induce hypnotic states of trance.

Unga wa ndere, mziba kauli na mfungua kauli
[...] mwonyesha vilivyopo na visivyokuwepo
Msimikisha ukweli na uhalisi wa mambo
Hata yasiyoonekana ...hata yasiyojulikana
Unga wa ndere wewe ni sayansi ya mababu zetu

Hatutaki usayansi wa wazungu
Sayansi inayotawala ardhi za watu weupe
Sayansi ya mazingira yetu
Si sayansi ya mazingira yao.
 (Mohamed 1990: 47)

The magic flour which both covers and exposes statements.

[...] It shows what is there and what is not there.

It sets up the truth and the reality of all things,
 even of those things that are invisible and unknowable.

Magic flour you are the science of our ancestors,

We do not want Western science,
 the positivist epistemology of science, which rules the land of white people.

The science of our cultural environment is what we want,
 not the science from their (white people) environment.

This is an example of what Stroeken (2012) calls the “synesthetic epistemology of magic” or *shingila* “the access” to the unknown. Black magic is characterized by symbols and codes, which not only break a subject’s capacity of producing independent critical thoughts, but they also affect, through a synesthetic process, sensorial representations, shifting sub-modalities. Therefore, I argue that we can dilute an “epistemology of *ndere*.” The metaphorical image of *unga wa ndere*, the hypnotic powder that works through overlapping processes of sub-modalities and synaesthesia, induces a hypnotic state of trance during which negative images are transmitted and an effect of negative autohypnosis is fostered inside the subdued subjects’ unconscious.

“Negative autohypnosis” is an unconscious process which, as described by Araoz (1984: 70-71), consists in three principles: firstly, the cognitive subjection of an individual that leads them to a state of “uncritical thought” or the inability of producing resistant/critical thoughts; secondly, the activation of negative images; and, the induction of post-hypnotic suggestions, which consist in a powerful negative self-statement, resulting from the combining of both the negative images previously suggested and the absences of criticism previously produced. This type of suggestion has the power to break any internal resistance, because it is self-constructed by the subject. Negative autohypnosis is much more hypnotic than the resistant structure or subject self-defence mechanisms, because it is rooted in culturally oriented myths, religious beliefs and superstitions (Araoz 1984: 71).

Bi Kirembwe: Fungua kinywa. Rangi gani hii? (anamwonyesha rangi nyeusi)

Mwali: Nyeupe

Bi Kirembwe: na hii? (anamwonyesha rangi nyeupe)

Mwali: Nyeusi

Bi Kirembwe: Adui yako ni nani?

Mwali: Nafsi yangu

Bi Kirembwe: Wewe ni nani?

Mwali: Mtumishi wa Giningi [...] mtumwa wako.

(Mohamed 1990: 47 - 54)

Bi Kirembwe: Open your mouth, which colour is this? (showing the black powder)

Initiand: White

Bi Kirembwe: And this one? (showing something white)

Initiand: Black

Bi Kirembwe: Who is your enemy?

Initiand: My mind/soul

Bi Kirembwe: Who are you?

Initiand: A servant of Giningi. [...] I am your slave.

People, captives of negative suggestions, became metaphorically vizuu, the living dead or ghosts as it happened in the play *Ngoma ya Ng'wanamalundi* ("Ng'wanamalundi's Dance;" Mbogo 2008) to the young and beautiful bride Nyamiti, who was abducted by the powerful witch Chidama.

Chidama: [...] **ufundi, utaaluma, ujuzi** [...] jambo kubwa hapa ni kuyateka na kuyafuga mawazo ya watu wako. [...] Uweze kuyatumia utakavyo. [...] uwezo wao wa kufikiri umo mikononi mwako. (Mbogo 2008: 32)

Chidama: [...] Witchcraft is a **technical know-how, expertise, knowledge** [...] the big deal is the capability of kidnapping and taming the thoughts of your people [...] you can dispose of them as you wish [...] their capacity of thinking is in your hands.

Nyamiti's induced state of cognitive enslavement made her forget about her bridegroom and made her fall in love with the villain Chidama. However, Nyamiti's *somo* sought help from the *mganguzi*, superior healer called Ng'wanamaludi, who, by performing his powerful healing dance, undid the spell that was subduing Nyamiti's mind.

Conversely, Gusto, the protagonist of the novel *Mirathi ya Hatari* ("A Dangerous inheritance;" Mung'ong'o 2016) inherited from his father as unilineal descent of the same sex the *mizungu ya uchawi*

(“the secret teachings of witchcraft,” 2): *ni urithi kubwa ukitumia vema; bali pia ni mirathi ya hatari usipojihadhari nayo* (“it is a valuable inheritance if you use it well; however, it can also be dangerous if you are not cautious with it,” 12).

In fact, black magic and witchcraft can be used either to protect oneself by undoing the magic of angered or jealous people, or to harm other people so as to achieve personal goals.

The initiand Gusto, after having sworn his *kiapo cha uchawi* (16), the oath of secrecy, have to undergo a specific training to both master the expertise of witchcraft and to be granted the access to this esoteric corpus of knowledge.

In a similar way to Bi Kirembwe’s statement, who maintains that *unga wa ndere* is the science of the African ancestors, Gusto was warned:

Hii ni elimu ya pekee. Ukiifahamu na kuitumia vizuri unaweza kuumiliki ulimwengu. [...] hiyo ndiyo elimu tulyokuwa nayo Waafrika tangia awali. Lakini ajabu ni kwamba vijana wa leo wanaidharau. Wanaioonea haya jadi yao. Wanataka Uzungu badala yake! (Mung’ong’o 2016: 20).

“This is a **peculiar and special knowledge**. If you master it, you can rule the universe [...] this is indeed **African traditional knowledge**. It is surprising that the young nowadays ignore it. They are ashamed of their own **cultural traditions**. They want **Western knowledge** instead.”

Therefore, I argue that magic is an example of local epistemology which conveys Afrocentric knowledge through cultural practices such as witchcraft.

4. Conclusions

Through this multidisciplinary analysis of Swahili literature has been illustrated that written literature describes hypnosis, an ancient and transcultural psychiatric technique, which is not only included in the performance of traditional ritual practices such as initiation rituals, but it is also conveyed by folktales, myths and metaphorical images.

Particularly, I argue that each one of the four elements described by Erickson (1978; Erickson *et al.* 1979) as fundamentals to create effective post-hypnotic suggestions during hypnotic trance can be detected:

- The focus of the attention is captured by means of ritual performances, which cover a pivotal function in the life of both the individual and the community, and thus, it becomes a significant cognitive moment.

- The indirect hypnotic-suggestions are disseminated through culturally specific knowledge and education transmitted during the ritual.
- The suggestions are conveyed during a delicate liminal status of the individual.
- The establishment of links to connect the suggestions to contingent forthcoming events takes place.

Consequently, the suggestions, indirectly introduced during the trance, are safely stored inside the unconscious of the young initiands and they are ready to be awakened by a post-hypnotic signal, which in turn, is capable of retrieving and triggering them. Post-hypnotic signals can appear in the shape of literary fictional works, which not only recall the experienced lived during the hypnotic trance via nets of associations, but they also create a favourable environment where people by analogy can access once again the knowledge and education received during the original trance. Thus, an ideo-dynamic process, articulated by the unconscious, is triggered, during which the individual seeks for a solution of the problem by retrieving lessons learned from their juvenile experiences (Dargenio and Nicolini 2017: 53-4; Erickson 1983; Granone 1989).

Furthermore, I divided the case study into two sections to investigate different kinds of initiation rituals: in the first case study, I explored one novel and two plays (*Mwendo*, *Embe Dodo* and *Kija*) describing the female rites of passage of *unyago*, and, in the second one, I investigated two plays and one novel (*Kivuli Kinaishi*, *Ngoma ya Ng'wanamalundi* and *Mirathi ya Hatari*) about initiation rituals to witchcraft.

Both of these rituals are characterized by a knowledge-making effect, which is closely linked to the efficacy of the trance induced, which in turn, is granted by the following elements: the initiands' cognitive status, typified by the young age and a memorable condition or moment in their lifetime; the transmitters, who are close relatives of the initiands; the use of native languages; and the symbolic value of performative and verbal arts, characterizing traditional local customs (Dargenio and Nicolini 2017: 53).

In conclusion, I argue that from the hypnotic trance, induced by the performance of these traditional ritual practices and customs, alternative epistemologies can be diluted.

On the one hand, during the trance, induced through the performance of *ngoma ya unyago*, educational post-hypnotic suggestions and therapeutic metaphors are produced and transmitted. Therefore, I argue that this trance can be described as a form of culturally specific epistemology: the “epistemology of *kupagawa*” or “epistemology of spiritual possession trance.”

On the other hand, during the trance, induced through the performance of witchcraft initiation rituals, negative cognitive images are produced, which works launching a process of negative autohypnosis (Araoz 1984), through an “epistemology of *ndere*”, which I named after the magic powder *unga wa ndere* that creates a hypnotic trance effect, bewitching people, so as to practice black magic.

Nevertheless, both of these alternative forms of epistemology of trance are privileged channels to access Afrocentric knowledge and wisdom articulated in the form of post hypnotic suggestions. In fact, these suggestions, which are introduced during the trance and saved inside people unconscious, are reconceptualized according to an individual ideology and worldview.

In conclusion, I argue that an analysis of Swahili literature through the lenses of hypnosis does not represent another example of the imposition of Western conceptual categories applied to African literature (Mudimbe 1988; 1994), but instead it represents a strategy to rise “surreptitious speeches” (Mudimbe 1994). Therefore, in a time where an “epistemic reconfiguration” is on its way in different disciplines (Mbembe at SOAS webinar seminar 25-2-2021), the objective of this peculiar and multidisciplinary analysis I dare say that is to shed light on cultural practices and rituals, which are drawn from local epistemologies, and which articulate Afrocentric knowledge.

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