

Sexuality in Africa

M A G A Z I N E



Vol 5 Issue 4

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Apples are common in the city since the people are being sensitized to eat them, instead of drinking coffee to start the day in the morning. Nairobi/ Kenya 2008 Julius Mwelu / IRIN

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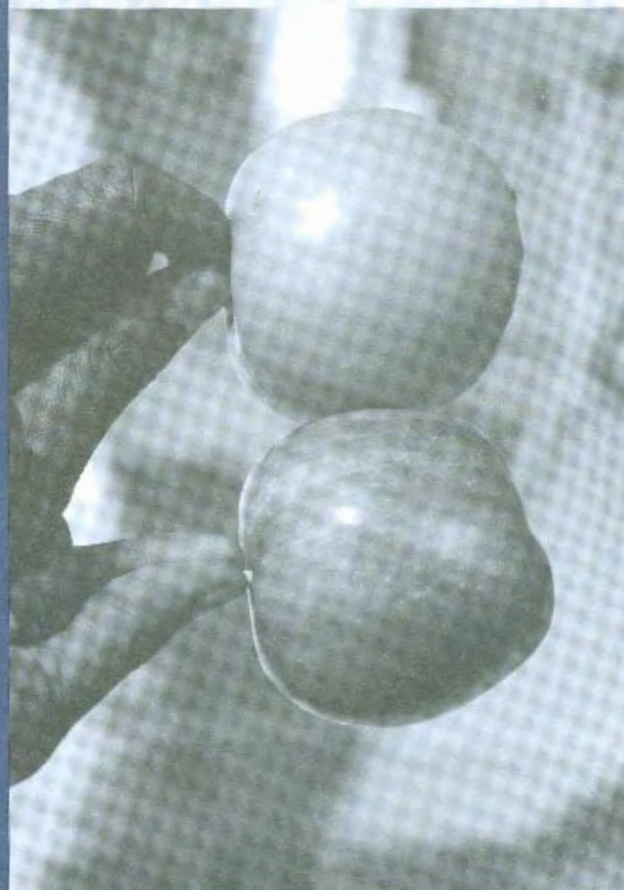
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By Richmond Tiemoko

Off the target?

The last issue of this fifth volume of *Sexuality in Africa Magazine* explores the intersection between food, Body and sexuality in Africa. To some extent, this is a deviation from the past volumes where the fourth issue was always on violence, HIV & AIDS and Sexuality to mark the 16 days of activism and the world AIDS day. Food and body could not however be dissociated with violence (be it gender based or not) and HIV in Africa as the food riot and challenge has poignantly demonstrated in 2008. However, in the line of thinking of current ARSRC programming cycle, this fourth issue of the magazine prioritises rights and sexual wellness from a positive perspective. It is our view that to prevent violence and disease, we need to promote rights, love and pleasure in sexuality. The focus on food, body and sexuality is therefore not off target.

Celebration

Focusing our attention on Food and body (healthy body) is a way of celebrating the fifth anniversary edition of the *Sexuality in Africa Magazine*. Five years in the life of the publication is probably short but it is obviously long and a land mark in Africa. On the African continent with a high level of under-five mortality of not only human beings but also, institutions and projects, achieving five years for a quarterly publication on sexualities is certainly an achievement and deserve celebration. Using the demographic approach and life table, we could say and hope that after surviving the first five years, the Magazine should grow in strength, coverage, reach and quality in the next fifteen years when mortality rate start to grow again.

Locating The Food, Body and Sexuality Nexus.

Sexual pleasure depends to some large extent on how and what one feeds the body with and conversely sexual desire may dictate the diet. Similarly, the body in its appearance, texture and functioning affect not only nutrition but also sensuality and sexuality. This is not to negate the neglected and yet important experience of bodiless sexualities.

Sexual body is arguable the most important aspect of sexualities in Africa.

Food for healthy sexuality goes beyond aphrodisiacs. Indeed two regular aspects of food and sexuality nexus in most popular culture in Africa are love potions and aphrodisiacs. And these aspects are deeply gendered as Aphrodisiacs are predominantly for males and used by males to enhance their virility, prevent or address sexual dysfunction. Even though women may use aphrodisiacs and some may be called women's stuff like the *Kayan Mata*, the aphrodisiacs are largely for male sexual performance and pleasure. This is clear in the research note in this volume. The second aspect of the nexus, love potions, *juju* and charm almost exclusively used by women to entice and charm men and be loved. Although the effectiveness of all the practices remains controversial, they all show that good food is an integral part of sexuality and sexual practice in many cultures.

Sexual body is arguable the most important aspect of sexualities in Africa. There are several cases, cultural practices of shaping a sexual body or sexually appealing body. Female genital cutting, male circumcision, labia elongation and girls fattening are just few examples of traditional practices. There seems to be a renewed interest in shaping and indeed designing the sexual body or body part. Designed genitalia though not yet widespread are nerveless familiar issues in contemporary Africa.

Regardless of an individual's stand on designing or shaping the 'sexual' body, it is extremely important that individual rights and sexual wellness are upheld.

As we begin the festive season (in Gregorian calendar) when food, drink exchange, and social interceptions, body image and appearance stake centre stage, I wish you sexual wellness, erotic justice and intimacy happiness.

Richmond Tiemoko PhD, is the Director of the ARSRC

FEATURE

Body Image, Beauty, culture and Language In The Nigerian African Context

By Taiwo Olorunjoba- Oju



Foreign magazines on fitness and the "ideal (slim)" body image at a Health Spa in Ghana.

Introduction:

Body Image and Social Conflict

Body image "involves our perception, imagination, emotions, and physical sensations of and about our bodies" in relation to values that are not necessarily innate but "learned or expected culturally" [1]. In a world where 'image is supreme,' the mirror becomes an agent of self-identification and instrument for the interrogation of 'self worth' against socially or culturally imposed aesthetic standards.

This article briefly highlights perceptions of body and beauty in traditional and contemporary Nigeria African context as reflected in the relevant language, literature and against the background of Western perceptions and formulations with some images of body and beauty in contemporary

Nigerian society that hint at transformations in traditional constructions and projections of body image, beauty and sexuality.

Body and Body Parts in Traditional Nigeria African Context

Body sensitivity is a pervasive phenomenon in traditional Nigerian African culture, and language is the poetic route to locating body image and beauty perceptions within traditional consciousness. Female beauty in particular is inscribed in traditional cultural codes in relation to body parts, complexion, overall physiology and

aesthetic appearance, though as we shall clarify below, often subject to a corresponding moral evaluation. This inscription of body and beauty in language manifests in names, cognomens, terms, tags, sayings, aphorisms, riddles and extended aesthetic forms such as poetry, folklore, nuptial songs; in sundry oral expressions and cultural practices.

Amongst the Yoruba, largely located in South-western Nigeria but with socio-political and cultural satellites in many other parts of the country, West Africa and in the African diaspora, body parts such as *eyinjú* (eyeball(s)), *eyín* (tooth/teeth), *omú* (breast(s)) and *idí* (buttock(s)) occur frequently as central focus in traditional sayings about beauty. The list below is representative but not exhaustive;

Examples of Inscriptions of Body and Body aesthetics in Yoruba language Forms

eleyinjú ege ("one with graceful eyeballs")

Eyinfunjowo ("teeth whiter than money" cowrie shells being previous medium of exchange)

Ìbádìàràn ("velveteen-friendly buttocks")

Ìdì iléke ("beads-friendly buttocks")

Àrewa ("beautiful one" also used as name or cognomen)

Omodára ó deju ("her beauty is problematic; it creates conflicts");

Bí omó eni bá dára ká wí,

tí pé a ó fí se aya kó ("if our daughter is a beauty we should acknowledge it [because it is true], not that we would make a wife of her").

The rationale for giving these examples points to the fact that autonomous aesthetic coding of body image was part and parcel of African culture, while also indicating that indeed what we call 'beauty' has always been culturally codified.

Such constructions in which body parts constitute the central lexes and to which aesthetic signification is attached seem mostly applicable to the female sex, but less overtly to the male sex. The term for beauty in the language is *enà* while the term for beautiful *arewà* is gender neutral but "female" and "beauty" seem to be the normative collocates in Yoruba construction, which contrasts with the reported situation in western patriarchal discourse in which the female body is 'frequently depicted ... as fluid, unstable,

that the male body is completely free of semiotic inscription in traditional Nigerian African culture. In Yoruba, the term, *arewà* ('the beautiful') applies to both female and male sexes, even if it mostly applies to the female. However, attributes of strength and sturdiness appear to be more applicable in the construction of male body image than size or dimension. In Yoruba culture a newly born male is announced as *ako* ('male') and further as *ako lantelante* or *okunrin laniilanti*. *Lanti*, *lantilati* or *lante*, *lantelante* (the *ie* variation depends on dialect) is onomatopoeia for 'sturdiness,' hence 'A fi okunrin lantilanti kan ta wa lore = "We have been blessed with a sturdy male."

Descriptions such as *o ga o sigbonle* ("he is tall and stocky/sturdy") may suggest that tallness is the ideal male body image or model; however, shortness, the opposite, is presented with equal adulatory adjectives in the praise song of the gods and of the male human. There seems to be a semiotic rule that the feature, 'sturdy,' as well as character attributes such as braveness, should overwrite physical deficits in the construction of male body image in traditional African culture. In praise poetry addressed to the male deities, items such as *Okunrin kikurú abí'ja kunkun* ('short toughie') and *Okunrin koroboto bi okà* ('sprawling like the cobra') occur. In the latter, otherwise unseemly folds are invested with the attributes of strength, fierceness or ferociousness.

If such perceptions with regards to the male body is cultural, Wole Soyinka's description of an 'unknown man' in *The Interpreters* may be seen as reinforcing the perception.

"From [the boat] stepped a barrel figure, half naked, a soft sheen over his paunch as if oil from his last meal was seeping gently through. [But] Even from that distance they saw no softening corpulence; the boatman grounded his craft easily, heaved a sack over his head and receded into the shadows [7]."

Here, the features 'seeping oil', 'half-naked' and to some extent 'barrel figure' are neutralized by the implied features 'strong' ("heaved a sack"), 'deft' ('grounded his craft easily'), 'smart, unobtrusive or business-like' ("receded into the shadow").

Such male body image fitting the description strong/sturdy/rugged is traditionally exhibited during specialized cultural displays involving acrobatics (e.g. during masquerade festivals) or body sports (e.g. wrestling), and in nuptial domains, during traditional wooing sessions such as in the Fulani *sharo*. Here, male suitors engage in a show of strength and endurance by submitting their bodies to severe whipping by rival suitors. In parts of Yoruba land, mutual whipping as test of endurance and also forms part of the rite of passage for young adolescents. Unlike the Fulani *sharo*, no nuptial formalities are involved in the Yoruba display, but the choice of whipping spots may ensure that prospective partners are among the spectators.

Praise songs addressed to the pantheon of gods offers further onomatopoeic rendition of specifications with regard to male body image.

At any rate, as with the wrestling sport, tales of the prowess of particular males do make the rounds soon enough, with expected effects among prospective females. Body build is also on display during

these sessions. An athletic body-build would seem to have added value, but the more important parameter seems to be physical strength and the ability to endure.

In Yoruba lore and contemporary popular culture, the sight of a dashing and powerful male is said to provoke a spontaneous and passionate prayer by all females in within sight to the Almighty. The 'prayer' signals a mixed bag of the 'more respectable' expression of desire for marriage partnership and a bland expression of desire for sexual liaison.

Oluwa, b'eleyi o ba le je oko eni, a si'ale eni
'Good lord if this one cannot become one's husband, at least let him be one's concubine.'

Conclusion

The idea emerges that in reality, beauty is in the culture of the beholder. However, while the numerous examples do establish primordial and resilient cultural perspectives on beauty, aesthetics and sexuality, there is indication that the body image and beauty landscape in Nigeria's Africa, like that of the rest of Africa, has altered dramatically in contemporary times. It becomes inevitable once again that culture is not static but dynamic, but also that this dynamism entails neither complete erosion of tradition nor uncritical acceptance of new ideas, but a well-considered blend of old and new into emergent and forward looking forms of expression. What seems to be a pressing need is to navigate in a healthy manner between contending constructions and projections of body image, beauty and expressions of sexuality.

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Dr. Olorunfoba-Oju has taught Stylistics and African Literature in Universities in Nigeria and abroad for about two decades. And also contributed to international research in sex-gender relations in African Literature and Culture.

¹ I must acknowledge that Prof Biola Odejide of the Communication Arts Dept University of Ibadan (and currently Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the institution publicly drew my attention to this inscription during a seminar organized by the African Regional Sexuality Research Centre Ibadan, Sept 13, 2007).

chameleon-like' [2].

Idi bebere, Obinrin R. ʔgb.ʔd.ʔ: Plump Beauty in Nigerian African Cultural-Semiotic Construction

While facial attractiveness is a general desideratum for beauty, plumpness or roundness as well as a jutting backside is also a pervasive image in traditional Nigerian African construction of female beauty. Perhaps the most intriguing poetic representation will be found in the praise chants of many prominent Yoruba communities which in part contain a sequence of boastful self-adulation over the theft or kidnap of a plump rounded beauty.

Should a goat go missing in [this town], don't bother to ask me. For I am not a thief of goats. If a robust sheep goes missing in your homestead don't ask me either For I do not belong to the class of sheep carriers. But if a plump rounded beauty with jutting backside is missing in your homestead... Hurry. Send a horseman and not anyone on foot For I have gone far with her, and she is now embedded in my father's homestead.

It is interesting to track the survival of these age-long traditional expressions regarding body and beauty in contemporary Nigerian literature and culture. Notwithstanding the status of literature as idealized representation, it does offer a useful guide to the culture of the society being mirrored, sometimes through images so stunningly evocative as to excuse the insinuation of reality into so-called fictive narrative. Such reality evocations, of the image of the African woman as plump beauty, will be found in numerous literary representations. A few striking examples will suffice here. In Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, the quintessential beauty of that name "grew more beautiful everyday. ... She looked very plump and appealing to the eyes" [3]. However, in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, the combination of beauty and a jutting behind is spelt out as major parameters of traditional beauty. Ahuruole the beauty

'was dark-complexioned and the indigo she had on made her darker still. Tall and slim, she was always hoping to put on a little more flesh, if only to stop her

friend's making annoying remarks about her flat buttocks. Her waist was heavily beaded. The beads make her hips and her behind a little fuller' [4]

While Ahuruole's buttocks need some padding to conform with the cultural image of body beauty, the star beauty of the community in this novel, "the most desirable girl in Omigwe village" is Ihuoma, no padding and no question asked. 'It was understood that her mature beauty would turn any man's head'. Her mature beauty is understood to be naturally rounded, not padded. Ihuoma herself once unconsciously observes a female neighbour, a visiting beauty and potential rival, as the latter walks away. Ihuoma's focus was the buttocks;

While facial attractiveness is a general desideratum for beauty, plumpness or roundness as well as a jutting backside is also a pervasive image in traditional Nigerian African construction of female beauty.

"Nnenda's behind was not nearly as full as hers even when she had her beads on, she thought. How lucky she [Ihuoma] was to possess these physical gifts. She wondered what it was like to be ugly" [5]

One final example, is the description of the massive lady, Owolebi on the dance floor at the 'Club Cambina' in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. The descriptive sequence is striking, as indeed, Owolebi was 'immense':

"... she filled the floor with her body, dismissing her surroundings with a natural air of superfluity ... and she brought a change in the song and the rhythm of the band, who now began to play to drape her in the lyric and the mood..." [6].

The famed kinesis of traditional African female body curvatures enters into this narrative through the description of Owolebi's rhythmical sway to the drumbeats, pretty much

'like a river swollen on fresh yam hillocks'. Nonetheless, different images emerge from the male gazes that her body rhythms command. While Kola the artist is idly sketching grotesque pictures of Owolebi on paper, it is clear, following the gaze and mood of Egbo, the womanizing interpreter, that he 'was dying to go to bed with the original'. The very idea draws guffaws from another interpreter who considers Owolebi to be 'revoltingly fat.' But Egbo retorts that this fellow is 'just crude' while continuing to 'fasten his eyes on the subtle independence of the buttocks'. The interesting thing is how Owolebi's enormous body mass is eventually analysed in terms of proportion and made to fit into cultural perception of beauty.

ʔp.ʔl.ʔng.ʔ: Slim beauty

The slim beauty also has her place in traditional Nigerian African culture as represented here in traditional Yoruba language, culture and the associated literature. In the Yoruba vocabulary of body aesthetics the term for the slim and pretty woman is ʔp.ʔl.ʔng.ʔ. The Yoruba pay her a teasing tribute in chants and sayings about beauty:

'slim beauty falls on a breakable plate, it does not break, but when she falls on a pounding mortar, the mortar splinters'

It is not clear whether this sexual innuendo, that is an insinuation of sexual gymnastics in this teasing tribute, is deliberate. What is clear is that the traditional African image of beauty is not as monolithic as is often claimed. The 'mature' roundness of plump beauty may well command the male gaze in that traditional community, but ʔp.ʔl.ʔng.ʔ does have her place as well, as a slim pretty woman.

ʔkunrin Sansanbele Male Body and 'Beauty'

As noted earlier, nothing in the foregoing should be taken as suggesting

By Eno Blankson Ikpe



A healthy meal of boiled plantains, roasted fish and vegetables.

Introduction

Food and sexuality are intricately bound in many ways and like sexuality, food is essential to human existence and total sexual abstinence without scientific intervention (artificial insemination, IVF) might lead to extinction of the human race. To remain alive, attractive and sexually able and desirable for procreation and sexual enjoyment, human beings need good food. This article, examines the intricate interplay between food and sexuality in the expression of desire, intimacy, eroticism and pleasure in Nigerian cultures.

Food for Love in Nigerian Cultures

Through the ages, food has been employed for the enhancement of giving and receiving sexual pleasure. It has been used as an invitation to sex, enticement and luring. In traditional societies, good food was the staple food of the area eaten with relish and assorted meat. Among the Efik, pounded yam or cassava *fufu* with vegetable soups such as *edikangikong*

or *ukwogho*, or *afia efere* (white soup) with goat meat or dried fish was and continues to be cherished. Among the Igbos, Pounded yam or cassava *fufu* with *ofe onughu* - bitter leaf soup or *egusi* - melon soup *ofe owerre* and *ofe akwukwo* with stock fish or *mangala* fish could be regarded as sex enhancing. Pounded yam, cassava *fufu*, *amala*, *eba* with vegetable soup *efo*, *egusi*, *ewedu*, *okra*, *ogbono* could be valued by some Yoruba groups. While among the people of the Delta like the Urhobo and Isoko prefer cassava starch with *banga* soup, fresh fish or bush meat.

Some "attest" to the efficacy of tastefully prepared sea foods such as crabs and oysters. Also, snails (popularly known as "congo" meat) prepared in spicy sauce to be a good aphrodisiac. Plantain with herbal sauces and the enhancing powers of the avocado which could be eaten with rice and plantain have also been indicated. Apart from the major dishes, every area has its own delicacies which women use to get to capture the hearts of their men. Cassava chips *abacha* mixed with *ugba* (fermented African oil bean chips) and garnished with certain herbs was highly priced among the *Ibos*. Special sauces, prepared with certain herbs such as *efirin* or herbs of the bacillicum family for eating of yams and plantains were regarded as good sexuality enhancing. Indeed any food at all relished by the people concerned could be sexuality enhancing. Such foods as corn pap (*ogi*) and corn drink (*kunu*) have been cited as enhancing sexuality through the immediate release of energy.

Many Nigerian cultures believe in the efficacy of honey in revitalising the reproductive organs of both the male and the female. Among the Yorubas there is a strong belief that eating slimy

soups like *ogbono*, *ewedu* and *okra* helps in the production of semen which could be enhanced by drinking lots of palm wine. Particularly assorted pepper soups - fish, goat meat, chicken and bush meat - prepared spicily with different herbs have been indicted as sexuality enhancing. The flavours from the herbs and spices are said to contain certain properties which heighten the senses putting the sexual partners in the right mood and encouraging the right responses. Some men feel that pepper soup "gave them the feeling" and that it made the women more relaxed and "juicy". A sensuous serving of *nkwobi* (cowtail meat spicily prepared) served with palm wine or in contemporary times with beer especially Guinness (*odeku* the big one) prepares the way for sex. The men thought that such delicacies with the accompanying alcohol turned them on and made the women easily malleable. They thought that Guinness was particularly good for the women because it nourished their bodies, aided weight gain and the development of luscious skin. Indeed, the grilled beef *suya* popularised in Nigerian towns by the Hausa and highly spiced with spicy mixtures is also famous for its sexuality enhancing properties.

In traditional societies where polygamy was rampant and women had limited access to their husbands, food was used for luring and binding the husband. Women knew which food made their husbands happy and put them in the "right mood" not just for fulfilling their sexual desires but also for meeting other needs. Food

was a factor in the general politics of their household including sexuality. An interview with a woman who was the fourth wife showed that food played a part in the competition for the man's attention. She claims that she easily found an esteemed place in the husband's heart due to her cooking. She constantly inundated the man with delicacies and relishes even when it was not her turn to serve him. Whenever the husband desired to eat any special food, he called on her to prepare it to the chagrin of other wives. According to her, it was quite normal for the husband to call her and loudly too: "*Mama Emeka, when you finish, go and make fire for me in my obi.*"

In traditional societies where polygamy was rampant and women had limited access to their husbands, food was used for luring and binding the husband.

For her, going to make fire in the *obi* was more than making ordinary fire, it was an invitation to sex during which Mama Emeka and Baba Emeka set their bodies on fire. Meals were interjected with little delicacies and fruits to enhance and maximise the sexual relationships with their husbands whenever it was their turn to be with him. The performance enhancing herbs and spices were added to the special delicacies prepared for the husband. These

delicacies were an invitation to sex and binding of the man to the special culinary art of a woman. Love potions were also administered through food for the exclusive attention of the man. Even till date, food is an tool for love. Women still invite desired men to good food where they show their mastery of the art subtly suggesting that more of such would be available if the relationship becomes permanent. It would seem that any food thoughtfully prepared and passionately served and eaten in desired company turns into food for love. Hence, it has been argued that, basically many aphrodisiac recipes are wholesome ingredients prepared in a tasty way and the receptivity to romance probably comes from the general sense of relaxation and well being which good food induces. Hence Ackerman concludes that, "looked at it in the right light any food might be thought aphrodisiac." The interplay of the sensual in the cooking, serving and eating of food is what makes almost any food an aphrodisiac.

The process of cooking and eating of food can also be very sexy. This led Thomas Wolf to claim that there is no sight on earth more appealing than the sight of a woman making dinner for someone she loves. To the man, even the movements involved in cooking become sensuous acts which elicit desire, not only for the food being prepared but for the woman preparing the food. It is also very appealing and satisfying to

By Dalya Elziny & Meena Tharwat



L-R, Dalya El Ziny, Dr.Sany Kozman and Meena Tharwa

Dalya El Ziny and Meena Tharwat 2008 SLD Fellows in an interview with Dr. Sany Kozman a Social Entrepreneur for the AIDS department in Caritas, Alexandria, Egypt and the director of board of trustees of the NGO "Life Friends" and Dr. Youssef Aziz a consultant Dermatologist and Andrologist and the Director of Caritas in Alexandria and the Secretary of the Alexandria Society of Dermatology, Venerology, and Andrology, discussed body image, food and sexuality in Egypt.

Body Image and Sexuality

There is a strong relation between

body image and sexuality as body image can affect sexuality and sexual acts in many ways and vice versa. Body image is referred to an individual's perception and cognition of his or her body and outer look. Attitudes towards body image are not only cognition but also a set of behaviors and emotions of one's physical appearance upon which evaluation of one's own self may affect his or her practices. Body image evaluation influences sexual performance, activities, interests and experiences. The issue is not only of concern to women, but men as well as some men's concern about their body image is to fulfill the societal role of

masculinity while some studies suggested body image therapy as an effective way in ameliorating disorders in self consciousness during sex [1].

Male and Female Body Images In Egypt

According to Dr. Sany Kozman who is a Social Entrepreneur responsible for the AIDS department in Caritas, Alexandria, Egypt and the director of board of trustees of the NGO "Life Friends", body image can affect sexuality in many ways as mentioned earlier. In general, sexual attraction depends on body image, but many variations exist between males and females regarding the different physical attributes considered sexually appealing. For example, males are first sexually attracted to female bodies according to the image and certain parts of the female body have special sexual significance for most males especially at the beginning of relationships.

On the other hand, body image is considered a hidden priority for females that they do not reveal in the Arab context. As expected by the society, females mention male personality as their first attraction

and priority instead of the male body image, for this is the socially acceptable answer. Moreover, self consciousness and interest in body image is less for males than females but it decreases after marriage for females. He referred this decrease in interest to increase life burden and changes in priority listing for both husband and wife. For females, we should not disregard body changes after pregnancy, labor and lactation that affect their body-image and take huge effort and time to regain the pre birth figure. Moreover, house hold chores and duties that last all day long and are female responsibility in the Arab context are considered hurdles for wives to find time and effort for body care and weight management.

One should not over generalize body care and image in both sexes as it seems that gender and sexual preference may affect the perception and care of an individual's body. Dr. Kozman continued that homosexual men are more concerned about their body image and outward appearance than heterosexual men. They are also involved in different types of sports and body building to enhance their masculine physique despite the prevalent misconception that they prefer to acquire feminine appearance since they are interested in members of the same sex.

Food and Sex

In another sitting with Dr. Youssef Aziz a consultant Dermatology and Andrology and the Director of Caritas in Alexandria and the Secretary of the Alexandria Society of Dermatology,

Venerology, and Andrology; Dr. Aziz whose ideas are based on practical and clinical experience explained that, better body image might be the motivational reason some boys and girls participate in sporting activities as these activities have strong relation to their sexuality". Dr. Aziz has noticed that body fitness has a positive affect on sexual performance. However, body image is only one component of sexual life that is entangled with many other aspects that should be considered as well. Stressful conditions and life burden can also affect sexual desire, interests and performance regardless of body image. Moreover, after years of marriage and frequent performance of the same acts with minimum changes and less creativity sexual desire may be reduced and altered to duties rather than pleasure. In his practical experience, many individuals inquired about food in relation to sexual performance. He usually advised high calories foods that could generate energy to enhance sexual performance. Nevertheless, he stressed that the brain is the center and origin of sexual activity and not really the quantity of food intake. In conclusion, the influence of body image on sexual attraction for both males and females is greater than its influences on sexual activity and performance.



L-R, Dalya Elziny, Dr. Youssef Aziz and Meena Tharwat

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By Amina Mohammed-Durosilorun

Introduction

In Hausa culture, the phrase "*Kayan mata*" often gets women smiling mischievously, excited and scampering to get a share. Literally "Kaya" means materials or property while "Mata" means women in the Hausa language. Hence, *kayan mata* means women's stuff but is generally understood to mean women's sexual stuff or aphrodisiacs. An aphrodisiac is any food, drink, drug, scent or device believed to stimulate sexual interest and increase sexual vigour [1]. Human sexual expression is more than procreation, it is also recreational [2]. Throughout history, almost every culture has used various 'substances', usually herbal in origin, in an attempt to intensify sexual desire, performance and cure the impotent. Despite all the unproven claims people continue to make use of aphrodisiacs and women in northern Nigeria are no exceptions. They include both traditional (which are common) and more modern ones. There are different types used by men and women to increase libido and vaginal lubrication.

This study is important to understand the cultural contexts in which traditional aphrodisiacs are used with the aim of investigating the use of *Kayan Mata* (traditional Aphrodisiacs) by women in Kaduna, northern Nigeria.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Kaduna State, Nigeria using mixed methods to collect primary data. Quantitative data were drawn with a structured questionnaire, and qualitative data drawn from in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion among some of the educated and uneducated women. The survey used purposive convenient sampling of 500 respondents who were assured confidentiality, anonymity and

privacy. Questions asked focused on the meaning of *Kayan Mata*, the reasons of use, and perceived efficiency and side effects.

Majority of the respondents (83.4%) were between the ages of 19-44, while 14.8% were less than 19 years with 1.8% above 44 years. They were mainly Muslims ranging from housewives to professional either with some form of education or non at all. 379 (75.8%) of the women were in marital relationships with 209 (55.1%) in a monogamous marriages and 170 (44.9%) in polygamous relationships.

What is Kayan Mata

Although a popular and yet public secret, *kayan mata* has different meanings and definitions according to the respondents. For some, *Kayan mata* is a concoction prepared to make a woman "okay"; an appetizer/sweetener, *maganin daddi* (traditional medicine to make you sweet). It is used to used to *Gyara Mata* (repair women) and makes a woman tasty. Some think it is just a belief, some are genuinely unaware of it, or have heard of it and are not sure of what it is.

Despite all the unproven claims people continue to make use of aphrodisiacs and women in northern Nigeria are no exceptions.

Why do women use kayan mata?

As expected, there are different reasons women use *kayan mata*. Findings from the survey indicated the use of *kayan mata* is mainly a pleasure seeking behaviour: Pleasure of the male partner (33.2%), women's personal sexual pleasure (20.8%) or pleasure for the couple

(46%). It is also used as a tool to outperform other wives (opponents) in the fierce competitions amongst co-wives: 'To be better than your mate/co-wife and be the "the moon among stars" or to stop the husbands from taking a second wife or to drive their mates away.

The use of *kayan mata* at times, seems to be related to life cycle and particularly reproductive cycle. As a group of women said in the focus group, it is used 'So that you can be a virgin again. It tightens. Especially after, you have had several children'. Other reasons include lubrication especially for women who are naturally dry or in situations where there is little or no fore play.

Source

Social networking seems to play a major role in the sourcing, marketing and use of *kayan mata* in Kaduna, state. Most women (53.2%) get their supply of *Kayan mata* from friends while 25.4% get it from family members, 17.8% from the market and 3.6% from other sources. One third of the respondents had recommended the use of *Kayan mata* to others. Most buyers are introduced during weddings, other gatherings and by their friends.

Types of Kayan Mata

Kayan mata comes in different forms and their mode of administration and application varies accordingly:

Oral preparations: Not less than 20 varieties of oral forms were mentioned during the interviews. They include;

Aya (tiger nut) for making a sweet tasting drink thought to be good for both men and women to improve fertility. *Dabino* (dates), *reke* (sugarcane) watermelon, onions and grapes are also useful. *Zogale* (Moringa seeds), *Gari Tarmu* a powdered formulation which tightens, *Gardelli* is gotten from a plant that looks like small white onions, it increases the urge. *Tsimi*, a herbal drink/brew is said to be

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very effective in lubricating a woman and so is useful for women that are naturally dry or take a long time to get wet. *Sabugu kuma*, red powder drunk with yoghurt "it drives a man crazy with desire" according a mid-life interviewee.

Another popular type is *Kazan mata*, a chicken specially prepared for women. It is relatively more expensive and usually given to brides. The effect ceases with childbirth so it needs to be renewed from time to time.

Vaginal preparation: These are usually tighteners called *dan matsi*. Examples include *Ruwan zakarin ayu*, the liquid gotten from the genitals of an aquatic animal (*Ayu*). *Karin kunama* (scorpion sting), *Bagaruwa* is an edible fruit that can be boiled and sat on, in water like a sit bath after delivery, to tighten the vagina. *Karya gado* (break the bed) are all insertables. Honey can also be used as lubricant and is good because it has no particles.

Effectiveness and Implications

Most of the users of *Kayan mata* are very positive about its effect. One of the respondents said "I am used to it and I know what to use if I want to enjoy myself, and what to use if I want to punish my husband". Some users said their husbands seem to be happier and enjoy themselves better, shout and scream, and want more, even when the wife is tired. Some women also notice changes in themselves (now well lubricated). 'I always reach my peak anytime I use it'. Women commonly cite the tighteners and *tsimi* as being most effective.

However, no specific scientific research has been done on the effectiveness of the products and like most aphrodisiacs the thought of the effect is more psychological (a placebo effect) than real.

Too much *Tsimi* has been associated with drowsiness, or being too wet to the extent that you "drip" and need to wear something protective. Other possible complications are lower abdominal cramps, nausea, and weakness.

What does Islam have to do with it?

Islam has had a lot of influence on the Hausa culture. Some women are told by their religious scholars that if they are in a polygamous setting it is obligatory to disclose what they take to co-wives. This is because it may make your husband pay more attention to you at the detriment of others and this is not allowed

There are however some risks related to the use of *kayan mata*. Some preparations for vaginal tightening sometimes cause itching, vaginal discharge, "infection of the womb", burning sensation and a fear of causing cancer and excessive bleeding after delivery from stenosis.

Discussion

Aphrodisiacs are common in many cultures. This study shows many women are still preoccupied in acquiring materials to enhance their sexual life, which could have wide-ranging implications. Most women in this study used aphrodisiacs mainly for the men's pleasure. Women seem to think that by ensuring sex with their male partner is pleasurable, they can bargain for other things. This shows that the function of sex is not only for reproduction and pleasure in itself, but also for economic, power, emotional and other gains. This is also likely to work because pleasure reinforces behaviours which are worth repeating [3], men will do anything to get it and maintain it. Vaginal practices that cause tightening are an important part of using aphrodisiacs in northern Nigeria.

The preference for "Dry sex" has been documented in a number of Sub-Saharan African countries.[4,5] but the

women in this study just like the Baganda people of Uganda prefer 'wet sex' to 'dry sex'. Clinically, diminished vaginal lubrication or difficulty lubrication during sex has been identified as a principal component of sexual arousal disorder and can be associated with pain (dyspareunia). [6] Women in this case are unlikely to disclose use of vaginal preparations to their doctors who discourage this practice.

Conclusion

Use of *Kayan mata* is widespread mainly to produce "great sex in marriage", but also for economic, political, religious and social rewards. Their efficacy is not fully proven scientifically but women will "swear" it works and will continue to use it. Science or no science! Hence, we need to be fully aware of it and its possible implications. Further research is needed to determine the male perspectives on the use of aphrodisiacs.

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- [3] Daniel T Halperin Sex Transm Inf 1999; 75:445-446. Dry sex practices and HIV infection in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Downloaded from sti.bmj.com on 2 November 2008
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VIEW POINT

Fat Thighs, Flabby Arms and a Pot Belly...[1]

By Olunosen Louisa Ibhaze



Two African ladies proudly show off their curves in Nigeria.

movements passed through generations and still in existence today? [2] Or the waist beads that adorned the thick waists of some of the maidens of old, our mothers, grandmothers and even some of our women today or voluptuous bodies once referred to as birthing bodies? Or even some of our present day popular hip up lyrics which says "shake what your mama gave you"?

Dance and Mate Selection.....

The Makosa dance which originated from Cote Divoire, that has been made popular by our new generation musicians is a very good examples of these sensual dances for the beautiful voluptuous African woman. It involves the movement of well rounded thighs and buttocks sensually which in later years men too have also adapted their way of dancing to the same rhythm. Interestingly, these dances are neither a recent development nor discovery. In some African cultures it was used as a practical means of mate selection for young men and women of the community and marriages built on such choices were believed to last the couples entire life time without any need for divorce! It is unfortunate that some of these dances in recent times are being judged by western or so called "moral" standards as being vulgar and indecent without much thought to the cultural relevance or reverence of the dance it self[3].

Waist Beads and Body Shape.....

Another phenomenon are waist beads. Why waist beads? These beads, traditionally worn by African women mostly around their waists (under clothes these days) and on the wrists or ankles in other cases have several meanings. The ones worn on the waists was held in place by the buttocks with its uses, ranging from enticing the husband, rites of passage, to healing and rejuvenation. Traditionally they were constructed in the "fattening houses" used as initiation lodges for young girls in the Old Kongo Empire, some parts of Nigeria and other parts of Africa. They were a symbol of the beginning of a young girl's reproductive cycle and this was a rite of passage to the mysteries of womanhood. It was also a time of

The tabloids and media today are swarmed with the images of celebrities either spotting slim toned bodies or those who "need" to work on their physical images to look like their counterparts. Gyms and health spas today are a common sight as they are springing up in all corners of urban centres with imported diet tablets, herbal diet teas and other "healthy" meals and snacks which would help achieve this ideal image infesting our markets in the last decade. It is interesting to know that the modes of usage on some of these imported drugs are not even written in English! Not left out too are the traditional African herbal mixtures which also aid with weight loss.

It would be easy for one to assume that the concept of the beautiful African woman began with the younger and more "expressive" or "enlightened" generation that is gradually being blindfolded by western ideals. Yet, a deeper look by the more inquisitive mind however, would reveal that, which really was beautiful and ideal before the infiltration of our thoughts by western ideas, ideals and the rephrasing of terms for the beautifully voluptuous with words like "flabby, fat and etcetera."

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If the stick thin shadow of a woman of today, was ideal and appealing to the African man; why in the early days did the African man who was either a farmer, hunter or warrior look forward to coming home after a hard day to the warmth of his wife's body? How do we explain the description of beautiful women in African literature? How also do we explain the undeniable high level of sexual energy generated by some of our very vigorous and sensual dance

learning from the older women who linked the physical mystery of these beads to menses, courtship, sex and childbearing [4].

Since the art of self adoration has been practiced in Africa since the beginning of time, in Egypt, waist beads were uniforms for teenage girls ignoring any sexual nuance and they were called girdles. In Ghana, women believed that these beads helped achieve the hour glass figure and sexually stimulate their men just as some Islamic cultures allowed women wear these beads under their clothes also for a husband's pleasure. In other parts of West Africa, women went as far as dipping their beads in scented oil or made them from fragrant material like sandalwood and wore them with tiny bells around their waist so that they jingled as they walked by. This signaled to the man that they were clean and ready. These days it is interesting to know that the waist beads of old are once again becoming more visible especially amongst the youth as our jeans are getting lower and lower and people are showing more skin [5][6]. The fit of these beads around the waist, is also used as a means of maintaining women's body weight and figure, especially after childbirth, which simply shows that they were health and beauty conscious despite their large frames. It is important to note that despite the preference of some for big women, the slim build is still highly cherished in Northern Nigeria.

Birthing Bodies and Comfort For The Unborn....

The effect of dance and waist beads cannot be achieved without voluptuous bodies. This is not to say that slim women do not partake in the Makosa dance nor wear waist beads. Of course they do, but before the rave of the western ideal of what a beautiful woman (slim) should look like, flesh was in. This explains the Makosa mate selection dance which by a girl's movement (shaking her ample bum, hips, belly or bosom) one could tell how good a wife she would be, also the fattening houses where young (skinny) girls were taken and taught about the intricacies of marriage (preparing their bodies for babies) and most importantly, pleasing their husbands and finally the waist beads. Since beads were mainly worn around the waist, women would require either a belly or a bum or both to hold these beads in place. A woman was also supposed to be not just a wife, mother and lover to her husband, she was also literarily supposed to provide warmth. This explained why men preferred women with "something" they could hold on to and why young wives to be were taken to fattening huts to prepare their bodies for the ability to provide a cushion effect (comfortable) for the unborn.

Celebrating Curves.....

I sometimes find it interesting that some men still appreciate the well rounded built for comfort type of woman and not surprised at

the image conscious ones, who still believe that people should either look or strive to look a certain way (slim) to be termed as beautiful and healthy. What then happens to those born with big frames who just can not be thin? Just the other day I was listening to the lyrics of the song "pot belly" by the South African Group known as Freshly Ground. The title of the song first caught my attention and I wondered what anyone would have to say about a pot belly and when I listened to it, I couldn't help appreciating and smiling at the chorus which says, "Fat thighs, flabby arms and a pot belly still gives good loving...". The truth is, I do not need to be thin or a shadow of myself for the society to accept me as healthy or beautiful. In the midst of all this hogwash of what is and what the society thinks should be, it is important to note that we are beautiful just the way we are and that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder with a big heart and mind. I'll just stand here confident, strong and healthy and celebrate my curves for I know I am beautiful.

[1] Title was coined from the chorus of the song "Pot Belly" by the South African group Freshly Ground

[2] <https://africancorp.blogspot.com/search/label/Africans>

[3] <http://www.africantheaterarts.com/Mapoula.htm>

[4] <http://home1.gsu.net/~vaceg704/4d36.html>

[5] http://www.waistbeads.com/content/avoidlines/cor_wearing_waistbeads.html

[6] <http://home1.gsu.net/~vaceg704/4d36.html>

[7] <http://africancorp.blogspot.com/search/label/Africans>

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NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION

The editors welcome submissions related to future issues of the Magazine and also other areas of sexuality, sexual health and rights in Africa. These articles or poems should be objective, analytical and reflect current issues and debates i.e. taking a broader approach to sexuality and taking the sexuality discourse beyond health to integrate the expression of sexuality without guilt or fear.

Priority would be given to previously unpublished articles while already published material might be considered based on the relevance of the subject area to ARSRC's work, accompanied by details of where to seek permission for its reprint.

Region Watch: Topical Issues with a country or sub regional focus.

Programme Feature: Best practices from programme implementers.

Research Notes: Focus on research and methodologies

Viewpoint: Reactions to previous magazine issues or subject areas that a reader wishes to express very strong opinions about.

Length:

Feature article: 1,000 - 1,500 words

Research issues: 800 - 1,000 words

Opinion articles: 400 - 500 words

Pictures:

Pictures are welcome with or without articles and appropriate credit would be given if the picture is used.

Presentation:

An abstract with your name, contact address, phone number, email address and short personal bio as you would like it to appear on the list of contributors should also be submitted.

References:

*** It is important to note that references

should be from the last five years.

*** All contributors would be sent a copy of the issue with their published articles.

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Please visit our website - www.arsrc.org - for more information and to access online editions of the magazine. Hard copies of the magazine will be made available on request and subscribers will however be required to pay the cost of postage.

SEXUALITY RESOURCES

The Sex Life of Food: When Body and Soul Meet to Eat

Author: Bunny Crumpacker
Publisher: St. Martin's Press, New York 2006
ISBN 0-312-34207-1
\$14.95

Bunny Crumpacker has looked at food from every angle and brings delicious stories about what others have done and said about eating and about making love. There are so many ways that hunger and desire act on each other and so many things that can influence our preferences. Not only are people moved by the tastes, textures and shapes of the food they eat but even the names of some dishes can candle hunger of both kinds. As the author writes "sometimes cooking is pure play, eating is a release love and being desired is the ultimate after." This is a book you can go back to again and again and keep finding new delight including such wacky and witty comments from the times and insightful chuckle. It's both a banquet and a late-night nosh. Taste it, devour it, and enjoy it.



The Politics of Women's Bodies

Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior
Second Edition
Edited by Rose Wolf
ISBN 13: 9780195149777 ISBN 10: 0195149772 paper, 320 pages
Dec 2002. In Stock
Price: \$32.95 (h), \$20.00 (pb)

For nearly three decades, feminist scholars have examined how the female body and ideas about the female body affect women's lives. The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior, 2/e, brings together recent critical writings in this important field, covering such diverse topics as the sources of eating disorders, the nature of lesbianism, and the consequences of violence against women. The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior, 2/e, begins by looking at how ideas about women's bodies become culturally accepted. As the writings in the first section demonstrate, this is a political process that can reflect, reinforce, or challenge the distribution of power between men and women. Subsequent sections look at how, once ideas about women's bodies become accepted, they can serve as powerful—and political—tools for controlling women's appearance, sexuality, and behavior.



Development with a Body: Sexuality, Human Rights and Development

By: Sonia Correa (Author), Andrea Cornwall (Editor), Susie Jolly (Editor)
Hardcover, 256 pages
Publisher: Zed Books (July 8, 2008)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 1842778900
ISBN-13: 978-1842778906

This book offers compelling insights into contemporary challenges and transformative possibilities of the struggle for sexual rights. It combines the conceptual with the political, and offers inspiring examples of practical interventions and campaigns that emphasize the positive dimensions of sexuality. It brings together reflections and experiences of researchers, activists and practitioners from Brazil, India, Nigeria, Peru, Serbia, South Africa, Turkey, the UK and Zambia. From political discourse on sex and masculinity to sex work and trafficking, from HIV and sexuality to struggles for legal reform and citizenship, the authors explore the gains of creating stronger linkages between sexuality, human rights and development.



The Seduction Cookbook: Culinary Creations for Lovers

Author: Diane Brown
Publisher: Inova publishing, USA 2005
ISBN: 0974937363

The Seduction Cookbook: Culinary Creations for Lovers, May 4, 2005
The ritual of cooking and dining has not been explored enough. This book is about preparing sensual dishes (tastes and presentations) with the right atmosphere (candles, soft music, flowers, beautiful settings). All the recipes are simple and are clearly displayed on only one page (thus freeing the cook to spend less time in the kitchen and more time at the table with a loved one. Here the author explains that cooking and seduction are arts that involve the hand, the heart, and the head. Through food Brown helps you create that all important sense of romantic anticipation. You'll find appetizers that will induce a little foreplay such as curry morsels.



SACRED SEXUALITY

Author: Dr. Muata Ashby
Publisher: Sama Institute (September 1, 1997)
ISBN-10: 1884564038
ISBN-13: 978-1884564031
Paperback: 226 pages

Tantrism and Mysticism of Ancient Egypt The Neterian Guide To Love, Sexuality, Marriage, Relationships and the Secrets of Sexual Energy Cultivation, Sublimation, and Spiritual Enlightenment This Volume will expand on the male and female principles within the human body and in the universe and further detail the sublimation of sexual energy into spiritual energy. The student will study the deities Khepri and Hathor, Anubis and Isis, Geb and Nut and discover the mystical implications for a practical spiritual discipline. This Volume will also focus on the Tantric aspects of Ancient Egyptian and Indian mysticism, the purpose of sex and the mystical teachings of sexual sublimation which lead to self-knowledge and Enlightenment.

