

Michezo: Dance, Sports and Politics in Tanzania

Anne Leseth

Oslo University College, anne-birgitte.leseth@hio.no

Abstract

This paper serves to demonstrate the manner in which body practices both reflect and, in turn, subtly shape the political contexts and purposes within which they occur. While governments may pay particular attention to how different body practices, such as sports and dance, could be means to advance their political objectives, they can never readily control the ambiguity, complexity and irony that is generated by the performing bodies of social actors. The ethnographic context for this discussion is the performing practices and political discourses on sports and dance in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in the 1990s. The colonial way of doing sports in Tanzania and Eastern Africa required another structuring of time and space different than many of the traditional games. By means of the moralistic ideology of athleticism, schoolboys should have learned the basic tools of imperial command: courage, endurance, assertion, control and self-control. However, the emergence of different dance societies indicates that the colonisation of body practices was not a straightforward process in which people responded without resisting. While the tribal modes of dance continued to attract most women during the British colony, there emerged several dance societies stressing modernity and multi-tribalism. The dance is a crucial demonstration of what Michael Taussig has termed ‘mimesis’. Mimesis is explicitly tied to the body, and through mimesis people can dramatise and negotiate understandings of themselves and of others. This paper draws on historical material as well as extensive fieldwork in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania between 1992 and 1997.

KEYWORDS: *Michezo*, sport, dance, cultural continuity, mimesis, embodiment

Culture is both embodied and challenged through corporeal performance (Noland 2009: 2).

Introduction

This paper serves to demonstrate the manner in which body practices both reflect and, in turn, subtly shape the political contexts and purposes within which they occur.¹ While the Tanzanian government pays particular attention to how sports and dance could be means

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of advancing their political objectives, they can never readily control the ambiguity, complexity and irony that is generated by people moving, whether it be dancing, doing sports activities or mere everyday practices. The ethnographic context for this discussion is the performing practices and discourses on sports and dance Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in the 1990s.² I also draw on historical material in discussing the development of sport and dance in Tanzania. Of analytic importance is the various ways people in Dar es Salaam use the Swahili word *michezo*. This local concept provides an alternative approach in studying body practices such as sports and dance, as it challenges and interrogates conventional Western ways of thinking about bodily movements and the body.

Michezo stems from the verb *kucheza*, which has the following meanings: play, sport, play a game, make a move in a game, waste time, trifle, act, work, move, drill, be loose. Its noun *mchezo*, (plural) *michezo*, is translated as a game, pastime, amusement, sport, a mockery (Johnson 1939). *Michezo* is not differentiated into concepts such as competitive sports, mass sports, leisure and play. Playing cards, playing football, basketball or skipping rope are all *michezo*. Thus, the concept is very broadly compared to 'sport'. In trying to grasp the ambiguity and complexity of performers, whether it is within fields of sport, dance or everyday practices, I found the concept of *michezo* to be a 'door opener'. I will add further depth and detail to this concept and its practice further in the essay.

I want to move beyond conventional categorical definitions and boundaries that isolate fields such as dance, sport, play, work and everyday practices from each other. The word *michezo* has served as a key in grasping this point, as peoples' experiences of *michezo* in different ways link fields of activities which for me, was isolated from each other, such as sports and dance. In social science writings on sports, especially sports in non-European societies, categories such as 'traditional sports' (Baker and Mangan 1987), 'indigenous sports' (Ndee 1996), 'pre-colonial sports' (Nkongo 1979) or 'sport in developing countries' (Heineman 1993) are applied to non-Western sport-like activities and games. The way in which these categories are applied, indicate (although quite implicitly) both a temporal and spatial difference between 'modern' and 'traditional' sport (cf. Osborne 1992; Fabian 1983). I suggest that modernity is a qualitative and not quantitative category (Osborne 1992), which might be used politically to make qualitative distinctions between practices and traits. My aim is to demonstrate that people do not necessarily experience a rupture between, for example, traditional dances and modern fitness, or between unorganised games and field sports. These categories are rather a product national and global politics with shifting aims of developing and preserving culture and national identity.

The analytical perspective on which I build my interpretations, draws on Paul Connerton's (1989) concept of 'incorporating practice' as a way societies remember as well as Michael Taussig's (1993) concept of 'mimesis' as a capacity for being like and being

² This article draws on material from two fieldworks in Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, in 1992–93 and 1997, as well as a re-visit in 2003. The experiences gained from my first visit to Tanzania in 1988, when I was engaged for a period at the Norwegian Sports project 'Sports for All', were decisive for the direction the research has taken (cf. Leseth 2004) The main language used in the research process has been Swahili. All the names used in this text are pseudonyms.

different. 'Incorporating practices' refers to bodily practices in which the transmission occurs only during the time bodies are present to sustain that particular activity. According to Connerton, much of our cultural knowledge is reproduced through our bodily practices, through 'living models' of people walking, sitting, working etc., and our bodies keep the past in an entirely effective form in their continuing ability to perform certain skilled actions. While Connerton is emphasising the cultural and social continuity created through body practices, Taussig's concept on 'mimesis' is fruitful in grasping continuity as well as transformation through performing bodies. According to Taussig, imitation, or what he calls 'mimesis', is not a blue-print of an action, but rather the ability to cope with change and continuity at the same time (cf. Taussig 1993: 243ff.). An important point made by Taussig is that mimesis is explicitly tied to the body, and through mimesis people can dramatise and negotiate understandings of themselves and of others. It is in this tension between continuity through body memory and transformation through imitation of 'the other' that the complexity, ambiguity and creativity of the performer will be illuminated and hopefully further explained in this essay.

'Sport is science'

For a long time, both sport and dance have remained a less serious field of research in social sciences and the humanities (Bryson 2003; Archetti & Dyck 2003). Bryson questions why dance seems to belong to a different disciplinary universe from the fields in the humanities, and claims that dance is often too narrowly defined (Bryson 2003). There is no guarantee that what would count as 'dance' would necessarily be recognised by most dance historians as what they mean by 'dance' (Bryson 2003: 58). Bryson argues the advantage in broadening the definition of dance to including social and historical context, by for example using the concept 'socially structured movements'. When it comes to sport, a popular view in the social sciences has been that sport has a life of its own, and is separate from important aspects of the social worlds, such as work, politics and economics (Dyck 2000). This essay applies the wide lens of anthropology in approaching sports and dance. I have been particularly concerned with trying to grasp the political processes that serve to divide sports and dance as two different phenomena, and at the same time understand the way many people conceptualise and experience them as similar, as *michezo*.

In 1992, I talked to Mr. Comba in the Ministry of Sports and Culture in Dar es Salaam, who claimed, 'Most Tanzanians do not yet see the meaning in doing sports.' I was surprised and wondered what had happened, taking into account the assumed importance of sport after the independence of Tanzania and the fact that I had observed people moving, playing and dancing. Mr Comba continued:

Sport is science. To be able to do sports in the modern way, it is necessary to understand its meaning, like that sports give you better health and a better morale and increase co-operation. The problem is that sports in Swahili, *michezo*, might imply activities without any specific meaning, like play, while 'sport' is organised, meaningful activity that has an important place in the development of a country. Our aim in this department is to develop modern

sports like football, basketball, volleyball and athletics. To see the point in these sports, one has to learn them in a scientific way. This is different from how people learn *michezo* from birth. This discrepancy between 'sports' and '*michezo*' is the reason most Tanzanians do not relate sports to a perspective of health and development.

According to Mr. Comba, there is a discrepancy between people's conception of *michezo* and politicians' promotion of 'sport' as development. I will try to explain this statement further by giving a short historical overview on how *michezo* and sport have been used in political discourse as a means to obtain political objectives.

***Michezo* as pre colonial activities**

The practice of sports and dance in East Africa predates the coming of the Arabs in the 7th century, later followed by the Portuguese, the Germans and the British (Johnson 1980; Baker & Mangan 1987; Tenga 2000). The performing of local dances, archery, wrestling and singing games played by children today indicate that these games have been handed down from generation to generation through various local institutions. *Michezo* (sports and games) and *ngoma* (traditional dances, singing and drumming) were by definition differentiated by tribe, geography, gender and age. People living close to a lake or a river, usually had good swimmers, while people living up in the mountains had good long distance runners. The style of the dances also differed, while the Masai tribe had more jumping and fewer hip movements, the dances of the coastal tribes were characterised by wild hip movements (Lange 2002). The teaching in dance and sports were linked to initiation ceremonies, marking a change from childhood to adulthood. There were activities that children and adults had to engage in for amusement and also as necessary skills to be acquired for individual or tribal defence and prestige. Children practised throwing at targets, fencing with sticks, running and jumping, distance and target spear throwing, and jumping over heights (Ndee 1996). Both men and women participated and competed in *ngoma* (traditional dances). The group of dancers that attracted most spectators was the winner. Men competed in different forms of *michezo*, like tug of war, wrestling, running, javelin and swimming. Good sportsmen obtained prestige among their peers. For a man, it was important to be strong and to train hard, or else it would take him a long time to 'acquire manhood'. Women had other *michezo*, such as running with bottles on their head or skipping rope (Leseth 2004).

From *michezo* to sports

Modern sports were introduced to Africa through missionary schools and the European colonisation, defined as 'civilising games' and the pathway to improvement (Ndee 1996; Mangan 1987; Tenga 2000). The missionaries found many of the traditional games and dances to be pagan, and they argued that western sports were better morally. As reported by the East African committee for education in 1924:

The improvement of many tribes in Africa is impossible until the degrading influences of their pleasures are corrected or eliminated [...] All concerned

with colonial welfare, whether European or native [...] will find their efforts hampered by the demoralising results of games and pleasures that are physically or emotionally enervating [...] It is therefore imperative in the interests of Africans and Europeans alike that Native amusements shall be corrected and improved (in Nkongo 1979: 23).

James Mangan uses the expression of *muscular Christianity* in describing the connection the missionaries made between Christianity and sporting practices (Mangan 1987: 146). During the German occupation of East Africa, physical education existed in the form of military training, often through marching parades, while two guiding factors for physical education characterised the British influence: the military concept and the British Public School. Later, this form of military gymnastics seems to have developed within the military barracks and as part of training programs for sports and exercises. In Tanzania today, 'parade' is still a *michezo*, practised in the military service and in schools. During fieldwork, I often participated in warming up sessions in football and athleticism at the National Stadium, and I was surprised by the military-like gymnastics that were rather old-fashioned. Also, within the fitness training I followed, the exercises consisted of a mixture of movements from gymnastic exercises, marching drills based upon this German model and Jane Fonda-inspired exercises. In this way, body practices could be seen not only as mere physical activities, but also as carriers of history.

During the colonial period, women and girls were not encouraged to participate in sports in the same way as men. Netball, a ball game for women only, also played in England and Australia, was introduced to Tanzania in the 1940s and '50s. Compared to basketball, netball required less running and explosive power. The colonisers argued that netball fitted the female shape. A crucial point made by Ranger in his book on *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890–1970* is that in the colonisers' attempt to record African 'tradition', their invented custom was based on the descriptions from male informants. Men's dominance in society, i.e. their control over religious beliefs and political organisation, was expressed even more clearly in colonial-invented customs than it had ever been before (Ranger 1975: 258). The idea of 'tradition' was provided with a feminine identity, while 'modern' was a male domain.

The colonial way of doing sports required different structuring of time and space than many of the traditional games. Running was usually conducted without territorial limits, but athletes should run at a stadium, measuring the distance in meters and seconds. However, an interesting paradox was that while *natural athletes* should become civilised, they should also remain *natural*.³

³ This points to what Homi Bhabha (1994) labels 'the ironic compromise of mimicry' in characterising the colonial discourse; the desire for a reformed recognisable Other that is 'almost the same, but not quite' (ibid:86).



Figure 1: Female solo dancer performing traditional ngoma dance

The traditional dances were, according to Ranger, the only activities that were not hampered by colonialism. The emergence of different dance societies in colonial Tanzania, such as *beni*, *mganda* and *dansi*, incorporated ideas of modernity and multi-tribalism in their styles, and indicates that the colonisation of body practices was not a straightforward process in which people responded without resisting (see also Lange 2002). In 1948, there was a change of the colonial policy in which one recognised the importance of ‘traditional’ dances in preparing Tanzanian for independence. The traditional dance was again invented, serving the purpose of a ‘national culture’.

Nation building through sports and dance

After colonialism, there was a widely shared belief among African leaders in the efficacy of sport, i.e. sport in the scientific way and not as *michezo*, in developing national unity. The potential value of sport and education in the development of national unity became accepted in the newly independent African states as an indispensable strategy for the integration of ethnic groups and as a means of diminishing tribalism (Tenga 2000). Sports, such as track and field, football, gymnastics and traditional dance were ‘re-constructed’

as national activities serving as important images in the Tanzanian self-representation as a nation. The Ministry of National Culture and Youth was formed in 1962 in order to effectuate a cultural campaign. The politics of independence as conducted by the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, was founded on an African socialism that favoured pure national-cultural ideals, such as anti-imperialism, self-help, the breaking down of tribal, religious, ethnic, gender and class barriers. Nyerere, as other African leaders, held that culture and traditions of a nation could only be preserved by the re-introduction of indigenous activities, including traditional sport and games into the new education system. As in many other African countries, Tanzania engaged in an Africanisation project, intended to restore the cultural heritage and pride of African people (Tenga 2000). This meant, among other things, that British or European names for sports clubs were changed to African names, stating their African identity. The two largest football clubs in the country, Sunderland and Young African Sports Club changed to *Simba* and *Yanga* Sports Club (ibid.). Traditional dances, which had been discouraged during colonial times in fear of tribalism and revolt, were now revitalised, not as activities claiming tribal identity, but as ‘symbols of the nation’. Performing in traditional *khanga* in the colours of the Tanzanian flag (black, white and yellow), dancers were collected all over Tanzania to create national dancing troupes. Traditional dances were revitalised as a symbol of national identity, and the practice of sport and physical activity were encouraged in order to provide people with healthy bodies and minds. According to Makoye, the political interest in promoting national Tanzanian culture through dance fostered academic interest in dance research related to issues such as development, gender, culture and politics (Makoye 1998).



Figure 2: Group of dancers end the dancing of ngoma traditional dance by making the line

Nyerere, who was educated at Oxford, has been criticised in the process of nation building, using European ideas of nationalism and projecting them onto Tanzania, without taking into account the fact that Tanzania did not have one tradition on which to build a nation. Nyerere wanted to create a national culture, but he did not take into account the differences in power-relations among the tribes. As stated by Lange (2002), even today people do not seem to recognise what a 'national dance' is.

Michezo and sports – a qualitative distinction

While politicians operate with categories such as 'dance', 'sport', 'art' or 'traditional' and 'modern' in classifying body practices, people might incorporate all kinds of practices into one concept such as *michezo*, or they make differences between practices according to the experience of performing them, like between sport and dance. Sport and dance are politically separated into different departments. However, when interviewing people about the ways of conceptualising activities, it seems that many made distinctions or connections between *michezo* (sport) and *ngoma* (dance) by pointing at the experience of doing these activities.

Asking whether *michezo* and *ngoma* were the same or different, I got answers such as: '*Michezo* is like *ngoma*, it is the same, but it is different', or '*michezo* is *michezo* and *ngoma* is *ngoma*, they are different', or '*michezo* and *ngoma* are the same' (Leseth 2004). After encouraging further elaboration on the answers, I learned that *michezo* and *ngoma* were highly embodied and non-discursive phenomena; people knew them by practice, not by speaking. *Michezo* and *ngoma* included not only many activities, but also many different experiences. Some started to explain differences or similarities between them by drawing on paper or demonstrating with their bodies. In *ngoma*, the drums were placed in specific positions, while in a football match there were no drums or they were placed outside the football field. A woman said: '*Michezo* and *ngoma* are different. In *ngoma* there is lots of noise, lots of dust and not any special structure. *Michezo*, like ball games, has a specific number of participants and the playing ground is often better than in *ngoma*'.

Other again pointed out that the experience of performing the activities as different; '*Ngoma* is jumping up and down, while *michezo* like running, is to move forward', or as similar: '*Ngoma* and *michezo* are the same, you use your body and your joints and you sweat'. Hence, the performer transgresses, so to speak, conventional categorical definitions and boundaries that isolate fields such as sports, dance, work and play, as well as breaks with distinction such as 'modern' and 'traditional'.

Living models on the National Stadium

The National Stadium in Dar es Salaam was finished in 1962 in order to improve the infrastructure of sport and became an important stage for performers of sport and dance, hosting both national and international events (Nkongo 1979; Tenga 2000). In 1997, I was present at the reopening of the stadium after a renovation. The guests of honour were the former president Julius Nyerere and the sitting president Benjamin Mkapa. The performance of football, dance and running was the crucial part of the ceremony. The National Stadium had played an important role in the nation building process in Tanzania, and every year

Liberation Day (9th of December) is celebrated with a ceremony at the stadium and with sporting events. The renovation of the stadium was meant to revitalise the importance of sport in developing a national unity, as was promoted after independence. Both the stadium and other local spaces were declining due to neglect by the government in protecting such areas against decay and modern building projects.

The two presidents, Nyerere and Mkapa, as body models for the nation, might symbolise a shift of interest and evaluation of involvement in sports to sport watching. Compared to Nyerere's fit body that had encouraged people to be involved in sports, President Mkapa was not athletic. As lived by Nyerere, the body image of the nation was a working-body that represented solidarity through a decent life style and physical effort; President Mkapa's belly was a sign of wealth. His regime was also representing a shift in Tanzanian politics, from single party to multi-party, from socialism to capitalism and an increasing class differentiation.

I take the ceremony at the National Stadium as a point of departure in describing *michezo* in post-colonial Dar es Salaam. My point is not to explain a 'decline' of sports in Tanzania, nor to point at the need of 'sport-development'. I will point at the power of performing bodies, of 'living models' (Connerton 1989), in reproducing and transforming political contexts in Tanzania today. By this, I will also incorporate the 'inscribed' pieces of history presented above.

I arrived at the stadium with a Tanzanian friend, Tunu, a 22-year-old woman living in Dar es Salaam. Entering the Stadium one-and-a-half hours before the football match between Zambia and Tanzania, we were met with loud music, and a brass marching band playing on the field. People kept pouring in, filling up the space. Men and boys definitely outnumbered women among the audience. The most expensive seats were taken by men wearing black suits, white shirts and carrying mobile telephones. Two of the most popular commercial dancing groups in Dar es Salaam started to perform. The female dancers performed in white tights and tight tops, while the male performers who were singing and dancing were dressed in suits. The female dancers in the first group were quite thin, while in the other group they were plump. The dancers in this group also wear a khangas wrapped around the waist, emphasising the movements of the hips. One of the dancers had a totally bleached face. The audience was shouting and standing upright as the dancers start to perform and some of the female dancers moved from the scene and among the audience in the stands.

The different body shapes of the female dancers illustrate the two dominant body ideals among young women in Dar es Salaam; the first is often called the *English Figure* while the second is called the *Bantu figure*.⁴ It is an obvious yet often ambiguous evaluation of those shapes, the *English figure* representing imperial ideals, while the *Bantu figure* is the most authentic. To bleach the skin is another 'imperial' practice which, despite being widespread, is condemned by the government and commented upon by other people on

⁴ These categories are developed from the basis of informal discussions with people in Dar es Salaam, structured interviews with participants in two fitness groups as well as interviews with 200 people in a squatter area in Dar, including interviews with politician, journalists and sports administrators.

those who do it, using nicknames such as *mkorogo* (this is also the name of the chemicals used), *fanta-cocacola* (describing the colour patches that happens when the bleaching fails) and *Half-London* (becoming half-European).

The outfits of the performers in commercial dance have changed dramatically in recent years. In 1997, the female dancers were wearing miniskirts and tights, compared to 1993 (the time of my first fieldwork), when most female dancers were dressed in *khang*.⁵ In 1997, the dancers were also slimmer and many of them had bleached their skin. Performances in traditional and popular dance were characterised by a preoccupation with erotic hip movements.⁶ The interesting point here is that when performed through dancing, critical aspects of appearance, such as displaying the body, seemed to be incorporated into known patterns. As noted by the artist Songoyi in his description of the nationalisation of songs in the traditional dance. 'To most people, movement is all that matters' (Songoyi 1988: 37). The new dancing styles in 1997, popularly called *Kwasakwasa* and *Ikibinda Nkoi*, gained enormous popularity among ordinary people as well as among politicians. People ran to see these erotic dances, which are like modern versions of the traditional initiation dances, *Sindimba* or *Mdundiko*,⁷ with impulses from other African countries such as Zaire. The movements are similar to those of traditional dances: the waist and the hips rolling, the flat feet on the ground, the wriggling of upper parts of the body. But the movements are maybe more explicit in challenging the erotic and sexual parts of the body, and the body parts, such as the hips, legs and breasts, are covered less. In Dar es Salaam, such hip movements and 'wild' behaviour became very popular, which again made the invention of new dances flourish. The fact that the audience enjoys erotic movements makes some groups not only to prefer dances that 'naturally' have this, but they even add such movements to dances that originally did not have them. In this way, these dances are presenting hybrid forms of the traditional culture.

The guests of honour, Julius Nyerere, followed by President Mkapa, arrived separately in Mercedes, driven into the Stadium. When the guests were seated, a female dancer dressed in black, started to perform together with a snake at the stage in front of the field. 'She is a *mchawi* (a witch), said Tunu. People were shouting and clapping, and at the same time football players were entering the pitch starting to warm up. An old man was running around on the field. 'That's a *mchawi*, too', people commented.

These performers are somehow relating the fields of football and dance more or less implicit, as the practice and belief in witchcraft (*juju*) is common both in dance and football, although officially abandoned as 'traditional belief' (Leseth 1997; Mesaki 1992).

⁵ Kanga is a piece of cloth with a border printed in bold designs and bright colors. There is a proverb on each kanga, which is supposed to somehow suit to the person wearing them.

⁶ Laura Edmondson (2001) criticises the postcolonial government's cultural agenda. In her article 'National Erotica'. The politics of 'traditional' Dance in Tanzania, she argues that the eroticization of what is promoted as 'traditional' dance reproduces stereotypes of Tanzanian women as tamed and controlled, with the ability to smile and cut the waist.

⁷ Mdundiko is the name of an initiation-dance from the Zaramo tribe in Dar es Salaam. The dance contains many erotic and sexual elements. The Sindimba is a similar dance, from the Makonde-tribe.

Victory in a football match or between groups of dancing, are credited not only on the performance in itself, but on the medicine used by the medicine man. Thus, witchcraft is a way to handle the element of unpredictability in sports and dancing competitions and the practice of witchcraft is reproduced through performing bodies, transgressing limits of 'traditional' and 'modern' practices.

The warm-up exercises of the football team consisted of stretching the joints, gymnastics and short running with a military look, like a parade. Simultaneously, the dancers were still performing and there were competitions in 100 and 200 meters around the field. The running took place without any announcement.

It is interesting to observe how athletes today in Tanzania are reproducing a myth of the 'natural athlete' who was raised in the mountains and ran to and from school⁸. At the same time, athleticism seems to decrease in popularity and athletes do not perform with impressive results in international competitions, such as the Kenyans for example. Within political rhetoric, the notion of the 'natural athlete' might even legitimise the government's lack of funding for sport, because 'natural athletes' do not need 'scientific training' or expensive equipment.

Then – at last – it is time for the match. The two football teams re-enter the field, while the band is playing the national songs. The atmosphere is ceremonious for a short while, although the songs played by the brass band are completely out of tune and – to me – a bad imitation of British military brass music. The football game obviously does not impress the audience, as they are constantly criticising the Tanzanian players. The trainer is a European (*mzungu*) and people laugh and say that there is no use in sending experts from Europe, when all he can do is to beautify the players with good equipment, not making them better in playing football. The match ends 0-0, and we are escorted out, trying to avoid the fighting that usually follows a football match.

The event at the stadium is an illustrative example of how performing bodies both reflect and shape the political contexts in which they occur. The multiple practices at the stadium reflect the change to multi-party politics in Tanzania and increasing internationalisation and globalisation. At the same time, the idea of *michezo* is reproduced and transformed through performing bodies, through imitation of new styles and images and reproduction of old ones, that transgress conventional boundaries and categories of body practices such as sports, dance, work and play. In a free listing exercise⁹ among people in Dar es Salaam in 1997, I found 80 different activities included in the word *michezo*. Football was the activity mentioned most often, followed by other ball games such as netball, volleyball and basket and athletics. Music and dance, often named as *ngoma*, were among other activities frequently listed as *michezo*. At the same time, 'traditional'

⁸ From a sample of 15 athletes I interviewed in 1992 in Dar es Salaam and Arusha, 13 of whom stated that they had been running 5–10 km to school when they were kids as the basic reason why they had become good athletes (Leseth 1995).

⁹ 'Free listing' is a systematic interview technique and a powerful way of studying cultural domains, such as diseases, plants, occupations, animals, sports etc. You ask people to list all they 'X' they know. After collecting 15–20, you already have a picture of certain domains (See Bernard 1995).

activities such as archery, wrestling, spear throwing were mentioned, as well as ‘modern’ practices such as bodybuilding and aerobics. The high numbers of activities included in the word *michezo* raise the question of how people made sense of and learned ‘modern’ body practices such as bodybuilding and fitness as *michezo*, practices that in the political discourse were defined as ‘foreign’ and non-cultural.

Moving beyond *michezo* – the importance of movements

Most people told me that they learned by imitating, either it was from ‘living models’ in the street, on TV, in films or in a magazine. To imitate (*kuiga*) was an expression incorporated in everyday discourse as a way of learning whether it was a skill, an action or a way of moving. Models representing bodybuilding, fitness and beauty competitions were highly visualised in the media. These models could be imitated. An important point, however, is that this imitation was not (as also stated by Taussig) a blue print. People seem to be conscious about that they wanted to copy, but at the same time they built on previous patterns of performing. Tino, who was a bodybuilder, not only imitated this practice by looking at photographs of American bodybuilders in magazines. He did also draw on experiences both from *ngoma* (traditional dance) and football in his performance as a bodybuilder. He explained:

For the time being, I am dancing and doing weightlifting. When doing exercises in bodybuilding, it reminds me of the rhythm from the drum. The dance has provided me with endurance and I am able to do several exercises lifting weights. I have also played football. I use to be the keeper. I like to jump, like I do in the dance. I fetch the ball, but people laugh at me and say I am better in jumping than in fetching the ball!

Hence, from the performer’s point of view, the skill you use in your performance is not only related to the role, in this case the bodybuilder, but you clearly exploit the accumulated experience of a lifetime in the performance. From this, the bodybuilder is not only ‘imitating’ a Western body image, he is also drawing on his own experiences as a performer. In contrast to Europe, where body ideals, such as being slim or muscular, are presented as static and detached from the moving body, people in Dar es Salaam talked about ideals of the moving body. Betty, a 25-year-old woman living in a squatter area of the city, explained: ‘You know, Anne, it is not important whether you have a body shape like a bodybuilder, a beauty queen or a traditional figure. The crux of the matter is how this person moves, both when it comes to speed and style.’ Starting to collect words on walking styles among people in Dar es Salaam, I found around 20 different words for styles of walking. The metaphors used on naming different ways of walking (also implying an element of speed, either fast or slow), indicated imitation. Names of animals were often used. *Mwendo ya twiga* (move like a giraffe) or *mwendo ya kiboko* (move like a hippopotamus) were common expressions. *Kulinga* refers to slowly walking, wriggling your buttocks (for women) and waving your right hand. This way of walking is both attractive and dangerous; it is the way a hyena moves when looking for meat. Betty told me that people, especially youth, continuously created expressions for walking-styles and copied new ways of moving. *Kutembea kwa mbwembwe* (walking with style, show off) refers to

the walking style of a body builder, while *kujyata* refers to walking like a model, like Miss Tanzania. People imitate ways of moving like a bodybuilder or a beauty queen. However, people incorporate new experiences into established patterns and thus create an embodied continuity with the past, which escapes political discourses. The bodybuilder and the beauty queen, as representing western body images, are incorporated, not primarily in the concept of *michezo*, but in a general pattern of everyday practices, like walking. Yet, what is being copied, is the movement ideal, as an already-known image and not the body ideal. The selection of how and what people copy simultaneously emphasises the difference between the European static body image and the Tanzanian moving body image. The youth continuously invent words for new beauty-ideals, and the terms are incorporated into already-known practices, such as walking. Hence, through imitation performers are able to transform and move beyond political discourses on culture and at the same time create continuity with the past through their body memory. Thus, the power of imitation, as a way of being like and being other, is not only crucial in explaining the malleability and transformative character of *michezo*, but in explaining the character of performers in general, moving bodies as social actors and cultural producers (Noland 2009; Taussig 1993).

By way of conclusion

Politicians continuously attempt to exercise control over the public display and the uses of the body, yet they run up against the stubborn but unspoken manner in which body practices resist simple regimentation. Nyerere sought to foster national uniformity and a common culture through promotion of a set of ostensibly pan-Tanzanian emphases in physical culture that nonetheless readily accommodated and still accommodates lingering colonial, tribal and post-colonial dimensions. The process of building a nation, as conducted by Nyerere, also built on principles of imitation, though quite implicit. Nyerere used his background of 'being like' Europeans, to become 'the Other'. His experiences of being educated in Oxford and of being an athlete were important in creating a 'capacity' to become different, to promote national identity. The multiplicity of practices and traditions in Dar es Salaam today might be interpreted as an outcome of ongoing processes of imitation, invention and reproduction of this multiple heritage. Moreover, in all performances, these elements must be taken into account creating and reproducing culture. Within processes of continuity, performing actors work in a constant process of hybridisation and challenge conventional and political categorical definitions of and boundaries between activities such as sports, dance, art as well as established theoretical notions of modernity, tradition, culture and nationalism. In this regard, the concept of *michezo* provides us with new insights.

Processes of imitation and habituation are crucial ways through which performers of dance and sports develop their skills. However, in order to grasp what is imitated and what is reproduced, one has to move beyond conventional categorical definitions that isolate fields such as dance, sport, play, work and everyday practices from each other. Anthropological research on the various ways people perform, experience and conceptualise bodily movements might be fruitful in developing dance as a creative and malleable field continuously being challenged through corporeal performance of imitating and moving bodies.

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POVZETEK

Avtorica poskuša v članku pokazati načine, na katere lahko telesne prakse odražajo in tudi subtilno oblikujejo politične kontekste in namene, v katerih se pojavljajo. Medtem ko lahko vlade posebno pozornost namenjajo različnim telesnim praksam, kot so športi in ples ter jih uporabljajo kot sredstva za uveljavljanje političnih ciljev, pa nikoli ne morejo v celoti nadzorovati dvoumnosti, kompleksnosti in ironije, ki nastajajo z nastopajočimi telesi družbenih akterjev. Etnografski okvir te razprave so prakse in politični diskurzi o športu in plesu v Dar es Salaamu v Tanzaniji v devetdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja. Kolonialni način delovanja športa v Tanzaniji in vzhodni Afriki je namreč zahteval specifično strukturiranje časa in prostora, ki je bilo drugačno od številnih tradicionalnih iger. Prek sredstev moralistične ideologije atleticizma so se dijaki naučili osnovnih orodij za imperialne ukaze: pogum, vztrajnost, samozavest, nadzor in samonadzor. Vendar pa pojav različnih plesnih družb kaže na to, da kolonizacija telesnih praks ni bila preprost proces, na katerega bi se ljudje zgolj odzivali in se mu ne bi upirali. Medtem ko so ženske za časa britanske kolonije še naprej privlačili predvsem plemenski plesi, pa se je pojavilo tudi več plesnih društev, ki so poudarjala modernost in multi-plemenskost. Ples je osrednja demonstracija tega, kar je Michael Taussig imenoval 'mimezis'. Mimezis je tesno vezan na telo in s pomočjo mimezisa lahko ljudje dramtizirajo razumevanja samega sebe in drugih in se z njimi pogajajo. Članek se osredotoča na zgodovinsko gradivo in na obsežno terensko delo v Dar es Salaamu v Tanzaniji, ki je bilo izvedeno med letoma 1992 in 1997.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: *Michezo*, šport, ples, kulturna kontinuiteta, mimezis, utelešenje

CORRESPONDENCE: ANNE LESETH, Centre for the Study of Professions, Oslo University College, Pb.4, St. Olavs Plass, 0130 Oslo, Norway. E-mail: anne-birgitte.leseth@hio.no.