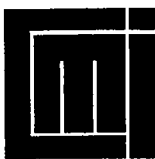


# **From Nation-Building to Popular Culture: The Modernization of Performance in Tanzania**

Siri Lange

R 1995: 1  
April 1995



**Report**  
Chr. Michelsen Institute  
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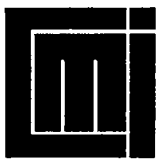
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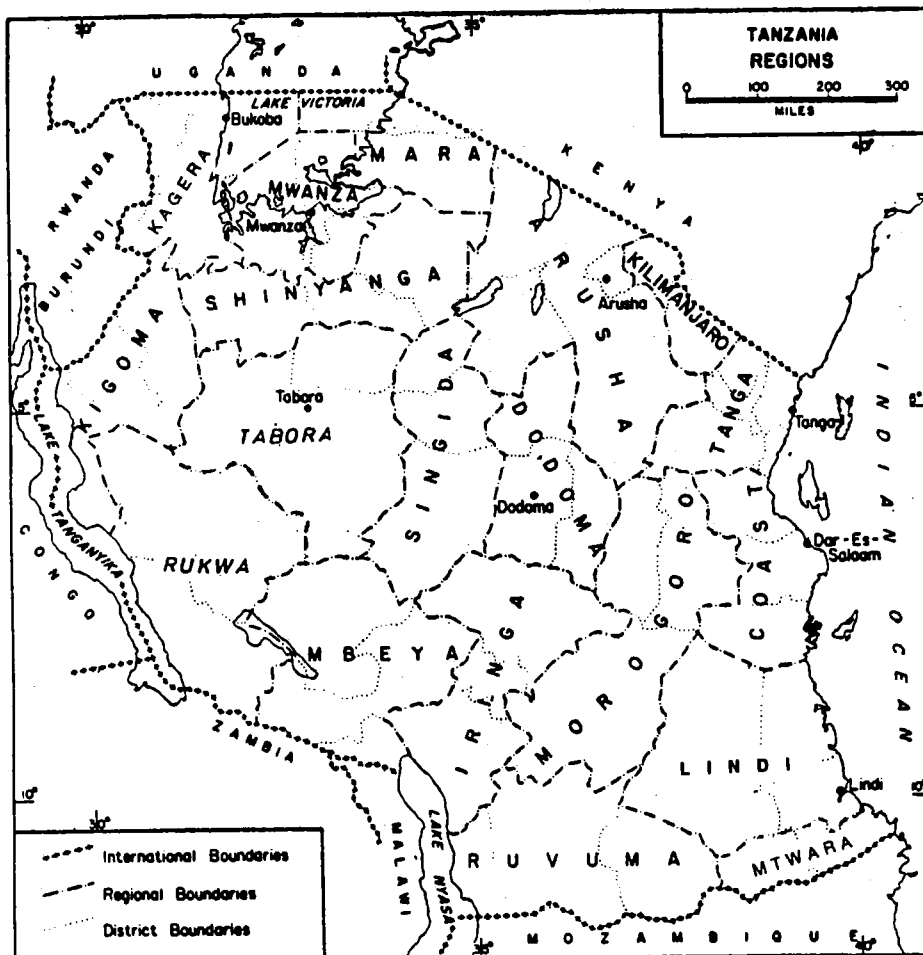
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All photos but 8, 9 and 10 by the author.



Source - Atlas of Tanzania, 1956

Map 1. Administrative regions of Tanzania (updated from original in Tordoff 1967).



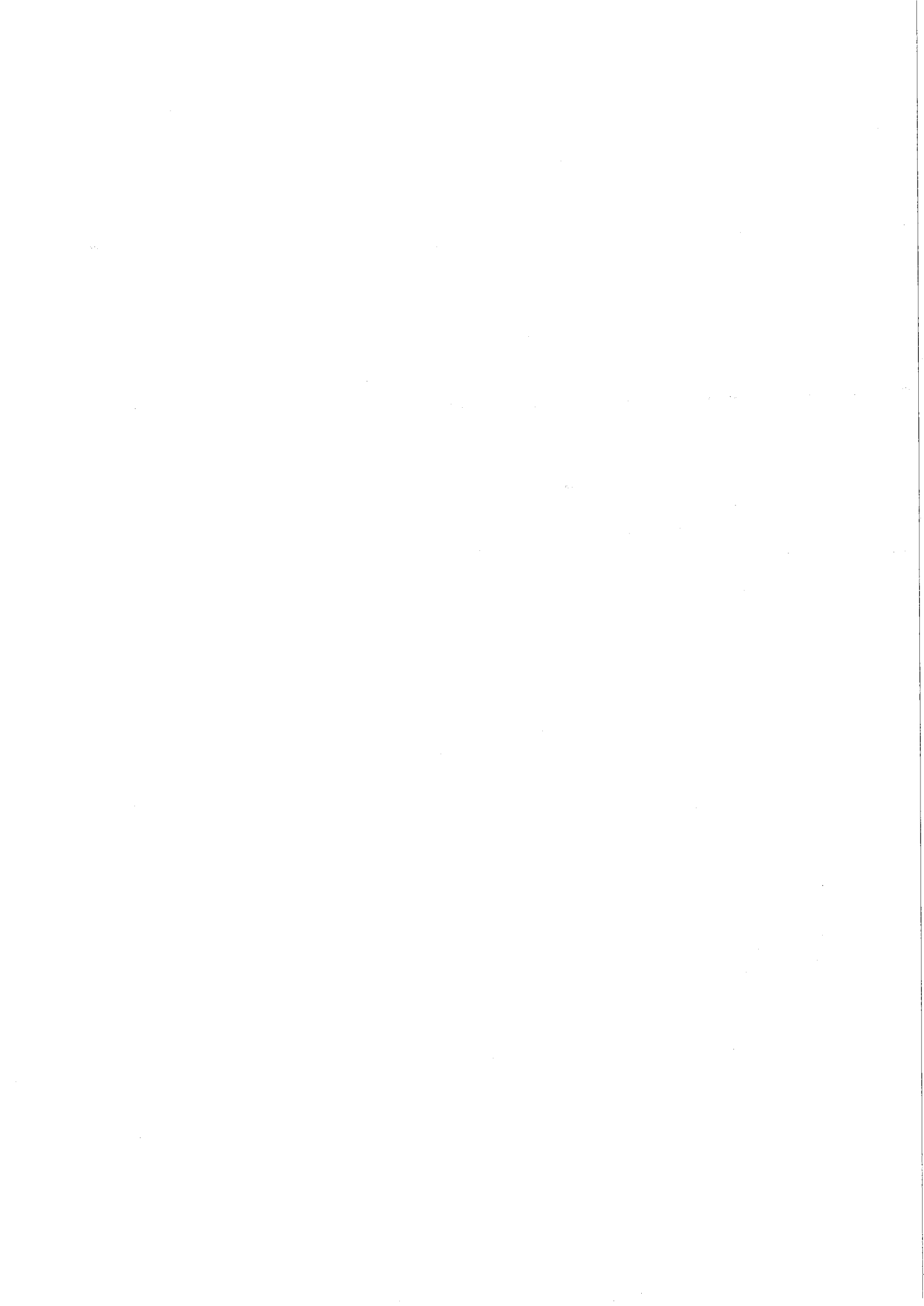
Map 2. Ethnic composition of Tanzania (from Tordoff 1967).



## Preface

This report is a revised edition of a *Cand. polit.* thesis by the same title, submitted to the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, in May 1994. Professor Jan-Petter Blom acted as supervisor for the project, and I am grateful to him as well as to Alf Morten Jerve and Eyolf Jul-Larsen at CMI, for their help and guidance. Thanks are also due to senior lecturer Thomas Hylland Eriksen, University of Oslo, for valuable critique of an early draft for chapter two.

Fieldwork in Tanzania was supported financially by the Norwegian Research Council and the University of Bergen. My deepest gratitude goes to the artists of Muungano Cultural Troupe in Dar es Salaam, as well as staff and students at the College of Arts in Bagamoyo, who made my fieldwork a very enjoyable experience. Ghonche Materego and Rose Sayore of the National Arts Council, Elias M. Songoyi at the Department of Literature, University of Dar es Salaam, and Atle Hetland at the NORAD administration in Dar es Salaam helped me out with practical problems and deserve my very special thanks. I am grateful also to friends and colleagues Chiku Ali, Anne Ellingsen, Liv Haram, Elise Johansen, Tordis Korvall, Eric Shitindi, Hugo Stokke and Thabit Tambwe who have all contributed at various stages of the work. Finally, I wish to thank my parents and my husband for their enduring support, interest and encouragement.





# 1 Introduction

## Research problem and conceptual context

Cultural performances have been said to be the “manifestations par excellence of human social process” (Turner 1986a:84). As societies undergo social change, cultural performances become transformed; indeed, sometimes entirely new cultural genres are invented to fit the new situation. My aim in this work is to present and analyse some of the processes which cultural performance has gone through in post-colonial Tanzania.<sup>1</sup>

Tanzania is best known for the leadership of Julius Nyerere and his attempts to create a genuinely African socialism: the policy called *Ujamaa* (literally: “familyhood”). This philosophy was based on the idea that the social system of Africa’s traditional societies – “tribal socialism” where the “capitalist was unknown” – could be brought up to a national level after Independence (Nyerere 1967:165-170). Not only the social system, but also the performing arts of the traditional societies were to be transformed for national purposes. A national culture, built on elements from tribal expressive arts, was to help Tanzanians to develop the same kind of identification with the nation as they supposedly had to their tribal homelands.

In attempting to create this national culture and win supporters for the new political system, the authorities employed a far-reaching cultural policy. During the first ten years of Tanzanian independence, dance troupes performing “traditional” national dances were established at all schools and in many other statal institutions and factories. A national performing troupe was founded, and later, a national College of Arts.

The socialistic cultural policy triggered a development in the field of performance which went far beyond the visions of the nation-builders. In the early 1980s, commercial, multi-ethnic cultural troupes grew up in Dar es Salaam, and these groups are today central to city life. Rural audiences too, get the chance to see the shows when the troupes go on tour. The groups perform traditional dances, some of them with strong emphasis on sensual movements which bring forth erotic connotations, and many of

<sup>1</sup> Tanganyika joined with Zanzibar in 1964 and the united republic took the name Tanzania. For the sake of simplicity, the name Tanzania will be used throughout.

them accompanied by songs praising political leaders or the Party. The shows also include other genres, like theatre and acrobatics.

What processes led to the existence of this cultural phenomenon and its specific form, and what is the entertainment value of such shows to the multi-ethnic urban audiences? What are the connections between the urban popular culture and the traditional performances, and which criteria are used to categorize the various cultural genres as either traditional or modern? Finally, what can we learn from studying the popular culture of African cities? These are some of the questions I will address in the following pages. First of all however, I shall discuss shortly three concepts central in the processes studied: *Performance*, *Nation-building* and *Popular Culture*.

Performance did not become established as a separate field of anthropological study until the 1980s when Edward M. Bruner (1986), John J. MacAloon (1984), Richard Schechner and Victor Turner (1985, 1985a), to mention some, set out to investigate the interrelationship between performance and experience, ritual and theatre. Cultural performance as an anthropological concept, however, dates back to the 1950s when Milton Singer found that cultural performances "could be regarded as the most concrete observable units of Indian Culture" (Singer 1972:64). He writes:

I was helped to identify the units of observation not by deliberately looking for them but by noticing the centrality and recurrence of certain types of things I had observed in the experience of Indians themselves. I shall call these things "cultural performances," because they include what we in the West usually call by that name — for example, plays, concerts, and lectures. But they include also prayers, ritual readings and recitations, rites and ceremonies, festivals, and all those things we usually classify under religion and ritual rather than with the cultural and artistic (Singer 1972:71).

Later students of performance have similarly argued that by beginning the study of culture through cultural expressions, "the basic units of analysis are established by the people we study rather than by the anthropologist as an alien observer" (Bruner 1986:9).

Performances are expressions about the experiences of others; Bruner writes that when we study them, "we are interpreting the people as they are interpreting themselves" (Bruner 1986:10). While I do I agree with Bruner and other performance-theorists that the study of performances can be central for our understanding of the people we study, we cannot take for granted that the expressions of any given performance necessarily concern what the performers themselves, or their audience, see as important, without asking important to whom, under what circumstances, etc. We need to

examine the power-relations of the society, as well as the historical background of that specific performance genre. In Tanzania, performance after Independence has often been in a political idiom, supporting the ruling party and its leaders. The political content of the songs that accompany traditional dances has remained largely unchanged for 30 years: but the meaning these songs give to people has changed completely. No longer do they express their hopes and aspirations.

Victor Turner, the major contributor to the theory of performance, holds that performance is the instrument all societies use to scrutinize themselves. He has devoted much of his work to comparing the functions of performance in simple and in complex societies. In complex societies, he holds, "performances are presented which probe a community's weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known world" (Turner 1982:11). If the nationalized dances of Tanzania do not appear to have the kind of reflexive qualities that Turner describes above, then we should look for reflexivity in other genres. Bruner writes that "drama is quintessentially reflexive" and much more so than music and dance. "Reflexivity" is defined by MacAloon as the "capacity of human beings to distance themselves from their own subjective experiences, to stand apart from and to comment upon them" (MacAloon 1984:11).

Cultural performance in Tanzania has traditionally been *ngoma*. This Swahili word, also used in various central and southern African languages, may denote a drum (occasionally any traditional instrument), a dance, or the entire musical event. You may dance an *ngoma* (*kucheza ngoma*), you may play an *ngoma*<sup>2</sup> (*kupiga ngoma*), you may go to an *ngoma* (*kwenda ngoma*), or you may have an *ngoma* enacted for you. Medical practitioners who believe that their patient is plagued by spirits, may arrange a therapeutic *ngoma* "where the drumming is considered to be the voice or influence of the ancestral shades or other spirits that visit the sufferer and offer the treatment" (Janzen 1992:1). A common way to ask if a girl has completed her puberty rites is to inquire whether she has been danced yet (*amecheswa?*).

*Ngoma* is essential in all celebrations and ceremonies, it has traditionally been at the very core of society. That *ngoma* was chosen as a national symbol in the nation-building strategies of Nyerere after Independence, was therefore not surprising. *Ngoma* was a purely African alternative to colonial cultural products. But for *ngoma* to work as a national symbol, it needed

<sup>2</sup> Either by beating a drum or playing a given *ngoma*-rhythm.

to be “de-tribalized”, as nationalism essentially concerns the idea of a *shared culture* (Gellner 1983, Eriksen 1993a:328). We can thus define nation-building as the efforts to *create* this shared culture. Nation-builders commonly do this through the writing or rewriting of history, through a common school system, and by efforts to establish national symbols.

Performing arts are frequently among the things nationalists incorporate in the national culture. For one thing, these arts, especially dance, appeal directly to the senses of the citizens (Bruner 1986:22). Anderson (1983), Kapferer (1988) and Eriksen (1993b) have all showed that nationalism, to be effective, needs to touch upon deep-felt sentiments in the subjects of the nation. Secondly, performances are ready institutions for communication with *other* nations. In the words of Richard Schechner: “when one group wants to communicate to another across various boundaries (linguistic, political, cultural, geographical) the main initial signal is an exchange of performances, a mutual display of rituals” (1988:280). All nations with respect for themselves establish folklore troupes to represent them abroad and entertain celebrities at home. These troupes may represent the national culture — but their performances are not usually what the inhabitants actually prefer when they want entertainment. Instead, they may choose to attend performances that fall into a category which has been labelled “popular culture”. This is the final concept which I want to say something about at this stage.

The *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* defines popular as: “of or for the people”. Scholars of popular culture have found it hard to define just who “the people” is; likewise, popular culture has often been defined by what it is not rather than by what it is (Storey 1993:17). Popular culture has been dichotomized with “elite culture” or “high culture”; and it has become a highly ideological concept, “a magical expression protected from examination” (Bourdieu, cited in Barber 1987:6). Some researchers, with more of a political motive, want to reserve the term for arts that open the eyes of the people to their life-situation and in turn mobilize them to action (Etherton 1982). They contrast the term *popular art* with *people’s art*, which is “the spontaneous expression of the ordinary people who have not yet been conscientised” (Barber 1987:7). According to this view, people’s art is escapist and conservative, and works against the real interests of the people.

These divergent usages of the concept “popular” are apparent among researchers working in Tanzania as well. Penina Mlamba and Amadina Lihamba at the Art Department of University of Dar es Salaam use the term *Popular Theatre* about theatre workshops arranged by the University or the College of Arts. In the workshops, village communities are encour-

aged by animators to express their problems and obstacles to development through their own performative arts (Mlama 1991). The American anthropologist Mark Plane (publication forthcoming), on the other hand, uses the term *Popular Theatre* for the performances of the commercial cultural troupes in Dar es Salaam, and so do I. This usage is in concordance with Karen Barber's, who holds that one of the most salient features of popular culture in Africa is that it is unofficial, "sliding around between the two official sets of cultural canons and institutions," the elite arts and the traditional arts, both sponsored by the government (Barber 1987:11). Popular arts, in contrast, are usually ignored by academics and politicians alike – as long as the power-holders do not find them threatening.

Popular arts in Africa also tend to be syncretic. John Collins (1986) defines a popular syncretic art form as one "which has continuity with traditional life and which has assimilated ideas creatively from the West – resulting in a qualitatively novel phenomenon" (cited in Barber 1987:10). It was not long after the European occupation that this kind of cultural production could be observed in East Africa. The development and diffusion of the so-called *Beni dance* is a telling case.

In the 1890s, soon after the establishment of British (Kenya) and German (Tanganyika) control, Beni dance associations emerged along the Swahili coast. The name "Beni" was an adaption of the English word *band*, and the dance was different from traditional dances. Performers wore white shorts and shirts; the dance steps imitated European military drill, and the dancers were appointed military ranks. The dance displayed an imitation of European dress and conduct, but it also had deep roots in pre-colonial dance. The dance organizations in towns were self-help groups, and the songs were in Swahili commenting on current events. Missionaries and colonial officers encouraged the dance, which they saw as one step towards "civilization". In few years, Beni spread from the coast to the interior areas of East Africa, brought by educated young men from the colonial towns and by prisoners of war. Beni organizations were the first to transcend tribalism, and as these organizations grew in number, the colonialists started to fear their political potential. In some rural areas Beni became assimilated as a traditional dance of the local ethnic group, and the dance was given a local name.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In western Tanzania, the dance was called Dundo, but in the southern and eastern regions it was referred to as Mganda. A Mganda dance in the version of the Kutu people of Morogoro region is now taught at the College of Arts in Bagamoyo, and the Nyasa version was represented at the National Arts Competition in 1992. In the towns that grew up around the copper mines in Zambia, the dance was named Kalela (Mitchell 1956).

Terence Ranger (1975), who has written a detailed historical study of Beni in East Africa, says that the dance as popular culture was dead in Dar es Salaam by the late 1950s. It had then been replaced by jazz bands which covered many of the same roles as Beni had done. According to Ranger, the history of Beni illuminates "some aspects of the colonial experience in eastern Africa"; and he further states that "studies of popular culture are especially valuable for getting at the experience and attitudes of the "masses" and for giving expressions to the reactions of the inarticulate" (Ranger 1975:3).

Beni developed as a response to the major changes brought by colonialism. The focus of the present study is on the development of performance and popular culture after Independence, under the new political leadership. Before turning to the political events of 30 years ago, however, let us visit a contemporary performance as it is presented to us by one of the popular cultural troupes of Dar es Salaam.

### **The setting: A Saturday night at Vijana Social Hall**

The modernization<sup>4</sup> of cultural performance in Tanzania is visible all over the country, but first and foremost where the forces of modernization and urbanization have been strongest: in Dar es Salaam. Dar es Salaam used to be the capital of Tanzania,<sup>5</sup> and still gives that impression with abundance of embassies, foreign firms and donor agency offices. Its population has reached a million, but compared to other African urban centres like Nairobi and Abidjan, it is more of an overgrown village. There are no skyscrapers, and the city centre is quiet at night. Dar es Salaam has a charm of its own, despite the ever-present dust and the hazardous traffic.

Imagine yourself there, a hot and humid Saturday afternoon, relaxing after lunch. You feel like going out, and you wonder what the city has to offer. You open your *Daily News* to see what's up tonight. There's an Indian film at the Drive-in. There's a James Bond at the Empress Theatre. There's a barbecue with soft music at one of the beach hotels. Nothing of this really attracts you, and you turn to the Swahili newspaper instead. Side by side with advertisements from the many orchestras and jazz bands

<sup>4</sup> The word "modernization" is here used to denote *general* change, not necessarily a development characterized by Westernization.

<sup>5</sup> Dar es Salaam was the German colonial capital from 1891, and continued to be the capital under British rule and the first decade after independence. In 1973, a decision was made to move the capital to Dodoma, in order to develop the inland regions.

playing at bars and social halls in the suburbs, there are announcements from cultural troupes:

*DDC Kibisa Ngoma Troupe* "The fountain is growing ever stronger"

Thursday 29/10 they are at Mwanzo Mwanzo Bar – Mtoni.

Friday 30/10 they are at Picnic in the Wood – Tandika Kilimahewa.

Saturday 31/10 they are at Harbours Club – Kurasini.

Sunday 1/11 they are at Super Fanaka Bar – Buguruni.

Well friends, this week there are very special things happening every day.

Play of the week: "If you love something, set it free."

*Wazazi Cultural Troupe*

Six months have passed since the group was established.

The leadership and fans welcome you and they say Wazazi is great.

Come and prove this for yourself.

Thursday 29/10 they are at FFU – Ukonga.

Friday 30/10 they are at Makutano Bar – Manzeze.

Saturday 31/10 they are at Miembeni Bar – Ilala.

Sunday 1/11 they are at Mango village – Tandika.

*Ujamaa Ngoma Troupe* "The Sensation of Town"

Come and see the artists who are fully mature like the elder Chagizo, Pangu Paksvu, Shehe, Chilala, Biolina Tamasinal and others.

Thursday 29/10 they are at CCM Vingunguti.

Friday 30/10 they are at Polisi Oysterbay.

Saturday 31/10 they are at Biashara Club.

Sunday 1/11 they are at Tiger Motel – Mbezi.

Play: "Don't break off the relationship because of a one-time problem."

*Muongano Cultural Troupe and Muongano Int. Orchestra*

They bring you the very best entertainment of the week.

Thursday 29/10 they will be at Super Mini Bar – Temeke.

Friday 30/10 Harbours Club – Kurasini.

Saturday 31/10 Vijana Social Hall – Kinondoni.

Sunday 1/11 Friends Corner Hotel.

Starting at 3.45 in the afternoon. Play of the week: "With bitterness I said."

Deputation: Do you have visitors, or do you have something to celebrate? Are you thirsty to see some arts? Try to see them today and you will say:

"Muongano are unique, from the beginning to the end."

Electricity is no problem, there's a generator.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> At the time, there was a general shortage of electricity in Dar es Salaam. Electricity was rationed by cutting the supply to the various suburbs for a period every day.

*Mrakitu Theatre Troupe*

The theatre stars Pwagu, Mrs. Hambiliki, Kipara, Milulu, Kanjibai, Havijawa, Zakia, Mkude, Kabwela, Massawe and others, together with a master of Mask Dance from Mozambique.

Saturday 31/10 they are at Rungwe Bar – Msewe.

Sunday 1/11 they are at Hunters Club – Ubungo.

Excuse us fans in Tanga region, there are unexpected national matters in Singida region.

(Advertisements in *Uhuru* 29 October 1992, translated from Swahili)

You find it hard to choose, especially since all the groups are performing at venues somewhat out of town, suburbs like Manzese and Buguruni, places you have never heard of. After conferring with some friends at the next café table, you settle for Muungano Cultural Troupe at Vijana Social Hall, Kinondoni area. Some of the other places, they say, are not safe after dark, and there might be problems in getting transport back to the city centre when the show is over. As the performance is to start at four, you realize that you'd better get going. Arriving at Vijana Social Hall you pay your entrance fee of 300 tsh.<sup>7</sup> You enter the hall, which proves to be an open space fenced in by brick walls. At the far end there is a roofed stage, and facing it, a bar. Thirty to fifty people, most of them women and children, are seated by the shady side of the stage, drinking beer and soft-drinks. They are all dressed up for the occasion, especially the little girls. They seem to represent the average Dar es Salaam dweller, there are no ladies with gold jewellery and car keys, neither is there anyone who looks really poor.

The show is introduced by a man in his twenties. With rolling r's, much in the fashion of a circus manager, he announces tonight's programme: "Ladies and gentlemen, Muungano is bringing you *ngoma*, band music, acrobatics and theatre. We will start with a dance from Songea, then we get some music by the band, followed by Sindimba. After that we will get a mask dance, before the *taarab*<sup>8</sup> section. After the *taarab*, it is time for acrobatics and then you will see our famous snake dance. After the snake dance we will show you tonight's play which is called "With bitterness I said". Then we will have two songs with stage shows, and finally the Masewe dance from Mtwara region." After a short pause he continues:

<sup>7</sup> The average exchange rate at the time of fieldwork was US \$ 1 to 400 Tanzanian shillings. The entrance fee to the show is the equivalent to the cost of one beer or four bottles of soft drink.

<sup>8</sup> See glossary.



“Ladies and gentlemen, the first item tonight is the Msoma dance brought to us by our brothers and sisters from Songea.”

The drummers start a beat which you recognize from the radio: it is the signal announcing the news. The dancers enter and form a semi-circle around the two drummers, women on one side, men on the other. One of the male dancers calls out a song line in the microphone, to which the other dancers respond.

In the song below, and throughout the work, normal types are used when the words are in Swahili while the use of *italic* means that the words are in a local language. Repetition of words and lines is not indicated.

C: Kilongo we kalale  
R: Aeeh!

C: Kilongo<sup>9</sup> sleep please  
R: Aeeh!

C: Wasanii wa Tanzania twaeleza  
Utamaduni ni uhai wa taifa  
Tudumishe  
Mila na desturi yetu

C: The artists of Tanzania will explain  
Culture is the nation's life  
Let us perpetuate  
Our traditions and customs

C: Huyu Mrema anatupenda  
Maua  
Anafanya kazi kutetea wanyonge  
Tumshangilie Agostino Mrema

C: Mrema<sup>10</sup> loves us  
Flowers (to him)  
He works in defence of the weak  
Let us praise Agostino Mrema

C: *Kokoliko kokoliko*  
*Kokoliko kajogolo kivemba*  
*Kokoliko waiiaia kokoo*

C: *Cock-a-doodle-doo*  
*The cock is calling*  
*Cock-a-doodle-doo hey doodle-do*

C: *Walile walile*  
R: *Liwaya waya liwaya waya*  
C: *Nikaloli mwana lelo Zaina*

C: *Hurray, hurray*  
R: *This is a celebration*  
C: *Let us go hom*  
*I want to see my child Zaina*

<sup>9</sup> Kilongo is the spirit of a former leader of the Ngoni Kingdom.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine Mrema is the Minister of Home Affairs.



Plate 1. The Msoma dance.

Plate 2. Mask dance. The devil style (*sheitani*).



When the dance is over, the drummers leave their place to the band.<sup>11</sup> A few Zairean tunes give the dancers time to change for the next dance, which is introduced as Sindimba from Mtwara region. The dancers once again enter in single-sex lines and form a semi-circle on the stage. The drum-beat varies between slow and fast, and so do the sensual hip-movements of the dancers. The audience is visibly delighted by the dance, later you learn that Sindimba is the most popular of the traditional dances. During the slow phases of the dance, the dancers again sing in call and response style:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| C: <i>Naputiputi ukamwona</i><br><i>Watambatamba</i><br><i>Kupali kuve Sindimba</i>   | C: <i>Naputiputi when you see him</i><br><i>jumping up and down</i><br><i>Know that there is Sindimba</i>  |
| R: <i>Ke ke ke ke ke ke liyaya</i>  | R: <i>Hey, hey, hey</i>  |
| C: <i>Mwanda wa sibo</i>  | C: <i>Journeys by night</i>  |
| R: <i>Ke ke ke ke</i><br><i>Wetu tunamauya ke</i>   | R: <i>Hey, hey, hey</i><br><i>We cannot manage them</i>  |
| C: <i>Mangwele ke kee</i><br><i>Mnimona kumachinga</i><br><i>Walya ding'unde keke</i>   | C: <i>The monkeys</i><br><i>I have seen them in the mountains</i><br><i>Eating beans</i>   |
| R: <i>Kutokela vavenu</i><br><i>Kuuulyanga ding'unde</i>  | R: <i>We are tired, fellows</i><br><i>Eating, eating beans</i>   |
| C: <i>Kamarada munge ke'ke</i><br><i>Unamuone kualala</i><br><i>Kinga Chisano ke</i>  | C: <i>Young man imprison him</i><br><i>Do not look at his attractiveness</i><br><i>Like Chisano</i>  |
| R: <i>Anava Chisano</i>   | R: <i>He is not Chisano</i>  |
| C: <i>Wako dada wako mjomba</i><br><i>Kala pusinguita ke</i><br><i>Ukala pusinguita ke</i><br><i>Kuniona mwali mdyoko ke</i><br><i>Hambi inikulumuka ke</i><br><i>Nikipita habari gani ke</i> | C: <i>You sister, you uncle</i><br><i>In the past you never wanted me</i><br><i>Because I was still a child</i><br><i>Now I am a grown up</i><br><i>When I pass you greet me</i><br><i>"How are you"</i> |
| R: <i>Ndihoni dyo oo</i>  | R: <i>It is a shame</i>  |
| C: <i>Silambo syetu sya mbone ke</i>  | C: <i>Our country is nice</i>  |
| R: <i>Aaa</i>   | R: <i>Aaa</i>  |

<sup>11</sup> Muungano is as yet the only private commercial cultural group with full band equipment.

You are not the only one who does not understand the words of the song. Apart from one line, it is in the Makonde language, familiar to few of the artists or on-lookers. When the song is over, one of the women leaves her place and dances towards the male line. She chooses a partner with whom she performs a solo in the middle of the stage. The solo part consists of rotating hip-movements, a movement called to "cut the waist" (*kukata kiuno*). The man, finding it all too exciting, covers his eyes, while continuing his hip-movements. The girl secretly leaves him, and when the man reaches out to embrace her, he discovers to his great disappointment that one of the male dancers has taken her place. After this comical climax the dancers leave the stage, some of the men crying out their sexual despair by shouts like "You! Oh you are sweet-tasting!" ("Wewe! Wewe ni taam!") etc. People are laughing and enjoying themselves, and by this time the audience has grown to at least 150 persons.

The drums then play the type of beat used for masked dancers, and a huge creature enters the stage, introduced as a devil (*sheitani*). The smallest children are terrified and run away when he comes near them. Some of the adults put money into a pocket on the belly of the beast. The mask leaves the stage after a little while, leaving it to a session of *taarab*. The dancers now appear in a totally new image, the women in beautiful dresses and high-heeled shoes, the men with Muslim headwear. They all sit down behind the band and constitute the choir for the solo singers. A distinguished lady, who has not been dancing, introduces the *taarab* part of the programme with a smooth voice greeting the audience "Salaam Aleik". The band then starts playing the first tune. The instrumentation is poor: there are no fiddles or contrabasses, instruments which are compulsory ingredients in *taarab* performances in Zanzibar where the music comes from, but the Dar es Salaam audience does not seem to mind at all. They show their appreciation by dancing towards the singer with dramatic body language, presenting her money. Coins are put into her hand, notes are displayed for every-one to see and often placed on the artists forehead. At times there is a rush of people, most of them women. A man sitting next to you tells you that the people who go to spray<sup>12</sup> the singer like the song because they have experienced the same thing themselves, and now they want to show that they feel the same way. The song is called *Mahasidi* – Hypocrites.

<sup>12</sup> This expression is taken from Waterman (1990a) who describes the social dynamics of cash presentations from celebrants to musicians during Jùjú performances in Nigeria. The Swahili expression for the act is *kutunza*, literally "to take care of", a verb used also in the context of child-rearing.

Mahasidi niacheni  
Hamwezi nivunjia  
Fitima zote za nini  
Vijineno kumwambia  
Yeye haniachi asilami  
Anachotaka namridhia

Chorus:  
Raha zake sizisemi  
Hiyo siri yangu  
Tena yeye ni msomi  
Hakuzoea majungu

Pendo langu la thamani  
Yeye limemvutia  
Sina hirizi shingoni  
Na waganga kutumia  
Sina shaka nawacheka moyoni  
Anachotaka namridhia

Chorus  
Umbo langu kwake dawa  
Peke yangu hunipatia  
Si rahisi kwa mwingine kuligawa  
Mtabakia mate mnammezea  
Haikuwa walokuwa  
Iliyobaki wewe tulia

Chorus

Furaha kwangu imekuwa  
Ubavuni mwangu ametulia  
Mbele yenu peke yangu kanichaguwa  
Mnanguwa japo mnanichukia  
Mimi sijali nimepowa  
Bure mnampapatikia

Leave me alone you hypocrites  
You can't destroy me  
All these rumours for what  
Telling my lover  
He will never leave me  
I'm giving him what he wants

Chorus:  
I won't mention his pleasures  
That's my top secret  
And after all he is educated  
He is not used to rumours

My valuable love  
is what he is attracted to  
I don't wear amulets  
I don't go to medicine-men  
I'm not worried, I laugh inside  
I'm giving him what he wants

Chorus  
My shape is his medicine  
It's only me, you won't get me  
And it's not easy for someone else  
to break my love  
You will remain slobbering  
There are some with money  
who wanted me, but I refused them  
So what about you  
I advise you to keep cool

Chorus

My happiness is  
When he finds rest in my arms  
He chose me, there are others for you  
So why do you hate me  
I'm not worried, I've found rest with him  
You are wasting your time for nothing

Whereas this woman sang about her true love for a man and the evil jealousy of her fellow women, the next song is performed by a young man who complains that certain women do not love at all, but just care about the material benefits they can get from a man. Not surprisingly, the majority of those who go to support him are men.

Si khama ninakashifu  
Haya ninayowapasha  
Usione wanadhifu  
Ukataka kujitosa  
Shangingi maji marefu  
Yaogwa na mwenye pesa

Chorus:  
Shangingi huyo jama shangingi  
Huyo shangingi huyo  
Anasema  
Kwake hapendwi mtu  
Ila yeye  
Ni pochi tu ni pochi  
Huyo shangingi huyo

Shangingi mnamjua  
Hana mapenzi ya dhati  
Kwani wazi akwambia  
Huu ni wake wakati  
Bila ya kuchangamkia  
Hili jiji ale wapi

Chorus

Shangingi akikujua  
Kwamba wewe una pesa  
Jina atalo tumia  
Wewe hukuita Shefa  
Akisha kukuchomoa  
kesho akuita Lofa

Chorus

Namwambia kila mtu  
Ayashike matamshi  
Penye makundi ya watu  
Shangingi halijifichi  
Asema hapendwi mtu  
Kwake linapendwa pochi

You know those tough ladies  
They are very attractive  
And I'm not blaming, I'm just warning  
The tough ladies are very expensive  
You need to have money  
To run with them

Chorus:  
There she is friends, the tough lady,  
there she is  
She says  
She loves no one  
For her  
It's only money, money  
There she is, the tough lady

You know the tough lady  
She doesn't really love  
And she will tell you openly  
If there comes a time  
when you have not given her money  
And this is a city, how will you survive

Chorus

Once a tough lady discovers  
That you have money  
She will nickname you  
"The one with money"  
And when she has finished your money  
She will call you a fool

Chorus

I tell every one  
To control themselves  
In social gatherings  
The tough ladies never hide  
She says that she does not love any one  
She loves money only

After two more songs the *taarab* part of the program is finished, and the compere announces the next item as "acrobatics from China and Korea". Accompanied by high-spirited tunes from the band, five young boys run to the stage and start making formations, jumping through wheels, and so on.

When waiting for their turn to climb or jump, they dance in the new dance-styles which go with the Zairian music the band is playing and their faces are all smiles. The show lasts for around ten minutes, then it's time for another traditional dance. The drum-beat is strong and steady, the dancers enter with springy movements carrying with them various artifacts like axes, wood guns etc. The dance has an air of acrobatics, with the dancers juggling the wood guns and axes around their own bodies at high speed. In between the juggling two songs are performed:



Plate 3. Acrobatics (*sarakasi*).

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| C: Ngoma zetu mamah                             | C: Our dance mother                             |
| R: Ngoma zafurahisha                            | R: Our dances entertain                         |
| C: Sikia utamu                                  | C: Feel the sweetness                           |
| R: Wa asili yetu watanzania                     | R: Of our origin Tanzanians                     |
| C: Ngoma zetu ngoma                             | C: Our dances dances                            |
|   |   |
| C: Siasa yetu kilimo                            | C: Our policy is farming                        |
| R: Watanzania                                   | R: Tanzanians                                   |
| C: Tushike majembe sasa<br>Uchumi wetu wa kweli | C: Let us take the hoes now<br>Our true economy |
| R: kwa watanzania                               | R: For us Tanzanians                            |
| C: Kilimo na mifugo                             | C: Farming and livestock                        |
| R: Kilimo                                       | R: Farming                                      |

As the dance is drawing to an end, a man dressed in attire resembling that of a traditional chief or healer enters the stage, carrying with him two huge pythons. You later learn that this man, who has been watching the show up till now, is the owner of the group. The dancers, apart from two men, leave the stage. One of them grabs the snake, rolls around on the floor with it and finally puts its head into his mouth, to the screams of the audience.

After this climax the leader invites people from the audience up to try their strength, to test if they can lift the biggest snake, called Sina Matatizo (“I have no problem”), on one arm. Others take the opportunity to have their photograph taken together with the beast. The high light of the night is yet to come, however. When theatre is announced the kids shout with joy. You look expectantly at your neighbours, but they tell you that this is “just a play the local people enjoy”, nothing special. Apart from a table and a chair there are no wings whatsoever; compared to the theatre you are used to, the characters are overacted. The play is called “With bitterness I said” (*Kwa uchungu nilisema*) and depicts the story of a young girl who leaves her boyfriend in favour of a richer, married man who is three times her age.<sup>13</sup> The play lasts for a full hour; in the middle of it, you do as many others have done at various stages of the performance: you go to order some chips and roasted meat from the open-air grill in the corner of the hall. The hall is now full of people, and women and children are no longer in majority.

<sup>13</sup> A summary of the play is given in section four.





*Plate 4.* Stage Show. The two women are on their way to spray.  
*Plate 5.* A member of the audience trying his strength.



When the theatre is over, the band returns on stage with more of the latest music from Zaire. This time the music is accompanied with another import from the same area, the so called "Stage Shows". Two girls perform sensual solos to the music and are sprayed by the audience in a similar manner as were the *taarab* singers (see plate four). The supporters are women as well as men. To the next tune a male dancer appears in an innovative mix of modern and traditional dress, and seems to be even more popular than the girls that preceded him. Like his attire, the dance itself is an amalgam of traditional and modern dance movements, and your friends praise him for being very much "in" the music.

The time is now a little past 8 pm and some people start leaving, but there is still one ngoma to go before the show is over. The dancers appear with chalk in their faces and line up in single-sex rows. The owner of the group acts the lead role, singing the call to which the others respond. Each song has a melody of its own and special movements that illustrate the text, and the leader improvises a little story before each song to give it a broader context.

C: *Mbawala jila*  
R: *Ajivile na mcheto*

C: *That antelope*  
R: *Has been eaten by a fox*

C: *Binti Ali*  
R: *Binti Ali kwa kunema*  
*Hakuna mwingine*  
*Kajenga nyumba ya bati*  
*Kulala mabata*  
*Kajenga nyumba ya ghorofa*  
*Kulala mapanya*

C: *The daughter of Ali*  
R: *The proud daughter of Ali*  
*There is nobody else*  
*She built a house of corrugated iron*  
*For the ducks to sleep in*  
*She built a storey house*  
*For rats to sleep*

C: *Mnole aida yoo*  
R: *Limanye mwene*  
C: *Mnole aida yoo*  
R: *Limanye mwene*

C: *Look at the person who is coming*  
R: *You'll then know yourself*  
C: *Look at the person who is coming*  
R: *You'll then know yourself*

C: *Kutema jing'uni*  
R: *Madengo kweli*  
*Tuve mkuluona*

C: *To cut firewood*  
R: *Is a difficult task truly*  
*We the women experience the difficulty*

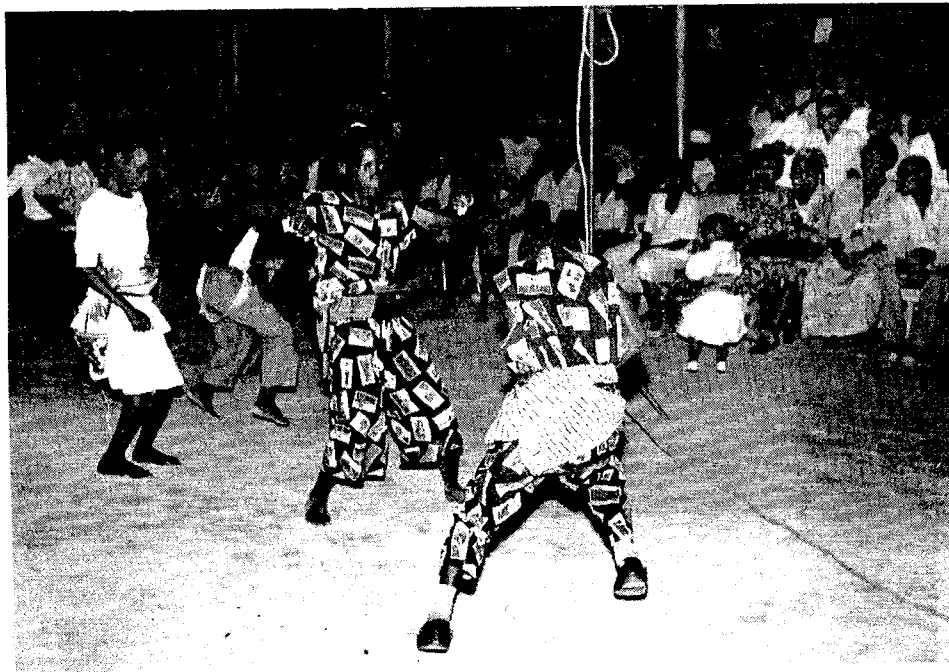
C: *Achalendo*  
R: *Kumala mboga*  
C: *Achalendo*  
R: *Ooo aiche*

C: *The visitors*  
R: *Ate all the vegetables*  
C: *The visitors*  
R: *Those who came*



*Plate 6.* The Masewe dance. The dancers have whitened their faces with chalk.

*Plate 7.* Children dancing Kwassa-Kwassa at a dance competition for youths arranged by Muungano Cultural Troupe.



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| C: Mwanangu mwali<br>Usiku pale ukilia nini?   | C: My young daughter<br>Why were you crying at night?   |
| R: Baba usiniulize<br>Usiniulize niligombana<br>na mume wangu<br>Chenga nilizopika<br>wala mahaba sikumwekea | R: Father don't ask me<br>I quarrelled with<br>my husband<br>I didn't leave him food nor<br>did I give him love |
| C: Nenda nenda<br>wewe na mume wako  | C: Go go<br>with your husband   |
| C: <i>Mwa Sefu mwa Sefu mwe<br/>Likaku lyo kumgongo</i>  | C: <i>Hey you Sefu<br/>You have some dirt on your back</i>  |
| R: <i>Ngamkulikunda mwe</i>  | R: <i>Why don't you scrub yourself</i>  |
| C: <i>Kuna ngunde</i>  | C: <i>There are some peas</i>   |
| R: <i>Mkateleke ngunde Majaliwa</i>  | R: <i>Cook the peas Majaliwa</i>  |
| C: Kaacha dini   | C: He/she left the religion   |
| R: Shauri ya pombe   | R: Because of booze   |

With the last song, which has a comical air to it, the dancers leave the stage and the compere announces that the show is over. The performance has lasted for a little more than four hours, and the compere has not finished talking when people start heading for the exit. The audience is in a rush to leave, but this does not mean that they did not like the performance. Four-fifths of them will be back when Muungano Cultural Troupe performs in their neighbouring social hall again, a week from now, and some of them will attend the performances of other cultural troupes as well.<sup>14</sup>

Commercial cultural troupes are central to the social life of Dar es Salaam today, but this kind of entertainment was non-existent a little more than ten years ago. Since the first troupes were started in 1980, their repertoires have developed constantly; likewise, these shows may have an altogether different content and organization five years hence. In the true style of popular culture, the artists will continue to incorporate anything that may boost the popular appeal of their shows.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with 138 members of audiences revealed that 109 of them went to cultural shows once a week or several times a week.

<sup>15</sup> The troupes started out as pure dance troupes. In the case of Muungano, theatre was introduced in 1981, acrobatics in 1984, *taarab* in 1985, and Stage Show in 1992.



Plate 8. Scene from the play "With bitterness I said" (*Daily News*, 13 November 1992).

## Fieldwork and research methods

The show by Muungano Cultural Troupe described above represents one form of popular culture in contemporary Tanzania, the commercial "cultural show". As the title of this report indicates, however, I will focus on the processes which have led to the popular culture we see today, rather than giving a detailed analysis of the contemporary commercial performances. This approach is closely linked to the research process.

When I set out for my nine-month fieldwork in April 1992, my research interest was in the modernization of traditional dance. By then I had already attended a two-months dance course for foreigners at the College of Arts in Bagamoyo, where I had been taught five nationalized traditional dances, two of them accompanied by songs praising Nyerere and his Ujamaa policy. The working title of the project was "Traditional Dance in Modern Tanzania: Nation-building, Politics and Entertainment". My intention, in short, was to compare the official, governmental use of traditional dance as represented by the College, with that of the commercial dance troupes in Dar es Salaam.

I was welcomed to join Muungano Cultural Troupe, one of the oldest and most popular groups of Dar es Salaam. Not only traditional dance was performed by the troupe, but acrobatics, *taarab* and drama as well. The theatre plays were farce comedies dealing with common urban conflicts, very different from the kind of theatre I had seen at the College of Arts. In the course of my fieldwork I found that the traditional dances, which were what I had come to study, were surpassed by the theatre plays in popularity. When planning my research, I had expected that the commercial troupes would use dance in a different way than the governmental institutions. I had not, however, expected to find a new and altogether different genre. The commercial troupes, in their dancing, made more use of sensual movements than the College, but they had the same kind of political songs supporting the government. The theatre plays, by contrast, did not have any of this supportive political role, and unlike the traditional dances they were ethnically neutral and perceived as "modern".

I was curious to find out what entertainment value theatre and dance respectively represented for the audience. As time passed, I got the feeling that the theatre plays were more related to traditional performance than it had first seemed, even though this suggestion was met with scepticism when I aired it for Tanzanian artists and intellectuals. It became clear to me that my field of study would be the changes which performance generally had undergone within the modern urban context after Independence — not the traditional dances by themselves.

I intend to show how a process of change, initially triggered by the nation-building strategies of the Tanzanian government, has led to the existence of urban cultural troupes, a commercial popular culture where genres are introduced which do not adhere to the conventions of the official cultural policy. The thesis is based on my observations of the popular culture which presents itself in contemporary Dar es Salaam (as well as the activities of the College of Arts), but I start off, in Chapter Two, by going back to the era of nation-building during the first decade after Independence. I discuss the way in which traditional dance was used in the nation-building process, the reason why just this symbol was chosen, and the reactions of artists to being "parrot-artists",<sup>16</sup> singing the praises of the political leaders and propagating their policies. In Chapter Three, I examine how traditional dances were transformed en route from the village square to the professional stage: how they lost aspects of their meaning and entertainment value for a contemporary, urban, multi-ethnic audience. In Chapter Four, the new performance genre of theatre is introduced. These are plays related to the social reality of the people who watch them, and the values that are expressed by them are discussed. The final chapter brings together traditional dance and popular theatre in a discussion of the relationship of these two genres to traditional performance. The three other genres — acrobatics, taarab and stage show, which also are part of the repertoire of cultural troupes — will be mentioned only in passing. There is no doubt, however, that the popularity of the shows is due to the multiplicity of genres.<sup>17</sup>

My nine months of fieldwork were divided between Muungano Cultural Troupe in Dar es Salaam and the College of Arts in Bagamoyo, a small town about two hours by bus up the coast. I spent the bulk of my time with Muungano, as I had been at the College for two months the previous year. My role as participant observer was different at the two institutions. At the College I was simply "hanging around", observing the students lessons as well as the rehearsals of the teachers' group (Bagamoyo Players), and joining them in their breaks and free-time, sometimes doing informal interviews. In addition, I would watch the official performances staged either for visiting celebrities or for the local inhabitants of Bagamoyo.

<sup>16</sup> A phrase used in the newspaper debate in the 1970s concerning the political use of arts.

<sup>17</sup> When I asked people what they thought of the cultural groups, a common answer would be that they were good, because they had a varied programme. A group which is able to achieve high standards in all the genres, like Tanzania One Theatre, sponsored by the ruling CCM party and which thus has more resources, can charge nearly double the admission fee of the other groups.

In Muungano I had a more defined role. I was considered as one of the artists of the group, even though I performed only when Msewe, the dance I knew best, was on the programme. To my great surprise, I was paid for the time I spent learning new dances with Muungano, just as the other novices in the group were. The owner of the group simply saw me, and other foreign students who had been with the group before, as workers with an extra potential for drawing crowds to the shows.<sup>18</sup> Of the 81 shows I observed or participated in during the fieldwork, 42 were by Muungano, the rest were divided among 16 other groups. When watching the performances, I would sit in the audience listening to their spontaneous comments, discussing with them, as well as taking notes. I also audio-taped some of the shows.

I combined participant observation with formal interviews with 39 of the artists of both institutions. At the college, I asked 22 students and teachers who had a good command of English to fill in the forms themselves, as the interviews were very time-consuming (see appendix for form). No-one expressed negative feelings towards being interviewed or filling in the form, but one student said that he did not want me to write down the negative things he had to say about the College, and another wrote that my questions "could cause fear". This student handed me the form the same day as he was leaving the school, so I was unable to get him to elaborate on this. Most probably he was thinking of the questions where respondents are asked about their views on helping the government politically through their arts. On the whole, however, I felt that my informants trusted me and that they were talking freely. Respondents are given full anonymity when I render their views. When names are used (the more elaborated cases) these are fictive. The names of the cultural groups, their leaders and theatre directors, are not changed, however.

To get an impression of the people who made up the audience and what they liked about the cultural shows, I prepared a shorter interview form. Of these, I conducted 14 myself, while the rest, 124, were done by three assistants.<sup>19</sup> Interviewers approached members of the audience of their own choice. I also asked the owners of other cultural groups to get a list of their dance repertoire, and the names, ages and ethnic origins of their

<sup>18</sup> Two foreign students have earlier performed with Muungano. This was the first time for any cultural troupe in Tanzania to have white artists, and their pictures were used in the advertisements of the group. One of the students is currently doing a Ph.D on popular theatre in Tanzania (Plane, forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup> Two of the assistants were graduates from the College of Arts, the third was an earlier employee of Muungano who was without work at the time.



artists. A letter of introduction from the National Arts Council helped me in this work. I have used the material and numbers from the sources mentioned above to strengthen my argument, and the data will be presented in various figures and tables. I am quite aware that the numbers I have are small, and that this method does not meet the demands of quantitative methods. I still think that the numbers I have show some very clear tendencies, and that I therefore can defend their usage.

Looking back, I wish I had had more contact with audiences of cultural shows outside the actual performance context, in order to get insight into how much the performances are discussed spontaneously in daily life.

There was no such discourse in the two families I stayed with in Dar es Salaam. One of the households was the home of two of the artists of Muungano, the other was an upper-class family who did not attend the shows of cultural troupes. I learned a lot from living with two so different families, however. Not only did they have different attitudes towards *ngoma* and other representations of African culture: their ways of life, materially and socially, were worlds apart. Still, they had shared the experience of growing up with Ujamaa, and they were now facing the new era of multi-party democracy, expressing the same kind of doubts about the motives of the "private parties" — a term they used for all the new political parties.

Swahili has been the national language in Tanzania since 1967, and I never met people who did not speak this language fluently.<sup>20</sup> Among ordinary people, very few speak English. Of the members of Muungano Cultural Troupe for example, only the owner could converse with me in English, and he too, preferred Swahili. My first encounter with the language was in 1979. I then had some Swahili lessons in preparation for a two-year stay in Dar es Salaam with my parents who were on NORAD contracts. Eleven years later, in the autumn of 1990, I participated in an intensive five-week Swahili course in Oslo. This knowledge, together with the oral command of the language which I developed through the fieldwork, made me independent of the help from an interpreter. However, if I was watching a performance together with an English-speaking person, I did ask him or her to explain details of theatre plays that I did not catch, the content of songs, and so on.

I did not employ any full-time assistant, but several friends helped me to write down the dance-songs of the groups, translate them from various local languages into Swahili, and explained to me their meaning in the original context. Elias M. Songoyi at the Literature Department of the University of Dar es Salaam checked my translations of some of these songs into English,

<sup>20</sup> In some rural areas one may meet older people who have difficulties with Swahili.

and later, when I was getting overworked, took the responsibility for translating the rest. As many of the songs have gone through two translations, and their original language in many cases does not have a fixed orthography, their accuracy is bound to be uncertain. There is also the problem that a song may have several layers of meanings, or make use of archaic language, so that various informants will translate them quite differently. Swahili words that recur are explained in the glossary, while words that appear one time only are translated in footnotes.

At the library of University of Dar es Salaam I took notes from theses by E. Hussein (1975), Amandina Lihamba (1985) and Penina M. Mlamba (1983). I regret that quotations from these works are without page reference.



*Plate 9.* Nyerere taking the lead in the cultural revival (Ministry of National Culture and Youth, n.d.).

## 2 Traditional dance as symbol and vehicle in the nation-building process

### Introduction

The ultimate goal of the nation-building policies of the new states in Africa has been “the creation of a supratribal/supraethnic loyalty to a national homeland” (Mazrui 1974). A new identity – the national – was to replace, or at least come in addition to, existing ethnic loyalties. Ironically enough, in the case of Tanzania, tribal identities were themselves quite recent inventions. The Chagga, for example, now considered one of the “big tribes” in Tanzania (in power, not in number), had not seen themselves as a group or community until the early 1950s when they for the first time elected a paramount chief. The role of the chief was first and foremost to talk with the Europeans on behalf of the Chagga. Chagga identity had become a “relevant category of interaction” in a social system wider than that of the tribe (Mitchell 1956:30). Two of the other major ethnic groups of present-day Tanzania, the Sukuma and the Nyakyusa, in a similar way “declared themselves a single people” during the colonial period, whereas they earlier had comprised distinct, but related, communities (Davidson 1992:100). The historian John Lliffe writes about this situation:

The British wrongly believed that Tanganyikans belonged to tribes; Tanganyikans created tribes to function within the tribal colonial framework... (The) new political geography ... would have been transient had it not co-incised with similar trends among Africans. They too had to live amidst bewildering social complexity, which they ordered in kinship terms and buttressed with invented history. Moreover, Africans wanted effective units of action just as officials wanted effective units of government. (...) Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes; Africans built tribes to belong to (Lliffe 1979:324).

No matter how young some of these ethnic traditions were, they were present at the time of Independence, constituting what Benedict Anderson (1983) has labelled “imagined communities,” with potential disintegrating power. The national leaders were highly aware that a great task lay before them. In the words of Nyerere: “We are trying to weld these people into a

nation" (Meienberg 1966). What ideas did Nyerere have about the nation-state, what was a nation to him? *Culture*, was at the very core: "A country which lacks its own culture is no more than a collection of people without the spirit that makes them a nation" (Nyerere 1967:186). Where did he get this idea from? Nyerere had been mission-educated, and later studied at Oxford. During his studies, he was taught the history of the European nations, and he learned the stories of their nationalism, where culture and tradition were uncritically presented as the very essence. More recently, however, scholars have undressed these cultures, labelled them invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and showed how the high (literal) cultures were simple vessels to ease the transition from an agrarian society with many local cultures, to modern, centralized industrial society. Gellner, in his famous work *Nations and Nationalism*, puts it this way:

Generally speaking, nationalist ideology suffers from pervasive false consciousness. Its myths invert reality; it claims to defend a folk culture while in fact it is forging a high culture; it claims to protect an old folk society while in fact helping to build up an anonymous mass society (Gellner 1983:124).

This analysis can be applied to the nationalist ideology of Tanzania as well. The national leaders modelled their nationalism on the nationalism of Europe. In contrast to the nation-builders of Europe, however, Nyerere and the other Tanzanian leaders had to start from scratch, creating their state-system and the nation at the same time. Before we turn to this process, let us briefly review the nationalist movement which brought these new political leaders to power.

### **The nationalist movement**

It is commonly said that Tanzania won its independence easily, without much bloodshed. Part of the reason was that the country had a united nationalist movement which was able to gather not only people from different social classes, but also the many different ethnic groups (more than 120) for a joined struggle. What was the background of the nationalist movement, and how could it manage to lead the country to independence in less than ten years?

Tanzania was first colonized by the Germans in the 1880s. The British replaced them after World War I, administering the country as a Trusteeship Territory under the League of Nations. White settlers remained few compared to neighbouring Kenya, and they never controlled the

economy (Bull 1973). The low number of settlers and the country's limited natural resources were also important factors which led the British to grant Tanzania its independence more readily than they would to their other colonies. Commercial African agriculture was very unevenly distributed in the country, centred mainly in the regions of Kilimanjaro and Kagera, where also Christian missions and schools had gained an early foothold. Economic organizations like Kilimanjaro Native Planters Association, founded in 1925, took an interest in politics, as did tribal organizations in Dar es Salaam.

The first organization that can be labelled national, however, was an organization for government officials: the Tanganyika Territory African Civil Service Association. From its birth in 1922, it underwent several transformations. By 1948 the name was Tanganyika African Association (TAA), and its goal was to get "all African men and women" (Bull 1973:219) to join the organization. This objective was considerably furthered when the association worked together with the leader of the Meru Movement. The Meru people were forcefully removed from their land in 1951; having no chance to win a violent conflict, the Meru sent a representative to the United Nations. Kirilo Japhet was met with sympathy, but no binding resolutions. On his return he was sent by TAA on an agitational tour around the country, to link peasants to the nationalist movement.

Even more important for mass nationalism, however, was the early establishment of TAA in the Lake Province, the most densely populated area of Tanzania. TAA fused with the tribal organization Sukuma Union as well as with a cooperative movement for cotton growers. To various UN delegations they openly demanded independence in near future, a thing unheard of at that time. The agitation in the countryside was administered professionally, with paid representatives arranging public meetings. In December 1953, all meetings were prohibited in Bukoba, and not long after a law was passed giving the government the possibility to ban organizations like the TAA. In July 1954, the party Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) was founded to replace the TAA. Less than four months later it was banned, having achieved a membership of 10,000 in the Lake Province alone. After serious protests, imprisonments of leaders and appeals to the UN, the authorities had no alternative but to capitulate and make TANU legal. Among TANU's supporters were Sukuma singers who commented on the situation through songs like the one below:

*Gwa sisi gwa sisi:*

*Lelo namubuje, bebe  
Ng'walalaga kinahe bazungu  
Nene namubuje  
Iki ng'wagandaga ng'walubaga giki  
Ng'wilek' inyam' indoto  
Twilye na ng'wana Wishi  
Nu Nchimani o ng'wa Masanja  
Nu Madeleke nu Magina twikamye  
Akuyombag'u Nyerere  
Twendeshagi TANU  
Twazunya makonw'abili  
Hanuma na bazungu  
Nabo bagata Tanu  
Yakij' ukushekana  
Balibatuyanjanja*

*We for ourselves:*

*Let me ask you today  
Europeans, how are you today?  
You look depressed, weak and gloomy  
Are you thinking of the fresh meat  
that you are about to leave?  
We shall eat it with the son of Wishi  
With Nchimani  
The son of Masanja  
With Madeleke and Magina  
We shall consume it all  
Nyerere says  
Let us join TANU  
We accept it with both hands  
But when Europeans join TANU, too  
It does not sound proper  
They had given us a lot of trouble*

(Songoyi 1990:47-49)

What took place in the Lake Province was characteristic of what happened throughout the country though on a smaller scale; mass movements evolved spontaneously, but linked themselves firmly to the nationalist movement, accepting Julius Nyerere as their highest authority.

The nationalist movement had resulted in a party that could be represented in the 1958/59 elections where Africans for the first time had the right (though limited) to vote. Two smaller parties were completely defeated by TANU. Inner self-autonomy was granted on 1 May 1961, with Nyerere as Prime Minister. In December the same year, the African government resumed responsibility also for foreign affairs and defence: Independence had come. One year later, on 9 December 1962, Tanganyika became a republic. Nyerere was elected as president with 97 per cent of the vote.

### **The quest for a national culture**

The struggle for independence was not over with the implementation of self-government. Now was the time for *cultural* decolonization, as expressed by Nyerere in his inaugural address to the Parliament on 10 December 1962:

Finally, I want to tell you about two of the changes which I have made in the Ministries. (...) The major change which I have made is to get up an entirely new Ministry: the Ministry of National Culture and Youth. I have done this because I believe that its culture is the essence and spirit of any nation. (...) Of all crimes of colonialism there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe we had no indigenous culture of our own, or that what we had was worthless —something of which we should be ashamed, instead of a source of pride. (...) When we were at school we were taught to sing the songs of the Europeans. How many were taught the songs of the Wanyamwezi or the Wahehe? Many of us have learnt to dance the “rumba”, or the “chachacha” to “rock n’ roll” and to twist and even to dance the “waltz” and the “foxtrot”. But how many of us can dance, or have even heard of, the Gombe Sugu, the Mangala, the Konge, Nyang’umumi, Kiduo or Lele Mama? Lots of us can play the guitar, the piano, or other European instruments. How many Africans in Tanganyika, particularly among the educated, can play the African drums? (...) And even though we dance and play the piano, how often does that dancing ... really give us the sort of thrill we get from dancing the mganda or the gombe sugu —even though the music may be no more than the shaking of pebbles in a tin? It is hard for any man to get much real excitement from dances and music which are not in his own blood (Nyerere 1967:186).

Nyerere saw the need for a new cultural policy to counteract the effects of colonial policy. The colonizers had, in Africa and elsewhere, sought to create a loyal elite class, as expressed by Lord Macaulay in 19th century India: “We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect” (quoted in Poddar 1970:36).

The same tactics were employed in Tanzania. Nyerere was himself a product of this system, son of a local chief, sent to Oxford for education. His speech was directed to Members of Parliament, educated, “Westernized” men like himself, alienated from traditional music and dance through Western mission and Western education. To what degree the “common” people had lost their culture depended on the degree to which they had been exposed to mission influence, whether they lived in an urban or rural area, and so on. The Chagga were among the very first to be exposed to the missions, and members of this ethnic group were the only ones I met during my fieldwork who — sometimes proudly — claimed that they had no ngoma. Some of them said that they used to have, but that it died as a result of the missions, because the missionaries forbade converts and pupils at their schools to take part in ngoma events. The missionaries’ view on ngoma gradually changed, however, and some came to see it as a

positive force in times of disintegration (Ranger 1983). Attempts were also made to give certain traditional rituals a "Christian form" (Pelt 1974).

Immigrants to Dar es Salaam in the colonial period organized themselves in tribal unions where dance played social and ritual roles as it had done in the traditional community (Songoyi 1988:17). Up to 1948, the colonial administration had tried to forbid the dancing of traditional dances, as they feared it would encourage tribalism, but then a directive from the Colonial Office in London to encourage and support the performance of cultural activities as part of a programme for "brightening of the lives of the people of the colonies" changed this policy (Hussein 1975). Traditional dance-societies in the cities were encouraged; by June 1954 there were 58 of them seeking to be registered in Dar es Salaam. The difference between these groups and the groups that came as a result of the cultural policy after Independence was that the original groups were ethnic, whereas the new ones were composed of people from different ethnic groups dancing "national dances".

The concept of national dances was introduced by the National Dance Troupe. The establishment of the troupe was the concrete action of the Ministry to fulfil its task as stated by Nyerere: "I have set up this new Ministry to help us regain our pride in our own culture. I want it to seek the best of the traditions and customs of all our tribes and make them part of our national culture" (Nyerere 1967:187). The process was not completed overnight. In 1967, five years after Nyerere's speech, the newspapers were still explaining to people: "... no ngoma should belong to one tribe. What are called tribal dances now should be transformed into national ngomas" (*The Nationalist*, 10 November 1967). There was no attempt on the part of Nyerere to mystify the social construction of a national culture for Tanzania. Others, however, talked of the process as a struggle to "re-claim our national culture" (*The Nationalist*, 13 September 1968) — as if a "national culture" of the territory that was later to become Tanzania had already been there when the colonialists arrived. This primordialist type of argument, so often used by nationalists, is, in Gellner's words, "the nationalist ideologue's most misguided claim" (Gellner 1983:47).

Dancers and musicians of the National Dance Troupe were recruited from the various regions by cultural officers. "Those to be selected, in addition to being the best dancers and musicians in their local troupes, had to be committed members of the TANU Youth League" (Ballanga 1992:5). Among the artists who in the early years were selected for the National Dance Troupe were Hukwe Zawose, Werema Chacha and Luiza Maganga, now teachers at the College of Arts:



*Zawose: Nyerere came to our village in 1967 to open two schools. I was asked to welcome him. In order that he should see me, I was standing by the door of his car while he was watching the ngoma and the praise-singing of the school. He liked my way of playing very much and asked me to gather five other musicians and form a group that he could see later, on his way back. .... He brought us to Dodoma where we ate with him and sang for him many songs of praise. After that we did not go back to the village, but we were brought to Dar es Salaam. All the time we were in Dar es Salaam we were worried. The condition of my wife, who was pregnant, and the yearning to return home to take care of my fields gave me much trouble (Uhuru, 16 September 1989, translated from Swahili by the author).*

*Chacha: In 1968 someone told me that there was a need for traditional musicians. I went to the Cultural Office together with my uncle and a brother-in-law. We were tested together, but they wanted only one, and they wanted someone young, who would be easy to teach more.*

*Maganga: There was a competition at our primary school and some officials saw me. I was 15 then. They came to our home and took me with them to some examinations in Rukwa. There were a lot of people, many dancing ngoma. I was chosen to join the National Troupe (1979).*

The artists were not paid wages, but were given free accommodation and meals, as well as some pocket money (Ballanga 1992). This fact, and also the way Zawose was recruited, reflects an attitude on the part of the government, of seeing the traditional artists as their clients whose traditional education was not something that they needed to pay for. The artists were supposed to help Tanzanians to "regain their pride in their culture", but they, the representatives of that culture, were themselves treated as people of lower social status. This attitude, as we will see, was one factor that led to the failure of a popular revival of the traditional performing arts.

### **National symbols and the problem of tradition**

As we have already seen, TANU could rightly be characterized as a mass party. During the first years of independence no other parties had won any following to speak of, and the chieftainship system, which had been partly

traditional and partly built up by the British, was abolished.<sup>1</sup> Nyerere developed his Ujamaa policy of African Socialism, and argued that a multi-party system was really needed only in societies where people had fundamentally different interests, like in the industrialized countries of the West. In Africa, he maintained, class conflicts were irrelevant, as there were no classes in the traditional African societies. Since all parties naturally would have the same aims — to raise the general standard of living, to develop education and health facilities — there was no need for more than one party. It would be just as democratic, or even more democratic, to vote for representatives of one party as for different parties, the argument went. Consequently only TANU was allowed to take part in the 1965 elections. Tanzania had become a one-party state, and this political system remained unchallenged until the mid 1980s when the World Bank put pressure on the leaders in order to make them democratize.

Nyerere wanted to introduce a one-party system not only because of his view that this would be more democratic; he was also trying by all means to protect his young state against disintegrative powers. Basil Davidson sees the “power-monopolist TANU” as “a great factor for good at the start of independence”, since its leaders, in contrast to those in many other African countries, could pool their energies for post-colonial change, rather than to fight each other (Davidson 1992:112).

TANU had led the country to independence, now it was going to lead the nation to development. The concept of Ujamaa replaced *Uhuru* (freedom) as the uniting power and symbol. It was the *political system* itself which came to constitute the main base of the national culture. A tight bond was formed between the Party and the nation by use of rhetoric and symbols. One example is the first page in the atlas for primary school in use today (Wizara ya Elimu 1987). The title says: “Our Country Tanzania” (*Nchi Yetu Tanzania*). The very first symbol presented is the green flag of the CCM<sup>2</sup> party. Under it, the Tanzanian national flag and the national emblem are presented side by side, and beneath them, the national anthem. The party flag is green and yellow. The national flag is green, yellow, black and blue. Party and the nation can thus be said to be connected to each other by metonymization, both sharing the green and yellow colours. The principal symbol of the national emblem is a burning torch, symbolizing hope and

<sup>1</sup> Many of the former chiefs got governmental jobs, locally or in the ministries, as they were among the few who had acquired formal education.

<sup>2</sup> TANU merged with the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) of Zanzibar in 1977, and took the name Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), The Revolutionary Party.

unity. Every year since Independence a burning torch has been raced around the country by the Party's youth organization.

Today, with the present introduction of multi-partism, the link which had been so carefully forged between the Party and the national symbols during the first years after Independence, has had to be disbanded. In 1992, the Party's youth organization handed the Uhuru Torch Race over to the government, as a neutral institution (*Daily News*, 25 August 1992). Several of the National Days that have been connected to the Party, have been reconsidered. The fifth of February, for instance – the "birthday" of the CCM party, which is also the day of the Arusha Declaration, is no longer celebrated as a national holiday.

The greatest changes however, and perhaps the most difficult ones, will have to be enacted in the school system, where the textbooks (like the atlas described above) and the curriculum all have worked to present the nation Tanzania and the Party as two sides of the same coin. Politics is a subject even at primary school (*elimu ya siasa*). Political training as a school subject is typical for socialist countries, but the use of the education system to socialize a new generation into nationhood is by no means restricted to them. Gellner writes of the USA and its educational system that it was "notoriously geared to turning a heterogeneous immigrant population into an ethnically homogenous one" (Gellner 1983:109).

Why did the political system gain such a central role in the creation of national culture and identity after Independence? McKim Marriot, in his 1963 article "Cultural policy in the new states" discusses the dilemmas new nations face when seeking their own identity. He starts off by stating that "no state, not even an infant one, is willing to appear before the world as a bare political frame. Each would be clothed in a cultural garb symbolic of its aims and ideal being" (Marriot 1963:27). National symbols are meant to work outwards as well as inwards, which makes creating them even harder. McMarriot explains the various reasons why Buddhism, not Hinduism as one would think naturally, was chosen to represent the great tradition in India. "That it had nearly disappeared in India by 1947 was, if anything, an asset to India's taking it up as part of her international image, for no important internal groups seemed likely to gain or lose by the illusion" (Marriot 1963:38). He then goes on to show the difficulties which Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and sub-Saharan Africa have had in enacting their cultural policies, before concluding:

As the recent historic pasts of nearly all new states are troubled, the cloudier glories apparent through ancient history, archaeology, or mythology are everywhere preferred. Where these vistas are not open, as

more commonly in the states of younger civilization, then attachment to the future itself regularly becomes the main orientation in time (Marriot 1963:55).

And this is exactly what happened in Tanzania. Tanzanians had no great tradition from which to create their national culture. There was little to build on from the past, with the approximately 120 ethnic groups each having their own histories and myths, traditions and heroes. None of them were substantially larger than the others, and there was no attempt by the Tanzanian authorities to re-define "tribal histories" to be the history of the nation.

The Ujamaa policy was a new-born tradition, but it had the qualities the authorities had been looking for: it cut across ethnic lines, it was unique for Tanzania, and it was attracting fame and recognition in the world community. It was highly modernistic, presenting a picture of a glorious future with African socialism, and yet it still had an element of nostalgia, claiming to build on a pre-colonial tradition of egalitarian villages. Through rhetoric like "The Arusha Declaration is the basis of our culture, socialist in content and Tanzanian in form", the politicians were able to fuse the national with the international, Marxist doctrine. Tanzania was not the first country to combine socialism and nationalism in its cultural policy; Stalin had defined Soviet national cultural policy to be "national in form and Socialist in substance" and Mao had done likewise on behalf of China (Perris 1985:70).

The socialist political system was declared the very basis of the culture in these countries—to such a degree that the concepts of politics, ethics and morality became almost synonymous. In contrast to this, most European countries had emphasized religion in their nation-building rhetoric. The reason why Tanzania did not do so, was not dogmatic Marxism on part of the leaders, many of whom were fervid believers, but the lack of one single religion. Westerlund has studied the interrelation of religion and politics in Tanzania:

Religion was hardly ever mentioned as forming a part of culture, let alone national culture. ... The influence of Islam and Christianity for the development of nationalism was certainly great, but in the search for a common political ideology as a basis for national integration, the partly different socio-political consequences of these religions could be considered hindrances. Similarly, or even more, the differing morals of the traditional African religions were hardly conducive to national integration. Hence the need to assert the primacy of ujamaa or "socialist morality" in the building of a national ethic (Westerlund 1980:32).

The use of literature in the struggle for national integration was similarly hindered by the fact that the Swahili poetry had a strong Islamic content.

Traditional dances, however, seemed less problematic. Moreover, they were readily at hand for fulfilling Nyerere's vision of taking the best from all tribes and making them part of the national culture. The establishment of the national dance troupe and the encouragement of traditional dance generally was seen as part of the "cultural liberation" (Ballanga 1992:2) of the newly independent people, a liberation with strong emotional overtones:

That a colonised people should, on winning back its Independence, put the question of national culture very high up on their reconstruction agenda, is something very easy to understand. It is a duty. The coloniser does not only occupy and pillage the national territory. He occupies and pillages everything up to the very soul of the colonised individual. ... In his attempt to make the colonised his property and slave for ever, he maims his person and distorts his culture to the point of destruction, so as to make him believe himself a person without a past, without a history (Mbuguni & Ruhumbika 1974:275).

The anthropologist Harald Eidheim (1987) studied the stigmatized Sami (so-called "Lappish") people of Norway in the early 1960s, focusing on the strategies of their leaders to achieve equality between Sami and Norwegians. Sami leaders re-codified aspects of their culture to make it more comparable to the values of Norwegian culture. Eidheim terms this process "complementarization", meaning that phenomena from different cultures are acknowledged as different, but of the same worth.

The nation-building project after Independence in Tanzania can be seen in the same light. The Tanzanian leaders wanted to seek back to their own roots, to create a national culture that was *theirs*; but at the same time, the tradition to be created should also be complementary to the Western tradition. This meant that certain traditions did not fit in. Mbuguni, in his report to Unesco on Tanzania's cultural policy, points out "a *selective* revival of our traditions and customs" as a major aim of the policy (Mbuguni 1974a:18, my emphasis). He goes on to state:

Body tattooing and body decoration are gradually dying out. The government actively discourages certain forms. The Masai and the Makonde still cling to their ancient customs, but the art is very much on the decline, a decline speeded by the growing wind of cultural change among the young and revolutionary who are ready to accept new forms and evolve new concepts of beauty (Mbuguni 1974a:55).

Body art was not the only African tradition to be rejected by the new socialist government. When talking of culture the modern socialist state strongly "emphasized the aspect of development which for them implied modernization or change" (Westerlund 1980:27). Great pressure was put on pastoralists to change their ways of living and dressing, in order to make them part of modern, agricultural society. In 1966, the Regional Commissioner simply banned the Masai initiation of young men to warrior status and ordered that the centres where the ceremonies were held should "be turned into National Service training camps" (*The Standard*, 30 November 1966). The rational argument for this law was to put an end to the warriors cattle-raiding of their neighbouring people. The same Commissioner, however, also initiated "a campaign against the Masai and Waarusha habit of daubing themselves with red ochre," as well as "forbidding them to walk about naked, or even wearing their customary simple shuka",<sup>3</sup> habits that could not be said to hurt their neighbours (*The Nationalist*, 20 November 1967). What it did hurt, was the self-respect and pride of the leaders of the state, men who wished to see Tanzania as a modern state in the company of equals in the international community.

This aspiration, according to Marriot, is shared among leaders of the new states. He writes: "Each new nation without exception strives to clothe itself in the dignity not only of culture but also of civilization, for each enters an intercommunicating world of civilized states" (Marriot 1963:54). *The Nationalist*, in its support of the new laws, stated: "The primitive image of East Africa will no longer exist" expressing precisely this wish to communicate equality with the "civilized" states. Frustratingly for the Tanzanian leaders, the Western countries reacted negatively to these modernization attempts. When the news of the laws forcing the Masai to wear shirts and trousers reached the international media, they were strongly condemned (*Newsweek*, 26 February 1968, 2 August 1972; *Time*, 24 November 1967). As a response to the critique, Nyerere stated: "Ideas of letting the Masai remain in their present stage of development are of foreigners who wish to see the Masai look funny so that they can take their pictures" (*The Nationalist*, 12 February 1968). And Tanzanian journalists supported him again: "Tanzania is not a human zoo as imperialists and their local spokesmen would like to believe. ... Tanzania and Tanzanians must be transformed" (*The Nationalist*, 15 March 1968).

Nation-building was never a simple task, neither for the leaders of the state, nor for the loyal press which did its best to support them. The same newspaper, only four months earlier, had presented an editorial urging,

<sup>3</sup> *Shuka* means loincloth.

under the heading "Cultural Revolution", the Tanzanians to "rediscover themselves", and scolding the colonialists and imperialists for the attempt to destroy the people's "pride in their own things and life":

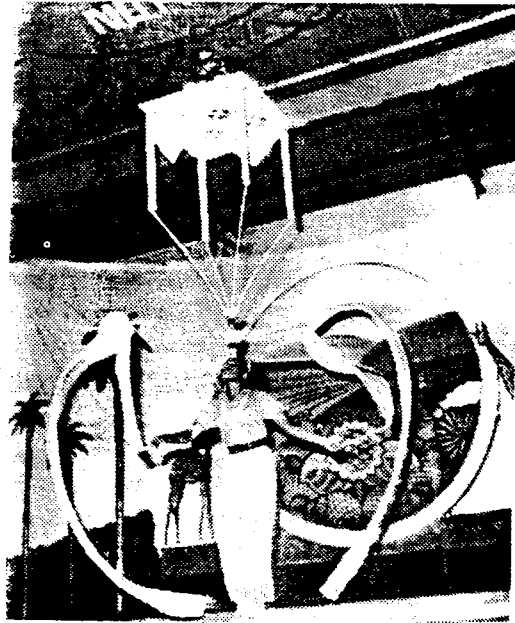
The colonialists, neo-colonialists and imperialists as a whole know only too well that in order to properly dominate a people, it is first of all necessary to kill their spirit of pride in their own things and way of life. Hence the vicious and inhuman attempts by the colonialists to turn Africans into their carbon copy. To be dominated, we must look like them, think like them, act and behave like them! ... Time has now come for Tanzanians to rediscover themselves (*The Nationalist*, 10 November 1967).

Ironically enough, these words could just as well have been used about the attempt of the Tanzanian government to dominate the Masai and other pastoral people. Pastoralists did not fit into the mainstream Ujamaa society which was so focused on state control, agricultural production and development. First, they did not produce surplus for sale, and their nomadic way of life made tax-collection and any other control difficult. Secondly, and perhaps even more important, nomadism was not compatible with governmental schooling. The school system was seen as a major tool in nation-building and in efforts to make everybody part of the new shared culture; this was especially important among groups who spoke non-Bantu languages and thus had difficulties in mastering Swahili. Thirdly, the Masai, together with a few other ethnic groups, were the only ones among the 120 ethnic groups of the country who were *visibly* different. By their mere appearance, displaying their unique ethnic identity in dress and hair-do, they counteracted the idea of a modern, unified nation.

We have seen that many local traditions were inapplicable to the creation of a national culture. Ironically enough, some quite foreign elements seemed less problematic. To help Tanzania develop its performing arts, the People's Republic of China invited 20 boys and girls to train in acrobatics in 1965. The youths returned home after four years with Chinese kites and baskets, adding a new and lasting touch to the Tanzanian national culture.

That these new foreign elements came from China, and not from the West, was probably an important precondition. It was the former colonial powers which were the "significant others" whom it was important to create a distance from, and who were to see that Tanzania had a complementary culture. The editor of *The Nationalist* did not mean China when he declared that Tanzanians should "reject all the poisonous borrowings from alien cultures" (*The Nationalist*, 1 April 1967).

Not only acrobatics were borrowed from China, but also the concept of “Cultural Revolution”. All works of arts were to support the revolution — a point that strongly affected the kind of artistic expression which had been chosen to act as a national symbol: traditional dance.



*Plate 10.* Tanzanian acrobat trained in China. The picture dates from around 1974 (Ministry of National Culture and Youth, n.d.).

### **Enlightenment of the people or political propaganda?**

In the cultural revolution after Independence, the performing arts were not only supposed “to assist in the development of Tanzanian nationalism and personality,” but also to communicate government policies (Lihamba 1991: 271).

In a speech to poets in 1968, Nyerere told his listeners: “Go propagate the Arusha Declaration and praise our national culture” (quoted in Lihamba 1991:271). The Arusha Declaration, a blueprint for Tanzania’s ujamaa policies, was passed at the annual party meeting in 1967. The call to spread the new policies went out to all cultural groups in the country. Traditional dances were seen as an especially potent way of enlightening the people, since most dances included songs and many of the local cultures had a rich tradition of using dance-songs as a major means of communication.





*Plate 11.* Chinese influence 20 years later: Hukwe Zawose of College of Arts performing traditional Gogo music on Chinese balance.

Soon after the call was made, new lyrics appeared to accompany the traditional dances. They took up the central theme of the Declaration: self-reliance and an economy based on farming. The examples below are songs performed by commercial cultural groups in Dar es Salaam in the period 1982-1992. The songs were often originally composed by village groups up-country and were later taught to the touring National Performing Troupe, or artists from the villages joined the urban groups and taught them songs from home.

As we saw in the description of the performance by Muungano Cultural Troupe, songs usually consist of sets of stanzas with no special thematic interrelation. I have here only rendered the verses that illustrate the political use. A much-used way of performing songs is the call and response style, common all over Africa in music as well as in song (Chernoff 1979). Since the literal meaning of the songs is in focus here, I have not indicated the leader/chorus parts. Neither have I indicated repetition of lines. All the songs are in Swahili.

*The Gadanzi from Kigoma, the Village Museum version:*

Mwalimu Nyerere alisema:	The teacher Nyerere said:
Tushike jembe	Let us take the hoe
tulime mashamba	and work on the fields
Hassan Mwinyi alisema:	Hassan Mwinyi said:
Tushike jembe	Let us take the hoe
tulime mashamba	and work on the fields
Habu gamba Nyerere habu gamba	Nyerere said, he said:
Tukavijenge tukavilinde vijiji	Let us build and guard the villages
Tukajiunge mashamba ya ujamaa	Let us work together on ujamaa fields

*Msolopa from Lindi, the Muungano Cultural Troupe version:*

Ndugu Nyerere baba	Comrade Nyerere father
Nyerere baba	Nyerere father
Tuzidi kuendeleza	Let us continue to develop
Vijiji vya ujamaa	Ujamaa villages
Wazururaji mjini	The loiterers in towns
Warudi vijijini	Should go back to the villages
Ili tuendeze	So that we can develop
Vijiji vya ujamaa	Ujamaa villages

The concept of Ujamaa villages was central to the Arusha Declaration. It implied that the whole rural population was to live in large centralized villages. Only by establishing these socialistic villages, it was argued, could

the government achieve its goal of providing all its people with clean water, schools, and health facilities. Further, in a village where the means of production were owned communally, and purchases and sales went through cooperatives, there would be less room for exploitation. And — not part of the official argument, but probably seen as a positive side-effect — political control would be a lot easier.

As already mentioned, Nyerere presented Ujamaa villages as a continuation of a pre-colonial tradition. There was one major difference, however: the traditional villages had their basis in extended families (Swantz 1986:178). Nyerere's idea of communal farming proved largely unsuccessful in the new centralized villages. Initially the villagization programme was voluntary, and many people formed Ujamaa villages in the belief that it would give them a better life. Others, however, were reluctant to leave the fertile land of their ancestors in order to move to a larger village, unfortunately often located in an area with poorer soil. After unsuccessful attempts to negotiate with these people, the authorities in certain cases simply burned the old villages and moved their inhabitants by force.

It is hard to say whether the song below is meant as whole-hearted support to the policy, or if it has subtle undertones. It was learned by the College of Arts when they visited Singida in 1978, and the people whose dance it is, the Iramba, are mainly cattle herdsman, people who traditionally have lived in scattered settlement pattern.

*Nkininta from Singida, The College of Arts version:*

Tumekubali kuishi katika	We have agreed to live in
vijiji vya ujamaa	Ujamaa villages
Ee baba Nyerere kweli	Yes father Nyerere
tumekubali kuishi aaah!	truly we have agreed to live there!
Siasa yetu ni kilimo	Our way of living is farming
Tanzania siasa yetu	Tanzania our policy
ni kilimo heeh!	is farming hey!

Other political themes commented on and supported through dance-songs were the relocation of the capital city (a way to develop the interior regions, much debated because of the immense cost), the struggle of Southern Africa, general calls to the citizens to work hard, and so on.

*Chikocha from Mtwara, The College of Arts version:*

Chama na serekali	The Party and the government
Wameamua makao	Decided that the capital
Yaende Dodoma	Should be moved to Dodoma

Eee walipendelea kabisa	Yes they really liked it
Dodoma ndiyo katikati	Dodoma is central

*Malale, the Makutano Dancing Troupe version:*

Nchi ya Tanzania imejitoa muhanga	Tanzania has been concerned
Katika ukombozi kusini mwa Afrika	About the liberation of southern Africa
Sasa umepatikana uhuru wa Namibia	Now Namibia has got its freedom

*Mangaka from Mtwara, the Muungano Cultural Troupe version:*

Nalia	I am crying out
Afunguliwe gerezani	Release him from prison
Mandela	Mandela
Afunguliwe gerezani	Release him from prison

*Msewe from Zanzibar, the National Service version:*

Taifa aa taifa aa	Nation oh Nation oh
Bendera inapepea	Let the flag flutter

Afrika bara letu	Africa is our continent
Hatukurithi kwa mtu	We did not inherit it from anyone
Mabeberu wang'ang'ania	The imperialists stick to it
Sisi tumesha hamaki	We are already angry
Mabeberu waondoke	Let the imperialists leave
Walihame bara letu	Let them move out of our continent

Tutapigana vikali	We shall fiercely fight
Kukomboa Afrika	To liberate Africa
Ni bara letu halali	It is our right
Hatukukopa kwa mtu	We did not borrow it from anyone

The political use of the performing arts was ideally meant to educate the people, many of whom were illiterate. In one of their publications, the Ministry of National Culture and Youth stated:

(K)nowing that theatre is an effective medium of communication, it must serve the interest of the masses. It must be used to impart useful and desirable education to the people. ... So we will sing about socialism as means to ending exploitation and poverty (Ministry of National Culture and Youth, n.d., page 13).

In the songs above, this ideal role is to a certain degree fulfilled. Most songs with a political content, however, turned out to be pure propaganda songs for the Party and its leaders, like the samples below:

*Maluwela from Mtwara, the Makutano Dancing Troupe version:*

Baba Mwinyi na ndugu Kawawa	Father Mwinyi and Comrade Kawawa
Twapongeza kwa kuiongoza	We congratulate them for leading
nchi yetu Tanzania	our country Tanzania

Nae baba Mwinyi asifiwe	Let father Mwinyi be praised
Twawaomba viongozi	We beg the leaders
wadumu milele	to continue forever

*Makao from Tanga, the Village Museum version:*

Chama twakipenda	We like the Party
Kwa msimamo wake kila	Especially for its political stand
kipitapo nulu ya mapinduzi	And every child who is born
Kila mwana kazaliwa tumemkabizi	We give to CCM
CCM	

Chama cha mapinduzi	The revolutionary party
ndiyo ngao yetu wa Tanzania	is our shield

*Sindimba from Mtwara, the DDC Kibisa Ngoma Troupe version:*

Chama chama chama chama	Party Party Party Party
Chama cha pinduzi Tanzania	The revolutionary party in Tanzania

Tanzania Tanzania Tanzania	Tanzania Tanzania Tanzania
Tunafuraha Tanzania	We are happy Tanzania

*Todi from Kigoma, The Village Museum version:*

Chama chama	Party Party
Chama chama chama chama	Party Party Party Party
Baba Nyerere	
Mrema	Father Nyerere
Watanzania e tunafurahi	Mrema
	We Tanzanians are happy

The artists were called on by Nyerere and the other party leaders to propagate their policies. How did they experience this situation, how did they feel about being the instruments of the government, singing songs like the ones above? The state-employed members of the National Dance Troupe, later the College of Arts, had a special duty to use their art in this

political way. As part of my interviews with artists and teachers at the College of Arts, I asked them the following question: "Since the 1960s the government has urged the artists to propagate the country's socialist policies and to help educating the people politically. How have you personally felt about being given this task?"

*Woman 32: This work was very successful. At that time the Tanzanian didn't really understand the politics of ujamaa and self-reliance. We were told to use political songs in the ngoma and chorus, and I liked it. I mean, it helped me to understand that also I could sing songs that helped to put forward our politics.*

*Man 42: I personally shared in it. We shared in the independence, we helped people. At the beginning of Independence it was good.*

*Woman 29: I have felt good about it. I can't see it as a bad thing. When I sing it comes from the heart. It's O.K. to put these new words into the old songs.*

*Woman 31: At that time, it was no problem. We had the Ujamaa-policies. I was born at the time of Independence and grew up with Ujamaa. Now it would not be good to have the same role.*

*Man 33: I personally feel that it is good. The government wanted to inform the people about our politics. The artists can publish our politics everywhere.*

*Man 52: I feel good about it. To use ngoma and chorus. It's something else than when the leader just shouts out the message.*

The college artists were personally chosen by governmental officials; as already noted, they were preferably to be "committed members of the TANU Youth League". That all the respondents were positive in their evaluation of their political role is therefore not so surprising. Some of them, however, express that this was a matter of duty:

*Man 39: I was not opposing it. Practically sometimes it was just a rule, not a matter of opinions.*

*Man 23: In our Tanzania, there are matters of art and politics that you are obliged to sing about. It's O.K., it's fine.*

*Man 29: At that time it was good, it was compulsory. That the artists act as teachers is O.K. Now we have multipartyism, every party has their own things that they want to say.*

In contrast to the performing artists, the university-trained teachers of theory were much more negative to the political function expected from them:

*Man 41: I always hate what I may call a top-down directives and especially when given to artists because they block them from speaking for the people and become mouth-pieces of a few individuals who have powers over the society. In other words they become parrot artists.*

*Man 33: Educating people is a good thing but why limit the artists to talk about political issues alone when there are many problems to solve in our country? Especially the economic situation persisting now. Artists should be left free and then they can talk exactly what is needed to the society.*

*Man 46: Politics is always tricky because it is never true.*

*Man 40: Boring.*

As part of the recent democratization process the College is no longer expected to be CCM-biased. This new situation is quite confusing to the governmentally employed artists, as can be read from their answer to the question: "What role do you think the artists should play in the new political situation?"

*Woman 21: We don't know. Someone has his own party... We don't understand. Will we have peace? I don't know. Maybe it will be like Kenya. The problem with the Party is the people at the top. CCM itself I like.*

*Woman 29: We have already started to change the songs. A few days ago I made a new version of Mawindi. The old version we (the National Troupe) learned from a local group in Singida when we toured there in 1978. It went: "Nyerere and Tanzanian citizens, let's unite and work". Now I try: "Artists and Tanzanians let's unite and work." As leaders we must say to people that we should not fight each other.*

*Woman 32: It's not easy, one can't know. I mean, it's like walking in the darkness. We simply don't know at all. I think it will be a difficult task for the artist to know which side he or she should be on.*

*Woman 31: Now it should be more about unity, not about politics.*

*Man 23: We have to stop singing about CCM, in fact we already have. But we can still sing about the revolution. With multipartyism every person will have his own politics, his own party, and they will not like each others' parties. You will carry your ethnic group, I will carry mine.*

*You will not be able to ask me for help, and then the aid has to come from abroad. But if another party does well, it's O.K.*

**Man 28:** *The work will be the same as it has been, to teach the people about political matters like economy, health, education etc.*

**Man 33:** *I don't know, I don't even know them. I don't know what garment they will wear. If we continue the way we have done it will not be good, other people will not like it.*

**Man 29:** *The artist still has work to do, there are questions of health, negligence and work. There are children who do not go to school, and people are dying of hunger. The artists can not leave this, these are not political questions.*

**Man 52:** *We continue to dance and play, but we can't take sides. Just traditional songs, without singing about the President. In the Mganda wa Kikutu the Swahili words will have to be taken away then.*

**Man 43:** *I can't say now. It's too new, we have to see. It's hard for the artists, what shall we do? Maybe I like the one-party system and a co-artist likes multipartyism. We haven't started to sing about multipartyism. The "what" party? There is no name.*

**Man 42:** *For the artist, it's his work. We sing about CCM. If there comes another party, you have to adapt, you'll praise him. But Mganda you'll perform as it is now. There is no reason to leave Nyerere. He has done good things for us. We have not forgotten the Teacher.<sup>4</sup>*

The last answer reveals a client attitude, the artist perceiving himself a servant for any political patron that may rule the country. This attitude was more common among the artists of the commercial group Muungano, where almost half of the respondents had similar answers to the college artist above:

**Man 35:** *We have to change. We must move with the times. But so far we can continue to sing about CCM, we don't know which party will win.*

**Man 32:** *We haven't stopped singing about CCM because so far no other party has overcome them. We will sing about another party if it becomes big.*

**Man 32:** *It depends which party will win. If another party than CCM wins, we will sing about them.*

<sup>4</sup> Julius Nyerere is affectionately called Mwalimu (Teacher). The title refers both to his occupation before Independence and to his role as President — teaching the citizens about African Socialism.



*Man 36: I used to be a member of a chorus where we sang about the Arusha Declaration etc., but now we have to see first. We don't know which party is going to win.*

Tanzanian scholars of the performing arts are, like the university-educated teachers at the College of Arts, negative towards the way the arts have been used politically in their country. Mlama writes about the use of the arts for propaganda purposes in socialist-oriented countries like Tanzania: "In most cases culture has been merely seen as the use of the cultural tools, especially the arts, to propagate socialist ideology as stipulated by the ruling class. Culture is often regarded as synonymous with political propaganda" (Mlama 1991:19). Arnold Perris, however, in his book *Music as Propaganda* responds to that type of criticism by suggesting that the artists may actually share in the official ideology:

The concept of a state which controls artists is ... offensive to citizens of western democracies, who believe that the making of art should be left to artists. (...) We judge that extramusical controls must ultimately inhibit the imagination of the composer and diminish the quality of his work. But suppose the creative artists accept the official ideology. Are they then inhibited? (Perris 1985:4).

As to the College artists, most of them seem to have internalized the socialistic ideas of their government. They say that they propagate what they believe in. This goes for some of the Muungano artists as well, but the proportion who feel indifferent towards the CCM party is bigger than the supporters. Still, they sing propagandizing songs to their dances. Lihamba explains it in this way:

Since the Arusha Declaration some of the cultural groups have been actively used by national and regional politicians to display "Tanzanian Culture" in a manner which the groups have expressed as amounting to "political exploitation". (...) They felt that they had to obey the politicians orders because of fear of repercussions if they did not comply. Continued political favour was seen as necessary for their survival (Lihamba 1985).

The massive power of the politicians is, of course, a very important factor for the cooperation of the artists. But I am still puzzled by statements like "for the artist, it's his work" and the number of people who say that they will support whatever party comes to power even in a multi-party situation. Also individual artists like street minstrels who are not really dependent on government favours and who *could* have continued singing traditional songs

in their own languages, sing praise songs to the political leaders, especially Nyerere (Martin 1982:159). In the West, politically conscious musicians may sing about socialism or pacifism or they may support "freedom-fighters" and oppositionals, but seldom or never do such musicians praise a politician already in power (least of all one in their own country). Could it be that the Tanzanians artists were and are, to a certain degree, pre-conditioned to accept a supportive political role from their background in traditional forms of the performing arts? Any straightforward answer to this question would be speculative, as there is little material available on the subject in Tanzania.

Mlama, in criticizing the modern political use of arts in Africa, calls it "a misuse of the ideological potential of theatre to benefit a few, namely, the ruling class", in contrast to the traditional theatre, which is controlled by the people themselves (Mlama 1991:31). However, she may here be idealizing performance in traditional societies. Several anthropologists who have studied performance in traditional societies have indicated the power aspect of these rituals. Bloch has showed how the control of the circumcision ritual was central to the power-holders of the Merina of Madagascar (Bloch 1986). Blacking, who has studied the music of Venda, South Africa, writes that "musical performances are audible and visible signs of social and political groupings in Venda society". Initiation schools, he continues, "are directly controlled by rulers" (Blacking 1973:76). Permission from the rulers is also needed to hold possession dances, disregarded the fact that they are arranged by family cult groups. Here we can see a clear parallel to modern Tanzania, where the Union of Traditional Medicine (*Shirika la Madawa ya Kiasili*), a union for 500 coastal healers using *ngoma* in their therapy, had their "director" appointed by the Party (Janzen 1992:170).

If there have existed systems of control in traditional societies in Tanzania like those reported from Venda, this may help explain the acceptance of today's situation. The institution of court singers in Africa, the *Griot* in many West African societies for example, is well known. These singers would praise, but if necessary also criticize, their kings or chiefs (Panzacchi 1994:190). In post-colonial Tanzania, Mzee<sup>5</sup> Mwinamila has taken on this double role (Lihamba 1985, Songoyi 1990), while the cultural groups, governmental as well as commercial, "have avoided including anything that might challenge or question the status quo" (Lihamba 1985). I will return to issues of censorship and control in section three.

<sup>5</sup> Mzee is a title of respect, used primarily for elder men.

## The cultural revolution goes commercial

Efforts to re-vitalize the traditional performing arts in the spirit of Nyerere's early vision led to the introduction of traditional dance in schools and companies, and finally, as we will see, to the outburst of commercial cultural groups in Dar es Salaam.

The introduction of *ngoma* in schools was partly a part of the Africanizing of education. The Party found the inherited British school system ill-suited to African rural reality. One of the reforms was that all primary schools were to have their own farms where the students not only learned (modern) farming techniques, but also how to put into practise the concept of self-reliance. The British school-theatre with its Shakespeare plays was replaced by educational plays in line with the socialistic cultural policy, political poems (*ngonjera*) and traditional dances. To promote national integration, all primary school teachers were employed outside their own home-area.<sup>6</sup> They would teach their pupils dances from their home, or the "national" dances which were performed by the National Performing Troupe. The school groups performed to welcome guests, and they entertained the local community on national holidays.

When interviewing my informants at the College of Arts and in the Muungano group, I was surprised to hear that nearly half of them mentioned school as the place where their interest in arts began, rather than the village or relatives. This may mean that they conceptualize the performing arts that they are doing now as in the same "category" as the school arts/national arts. It may also mean that what Nyerere stated in his 1962 speech was true, that the traditional arts were dying out as a result of colonialism and mission, and that the cultural revolution, with its strong emphasis on arts in the schools (especially *ngoma*), really became the first encounter with performing arts for children in certain areas.

The cultural groups at the state-owned companies were at the outset parallel to factory sports in Europe. They encouraged the spirit of community, and propagated the company outside. Some groups, like the Kisamasuki troupe at the sugar factory in Morogoro, still function in this way. The dancers and musicians are workers at the company, their performances are free, and they represent their region in national competitions, etc.

In Dar es Salaam however, developments have taken another turn. In the 1970s the companies assumed patronage over troupes of full-time artists

<sup>6</sup> This policy has generally been the rule for all governmental posts, especially the first years after a person has completed his/her governmentally sponsored education.

who were performing commercially at the same time as they were advertising the company. The troupes were sometimes transferred from one company to another, and it did not take long before groups were formed independently of any institution, being run on a purely businesslike basis (Songoyi 1988:31). A large number of commercial *ngoma* troupes popped up in the early 1980s; by 1984 there were more than 40 (Lihamba 1991:274). This was partly a result of the extremely poor economic conditions in the country at that time, which led people to look for any new opportunity to earn their bread. Many groups did not make it in the competition and were disbanded.<sup>7</sup>

The relative success of this new genre was due to the fact that such troupes met an unsatisfied need for entertainment in the city. Urban life, characterized by a distinction between work and leisure, had created a market for entertainment, but up to 1980 there had been few options for Dar es Salaam dwellers in this respect. There was at the time no television broadcasting in Tanzanian mainland,<sup>8</sup> and the films which were showed at the cinemas were either European or Indian. Theatre performances were extremely rare and usually staged at the university campus outside town, while the dance-nights in clubs and bars were too expensive for most people and not suitable for children or single women.

Some communities, like the Makonde, had and still have a rich and entertaining ritual life in their urban "villages" (Johansen, forthcoming), but for the large majority the traditional performances were something which they had left behind in the rural areas. There was thus a market for commercial performing arts, and the commercial groups tailored their performances to the rhythms of urban life (Plane, forthcoming), performing at neighbourhood social halls in the break between housework or wage labour ending at around 3.30 and the evening meal at around 8 pm.

In 1992, a little more than 10 years after the first commercial groups had started up, there were between 15 and 20 fully professional groups in Dar es Salaam. In addition, comes a much larger number of smaller groups where members have this as an extra source of income. The groups usually have a contract with the social halls or bars to perform a certain day every week. They get the income from the tickets at the door, while the owner of the hall benefits from the increased sale of beer and soft-drinks. The

<sup>7</sup> Examples are Mapinduzi, which was disbanded around 1985, and Urafiki, which had the same fate around 1988.

<sup>8</sup> Television broadcasting on the Tanzanian mainland was started in 1993 at the initiative of a private businessman. Zanzibar has had television since the early 1960s, before the revolution.

number of spectators varies, but from the files of Muungano Cultural Troupe I found the average to be a little more than 200, nearly half of these being children. Some of the groups also have contracts with tourist hotels. Admission is then free and the hotel pays the owner of the group directly. In addition to the commercial groups, there are of course still dance-groups which perform in the traditional sphere, dancing the dance(s) of their ethnic group or home region for weddings, religious feast days and so on. Some of the groups also perform for therapeutic purposes (Janzen 1992). One informant estimated the number of such groups in Dar es Salaam Region to be more than 6000.

The Muungano Cultural Troupe where I did my fieldwork was a business project from the very start in 1981. The owner, Norbert Chenga, was employed by the Ministry of Arts to teach the artists of the National College of Arts basic school subjects (the College is the successor of the National Performing Troupe). He was not himself an artist, but he had the means to invest in costumes and instruments. He recruited the artists from his own village in Lindi and through advertisements in the Swahili newspaper *Uhuru*. When the Ministry later cut down the number of its employees, Chenga was told that he might as well work with his private group fulltime. As already mentioned, his group performs the same type of political songs as the governmental College, a feature they share with all the other professional *ngoma* groups. One group had among their objectives "to praise, explain and spread the Party Policy" (Songoyi 1988:30). Of the 17 cultural groups I saw perform during my fieldwork there was not one that did not praise the Party in at least one song.

Chenga named his group Muungano Cultural Troupe. "Muungano" means union, alliance, and the idea behind the name was, according to Chenga, to express that the group was inter-ethnic, performing dances from all over Tanzania. Both Chenga and the principal at the College emphasize, and take pride in, the fact that the dances and the artists come from *all* of Tanzania, they are nationally representative.

When I gathered information on the repertoires of 11 different groups however, I found a strong bias towards the southern part of the country. Close to half of the dances performed by the groups are from the southern zone — one of six geographical zones of the country, and the home of only 10 percent of the population. Of the 55 dances 13 come from the Makonde alone. Not only are the dances from the south over-represented in the repertoire, but each of them is also much more commonly performed than dances from other areas. Sindimba is the only dance to be on the repertoire of every single group, and many groups use it in all their performances, knowing that it is a favourite with the audience.

Table 1  
Dance repertoire of eleven cultural troupes

Ethnic group	Dance	Troupes (see key for names)											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
<b>South</b>													
Makonde	Chikocha	x		x		x	x	x	x		x	x	<b>8</b>
	Chitumbo								x				1
	Limbondo	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		<b>9</b>
	Lingoti			x			x		x		x	x	5
	Lingunjumu			x			x	x	x		x	x	6
	Malale			x			x		x		x		4
	Maluwela			x		x	x	x			x	x	6
	Malivata	x			x	x		x	x		x		6
	Ngokwa	x				x	x	x			x		5
	Ngongoti			x	x		x	x					4
	Lingondo										x	x	2
	Lingokwa			x			x						2
	Sindimba	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	<b>11</b>
	Makua/ Yao	Masewe	x		x	x	x	x	x			x	
Manganje											x		1
Mwera	Liyaya										x		1
	Mangaka	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x		<b>8</b>
	Msoplopa							x	x		x		3
	Ntimbe	x	x										2
Ngindo	Kipulepule		x										1
Ngoni	Chomanga			x									1
	Ligiu				x		x				x		3
	Lizombe	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		<b>10</b>
	Msoma	x	x			x	x	x	x		x		<b>7</b>
Nyasa	Mganda					x	x						2
<b>East</b>													
Kutu	Mganda	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	<b>9</b>
	Pogoro				x	x		x					3
Wadde	Kavoge		x										1
	Zaramo										x		1
	Mkwajungoma	x	x	x	x			x					5
	Msewe	x		x							x		3
Zanzibar	Msewe			x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	<b>8</b>

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
<b>Highlands</b>													
Manda	Kihoda				x								1
Nyakyusa	Ling'oma	x				x							2
Safwa	Safwa	x				x			x		x		4
	Lipango				x			x					2
	Lekatulinge						x						1
<b>West</b>													
Gogo	Selo				x								1
Ha	Bukola				x								1
	Ndendele										x		1
	Gadanzi										x		1
Iramba	Nkininta	x			x	x		x	x		x		6
Manyema	Kilua		x										1
	Todi	x				x		x			x		4
Nyamwezi	Busheshaya		x										1
Nyaturu	Mawindi	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x		8
<b>Lake</b>													
Kerewe	Bongonyosi				x						x		2
Sukuma	Bugobogobo	x	x		x	x		x	x				6
	Buyeye						x		x				2
<b>North</b>													
Digo	Gita			x			x						2
Masaai	Sekei				x		x				x		3
Sambaa	Makao										x		1
	Mdumange						x						1
Zigua	Selo		x		x	x					x	x	5
	Ukala	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x		8
27 ethn. groups	55 dances	20	14	19	21	22	25	23	20	3	33	9	

- 1: College of Arts
- 2: Bagamoyo Cultural Troup
- 3: DDC Kibisa Ngoma Troupe
- 4: National Service
- 5: Morogoro Sugar Factory
- 6: Makutano Dancing Troupe
- 7: Mandela Theatre Troupe
- 8: Muungano Cultural Troupe
- 9: Tanzania One Theatre (the troupe of the CCM party)
- 10: Village Museum
- 11: Wazazi Cultural Troupe

Sindimba is a Makonde initiation dance, erotic to the extent that a ban on performing it in public was implemented in the early 1960s. After the ban was lifted it swept the country, and it is still the only traditional dance that all Tanzanians know the name of. Sindimba is danced with abundant hip movements, a feature common to most of the dances from the south, which gives them an advantage over dances from other areas. The dance style of the south is something people from all ethnic groups can be entertained by. Muungano had a Haya dance (Bukoba district in the north) on their repertoire in the early 1980s, but the urban audience was bored by the slow movements and the hand-clapping, and it was eventually taken off the list. A table showing which dances are performed by what groups is presented below. The *non*-southern dances that are performed by eight of the eleven groups or more, like Mganda wa Kikutu, Mawindi and Ukala, have in common that they were on the repertoire of the National Performing Troupe and later were taught at the College of Arts, and thus became established as "national dances". They continue to be spread by Cultural Officers who are trained at the College and then employed in the districts and by the larger cultural groups in Dar. The troupe with the largest number of dances on its repertoire is the group of Village Museum. Its members have ample time for rehearsing and learning new dances, as they are fulltime employees of the museum but only perform two nights a week (weekends). By contrast, the commercial groups perform five to six days a week, at different venues, and thus have almost no time for rehearsing. They are often criticized for not renewing themselves or their repertoire.

During the audience interviews at commercial group performances, the respondents were asked: "Which dance do you like the most and why?" The single most popular were Lizombe of the Ngoni (27 per cent) and Sindimba (22 per cent) both southern dances. Lizombe has in common with Sindimba that it is erotic, but its popularity is also due to the songs, which are not political (see chapter three). The tendency of the south to dominate the commercial performing arts also holds true of the performers themselves, as can be seen from Figure 2.

When we compare with Figure 1, which shows population distribution on geographical zones of the country, we see that the south is heavily over-represented in the commercial cultural groups. This is especially so for Muungano, where 73 per cent come from this area. The governmentally-run College of Arts has as a goal and duty to represent the whole country equally, but also here the south predominates, with 35 per cent. The most populous area of the country, the Lake Zone is hardly represented in the commercial groups.



Figure 1  
Population distribution of Tanzania

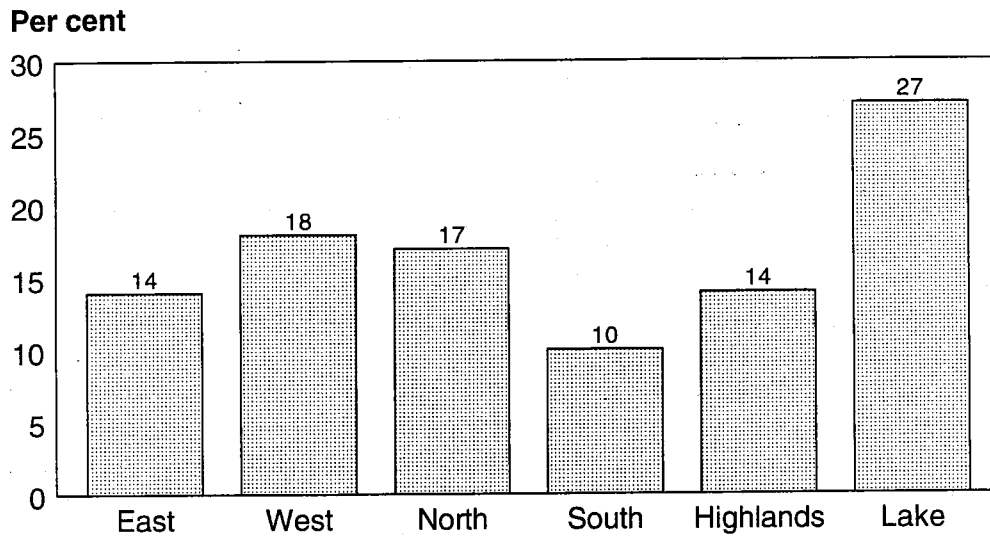
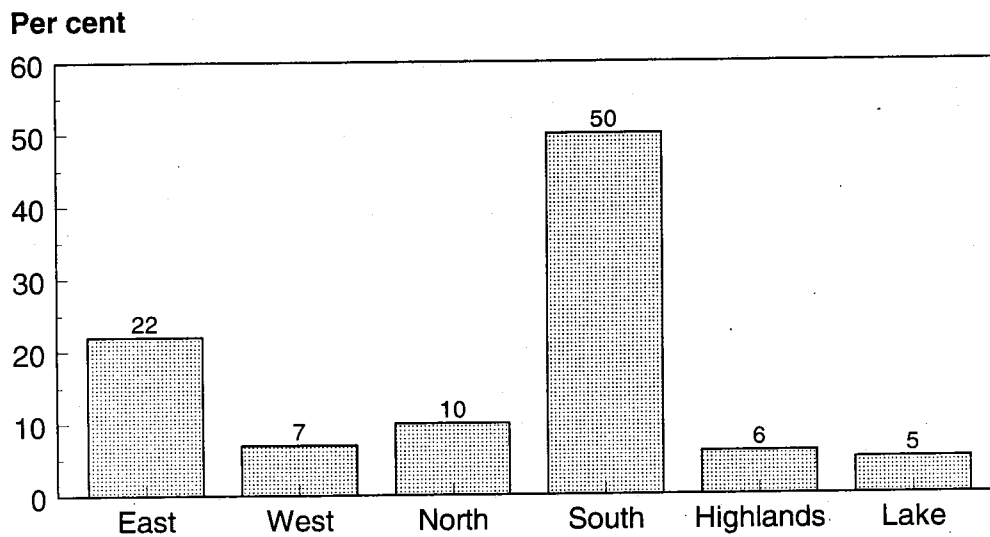


Figure 2  
Regional origin of artists of Dar es Salaam based troupes



(The percentages are based on information on the 135 artists of the following six groups: DDC Kibisa, Makutano Dancing Troupe, Mandela Theatre Troupe, Muungano Cultural Troupe, National Service and Village Museum.)

The over-representation of southern artists in the cultural groups can be illuminated further by statistics on the regional background of the most highly educated persons in the country: the academic staff at the University of Dar es Salaam and at the Agricultural University of Morogoro. In this group there is not one single person from Mtwara region, (home of, among others, the Makonde) whereas the north is strongly over-represented with 41 out of 141 from Kilimanjaro region.<sup>9</sup> As mentioned earlier, this area was the subject of early mission, which can explain their dominance among the educated elite.<sup>10</sup> In none of the dance groups I contacted was there a Chagga artist. The north, represented by the Chagga (and Haya), and the south, represented by the Makonde, can be seen as two opposite poles in the country. The south is a stigmatized area, an "undeveloped" place which people from other regions shun.

In June 1992, Daily News reported that eleven doctors were transferred to work in the south. The spokesman of the Ministry of Health said that "if any of the transferred doctors refused to go south, the ministry would stop paying his/her salary" (*Daily News* 11 June 1992). A reader's letter in the *Sunday News* argued that the tendency of teaching personnel to ignore working in the south, with the consequent below-average performance at secondary schools there, had "its roots in the colonial era, during which some of the regions were neglected while other regions were favoured" (*Sunday News*, 31 May 1992).

What are the reactions of members of the privileged class in Dar es Salaam, people generally from the north, towards a "national culture" of traditional dances mainly from the south? While resting from fieldwork with the dance groups, I stayed with a Chagga family. Their attitude towards *ngoma* is an indicative case:

The Lyimo are a higher middle-class family originating from Kilimanjaro. Their late father was a chief under British indirect rule, and he got an Oxford education. Among the few people in the country who had higher education, he became a Member of Parliament after Independence. His daughter Joyce told me proudly that he was like a European; he did not accept poor relatives from home coming to visit or stay with them in town. He preferred the Western values in social life as well as in the arts, attitudes shared by his wife and children. Joyce used to say that she got stomach-ache when they were to dance *ngoma* at school.

<sup>9</sup> The figures are taken from "Survey of Institutional and Individual Academic Links" (Hetland 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Also in Zambia, mission activity in restricted areas led to a congruence between class and certain ethnic groups (Mitchell 1956:16).

*Ngoma* — in the Lyimo's view — was a dirty thing of the un-civilized tribes of the south, from people who they claimed were unhygienic and who engaged in witchcraft and sorcery. The Lyimos could not understand that I had an interest for traditional dance and urged me never to perform with the groups. In the beginning I thought that what they disliked about traditional dance was the sexuality or immorality of it, especially since the mother consistently used the word "dirty" in referring to it (*ngoma ni chafu kabisa*; *ngoma* is very dirty). One day, however, we were invited by some of their high-class friends to a Burundian cultural party where Burundian traditional dance was on the programme. This was a very different dance from the south Tanzanian *ngoma*, with the main features being graceful arm-movements by the girls and jumping by the boys. Mother and daughter could not refrain from giggling, and for days afterwards they caricatured the dance for the whole family to laugh at. This dance could not be blamed for being immoral or dirty, so the Lyimo's dislike of it must simply have been because it was traditional and old-fashioned. I think this is the core of what they despise about *ngoma* too. Another thing that supports this view is that they in no way were negative towards the so-called "Stage Shows" performed by young girls in scanty clothing to the tunes of Zairean pop music (the shows were banned in Tanzania in the 70s because of their "pornographic" character). The Lyimos had these shows on video, and the whole family enjoyed them. I commented that the dance in many ways resembled *ngoma*, to which they said: "Yes, but this is to *music*." In Swahili the word *muziki* denotes music played on modern instruments, while *ngoma* is used about traditional music.

For people like the Lyimo, traditional dance can never give national sentiments or work as a national symbol. *Ngoma*, to them, represents remnants from a primitive life, a life their own ethnic group left long ago. To the son of the house, Peter, *ngoma* symbolized primitiveness so strongly that he used the "lack" of *ngoma* among the Chagga as a "proof" of their racial difference. The Chagga, he said, were not bantu. At a Chagga wedding in Dar es Salaam, however, I saw relatives of the couple performing a traditional dance in a circle, holding hands and jumping rhythmically. That Peter (and other Chagga) should claim that they have no *ngoma*, reveals the degree to which *ngoma* has come to denote the erotic dance styles of the south.

In countries where the creation of a national culture was more successful than in Tanzania, the reified culture may not have been any more representative than in the Tanzanian case, but the nationbuilders in these countries were more lucky in their choice of symbols. They managed to find symbols that a majority of the population could identify with, often by

a process where the symbols first were adopted by the elite and later embraced by the commoners as well.<sup>11</sup>

In my research proposal, believing that the views expressed by Nyerere in his inaugural address were commonly shared among the educated, I suggested that members of the African middle and upper class would use traditional dance in its national form as an idiom in their wish to establish a complementary culture to their Western counterparts. The commercialization of the traditional dances, however, resulted in only the dances of certain areas being performed (those preferred by the multi-ethnic audience). This was one reason why Nyerere's vision of a cultural revolution, a cultural revival involving national pride in traditional dance, did not succeed. The southern dances may *entertain* people, but as long as they represent a stigmatized area, and are seen as basically indecent, they cannot function as a symbol of national pride – least of all for members of the upper classes.

### **Project “National Culture” abandoned**

I never heard or saw the concept “National Culture” in use in Tanzania during my fieldwork. The concept no longer forms part of the discourse in the country. After a life in glory during the first decade after Independence, with frequent newspaper articles calling on the citizens to “reclaim the National Culture” and attacks on people who dressed in a decadent, Western manner, etc, the first sceptical voices began to be heard:

Heaps of things have been said ... about “our culture” save what really it is. There have been battles against short and tight skirts and trousers, cosmetics and the Masai traditional dress. (...) (V)ery few attempts have been made to explain to us what type of culture we ought to have (*The Standard*, 16 November 1970).

Since independence Tanzania has been trying hard to tackle the problems of her culture. The reason is clear: a nation without a culture, a nation robbed of its culture, is a nation without a soul. (...) But let it be said that very often our attempts to re-create and perpetuate our own culture have been limited to fragmented actions to develop this or that aspect of Tanzanian culture. There has been no programming geared to the nation as a whole and whatever there has been, it has been usually limited to the

<sup>11</sup> In Norway, for example, the local culture that was re-codified to represent the national culture was the inland culture of the south (Berggreen 1994 [1989]). During the later years, there has been a campaign to perpetuate the neglected “coast culture”.

development of ngomas. (...) An important seminar on culture is currently going on at the University College, Dar es Salaam. It is to be hoped that one of its tasks will be to find a definition of Tanzanian culture (*The Nationalist*, 4 March 1970).

Critics wanted a definition of what the Tanzanian national culture was to be – but there was no easy solution to this problem. In 1962 the Ministry had hit on traditional dance as one of the few traditions that they felt could represent the country. In a book evaluating the TANU leadership up to 1974, the authors of the chapter “TANU and National Culture” criticized the central place of *ngoma* in the cultural policy, as this had led to the belief among many people that the dance *Sindimba* and the concept “culture” were synonyms:

(If you ask a primary school boy what *utamaduni*, culture, means the answer will almost certainly be: *Sindimba*, – a traditional dance which apparently is the favourite of school-masters, even though when performed out of context, as it is in schools, it borders on obscenity (Mbuguni and Ruhumbika 1974:276).

When I asked the employees of the Ministry of Culture and the National Arts Council about national culture, they denied its existence, or said that it was Swahili. The idea of *creating* a national culture had undoubtedly been abandoned. However, among the artists themselves – those called upon by the authorities to perform the national culture – the great majority confirm that there *is* a national culture (see Table 2 below).

Table 2  
“Is there a Tanzanian national culture”

	Yes	No
Muongano Cultural Troupe	83 %	17 %
College of Arts performers	100 %	
College of Arts theory teachers and students	57 %	43 %

Two artists, one from Muongano Cultural Troupe, and one from the College, simply repeated the old slogan of the Ministry of Culture from the 1960s: “We should perpetuate the culture of Tanzania” (*Tudumishe utamaduni wa Tanzania*). This phrase is used in countless *ngoma* songs. Some of the artists defined the national culture as the various arts of

Tanzania, a definition used by the authorities in the early years after Independence:

**Muongano artist 32:** *Yes. Wood-carving, plaiting, ngoma.*

**Muongano artist 32:** *No. Every ethnic group have their own ngomas.*

**BCA artist 21:** *Yes. There is ngoma, traditional music and traditional acrobatics. What I do is Chinese acrobatics, but Bugobogobo (a Sukuma dance) is traditional acrobatics.*

**BCA artist 29:** *Yes. It consists of traditional culture which again consists of traditional dances and traditional music.*

**BCA teacher 38:** *Yes. Each ethnic group has its own what we may call culture; dances, songs, etc.*

**BCA student 25:** *Yes, we have such a thing and it consists of developing things which are performed on stage and all artistic work. The National Arts Council plays an important role.*

**BCA artist 39:** *Yes, somehow. Some of the traditional dances are very common. Sindimba, Masewe, Mganda wa Kikutu and Mangaka are performed in many regions. They have been introduced by the National Dance Troupe. It influenced the artists to have varieties of traditional dances.*

Others had a more anthropological understanding of the concept, a line introduced by the authorities and press<sup>12</sup> from around 1974, and used in school textbooks, etc.:

**BCA theory teacher 40:** *Yes. Our customs. How to welcome people, how to greet, to make things with the hands. And the nature of the culture itself, like that girls can not wear short skirts, grown-ups not shorts etc.*

**Muongano artist 34:** *Yes. Our origin. Our thoughts and ideas, even what we eat.*

**Muongano artist 36:** *Yes. In total it's those customs and traditions.*

**Muongano artist 35:** *Yes. The traditional African customs. The Mdundiku (a Zaramo dance) makes the Zaramo happy.*

**BCA artist 29:** *Yes. The state of the nation. What the people do from they wake up in the morning till the night when they go to sleep. To cook, to dance, to read etc. If you compare to Norway;<sup>13</sup> there it is*

<sup>12</sup> An example from Daily News 22 April 1974: "Culture embraces a whole spectrum of our national life, aspects as varied as food, clothing, housing, sports and the arts. If we seek a lasting national identity we must tackle all these singly and jointly."

<sup>13</sup> This artist had toured Scandinavia with the Bagamoyo Players.

*obligatory that the husband cooks, here it is only the woman. That's culture, we can't do the same as in Europe.*

**BCA artist 33:** *Traditional customs, history.*

**BCA artist 29:** *Yes. To plait the hair, how to dress, cooking, plaiting, peace, and the national language.*

**BCA artist 52:** *Yes. If you come here from Kenya you will see that there is a difference. And if you talk with me and another person we will say the same thing, that's unity.*

**BCA theory teacher 45:** *Yes, it consists of typical dishes, way of dressing, and taboos.*

The academically trained — students and theory teachers at the College — are the ones who most deny the existence of a national culture. Among the students, one fourth of those who answered yes to the question stated that national culture consisted of the national language only. Among the teachers who answered yes to the question, several emphasized language and lack of tribalism:

**BCA theory teacher 46:** *Language, some customs, political thinking, religion.*

**BCA theory teacher 40:** *Swahili language and national history.*

**BCA theory teacher 41:** *Freedom in beliefs, peace, lack of tribalism.*

Four respondents directly expressed the problems of creating a national culture in a multi-ethnic nation with ethnic groups living on both sides of the various national borders:

**Muongano artist 33:** *I don't know. The carvings and ngoma are from the Makonde. It is the artists themselves who are national.*

**Muongano artist 40:** *No. There is original culture, not national culture. That is two different things. The nation is the government, they have the National College (College of Arts), for example, for the whole nation. The traditional culture of Bagamoyo is something else.*

**BCA artist 42:** *We are reviving the Tanzanian culture. We try to show the foreigners our culture. The Masai don't want to wear Tanzanian dress. They don't leave the Masai way. We are grateful that they are still there, it helps us. You can say that they are Tanzanian Masai.*

**BCA student 21:** *That's a tricky one. Sindimba is also Mocambiquean, and the Mganda wa kimande (the Mganda dance of Mande) exists on both sides of the border. There is no difference, nothing national for Tanzania. And the Masai live in Kenya as well. Language is a part of*

*culture, but then the origin of Swahili is not here. In Kenya it is the mother-tongue of many people, but not here, they just learn it. Still, if you tell someone that Swahili is Arabic, they will beat you.*

No one mentions particular persons in connection with national culture, as might have been the case in Europe, where authors and composers are seen as central carriers of the national culture. *Ngoma* was mentioned by many of the artists as forming part of the national culture, but none of them stated any *specific* dance as more national or important than the others during the interviews. During an informal conversation, however, a senior college teacher labelled Msoma the national *ngoma* (*ngoma ya taifa*). The drum-beat of the Msoma is played on the radio every day as a signal before the news; it is in the consciousness of every Tanzanian. The average man or woman in the street does not know of which *kabila* (ethnic group) it is, and he may not really care to know, but he certainly knows that it is Tanzanian.

When one of the foreign students at the College of Arts asked his drum-tutors to teach him this beat, they refused. They would happily teach him all other traditional rhythms, but did not want this special one to be taken out of the country by foreigners. They further advocated its uniqueness by claiming that only 2-3 persons in the whole country knew how to play it properly (it is played on a large number of drums at the same time). Another fact that shows the special status of this dance is that it is commonly used to start performances. The College of Arts performing in Germany, or Muungano Cultural Troupe on tour up-country, both use this dance as their first item.

The national overtones and the "difference" of this dance are further communicated by *not* wearing the customary African "*ngoma*-costumes" (*kangas*, or uniforms made by African *kitenge* cloth). For this dance, and only this one, the groups dress in neutral Western-style clothes in the national colours: green skirt and green blouse for Muungano (see plate 1), green skirts and yellow T-shirts for the Police group. This way of dressing for the Msoma was first introduced by the National Dance Troupe, and it has been adopted by the other groups to the extent they can afford to get these special costumes made. Note that the colours used, green and yellow, can symbolize the nation or the Party, or alternatively, as probably is the intention, the two simultaneously. The party flag, as mentioned earlier, is green with an axe and a hammer in yellow, while the national flag has blue and black in addition to green and yellow.



The songs of Msoma, not surprisingly, support the national message, though some phrases from the original context are kept here and there.<sup>14</sup>

*The College of Arts version:*

Kilongo we	Kilongo
Kalale	Please sleep
Aeeeh!	Aeeeh!
Rasilimani ya mnyonge	The oppressed people
ni umoja	Their capital is unity
Wote tulime mashamba kwa umoja	Let us all farm the fields in unity
Wote tulinde taifa kwa umoja	Let us all guard the nation in unity
Rasilimali ya mnyonge	The oppressed people
ni umoja	Their capital is unity
<i>Ulole mwana lelo Zaina</i>	<i>Look after the baby Zaina</i>

*The Makutano Dancing Troupe version:*

Kilongo we	Kilongo
Kalale	Please sleep
Aeeeh!	Aeeeh!
<i>Walile walile</i>	<i>Hurray, hurray</i>
<i>Liwayawaya liwayawaya</i>	<i>This is a celebration</i>
<i>Walile walilele</i>	<i>Hurray, hurray</i>
Bendera ya chama	The party flag
Inatupendeza rangi ya kijani	We like the colour of green
Halafu kuna jembe	And there's a hoe
Tena kuna nyundo kwa wafanyakazi	And also the worker's hammer

I asked a Ngoni friend, himself an artist, if he agreed that Msoma was a national dance. He answered that it was a Ngoni *ngoma*, not a national *ngoma*. After some thought he said that the drumming might be national, since everyone knew it and did not know that it was Ngoni, but the dance itself was not national. Apart from the college teacher mentioned above, who called Msoma the national *ngoma*, none of the artists or cultural bureaucrats with whom I was in contact ever talked about any of the dances as national dances, it was always the *ngoma* of such and such *kabila*. How is it then when Tanzania is to present herself abroad?

<sup>14</sup> See chapter one for the Muungano Cultural Troupe version.

As discussed earlier, national symbols are not only created to play a role at home, they are also symbols to the outer world of the unity and value of a given country. Tanzania's cultural bureaucrats have realized that the idea of building a national culture on the many ethnic dances did not work out, but they can still use dance as a symbol to the outside world. The problem of whether to present the traditional dances as ethnic or national was discussed by some of the college artists before a trip to Germany in June 1992. The festival they were invited to was called "Roots of Dance", and the leader of the group had been asked to submit an information pamphlet on the background of the dances. The leader found it natural to state which ethnic groups the dances originally were from, but when he told the other artists this, some of them protested strongly, saying that what they were to present in Germany were dances from Tanzania, and that there was no need to specify them ethnically as they were there to represent the whole country.

When the commercial groups announce their program in Dar es Salaam for a local public, the common way is to say things like: "And here our friends the Ngoni bring to us the Lizombe" (even if everyone knows that only the lead singer is a Ngoni). The ethnic aspect is by no means undercommunicated. The artists know that many people among the audience have come there to be reminded of their home places. In a discussion on the use of Swahili contra local languages, one of the Muungano dancers said:

*I think it is nice to sing local languages. The person whose language it is becomes satisfied and feels as if he's at home.*

And similar views were expressed by a drummer of the same troupe, when talking of culture:

*The meaning of culture is that I as a Makua, can play a Nyamwezi ngoma in such a way that the Nyamwezi who have bought tickets feel happy, feel that this is like it is at home.<sup>15</sup>*

I was curious to find out the background of those who attend the cultural shows, so in my interviews with the audience, I asked them about their ethnic origin, their place of birth, and where they had their primary schooling. On the basis of ethnic self-ascription, I found that 28 per cent

<sup>15</sup> Makua is an ethnic group in the very south, close to the Mozambiquan border, while the home area of the Nyamwezi is in the north-west.

were people from the Eastern Zone (most of them Zaramo, the original inhabitants of the Dar es Salaam area), the remaining 72 per cent came from various up-country regions. Unfortunately I have not been able to find recent statistics on the make-up of the Dar es Salaam population as a whole, but even if there has been large-scale immigration to the city I doubt that the immigrant population can be as high as 72 per cent. According to 1968 figures,<sup>16</sup> only 35 per cent of the Africans in Dar es Salaam belonged to up-country ethnic groups, so if the figures have not changed substantively since then, immigrants as a group are heavily over-represented at cultural shows. To call the Dar es Salaam dwellers who do not belong to eastern ethnic groups 'immigrants' may seem inappropriate when one knows that many of them have lived in Dar es Salaam for generations, but the fact is that the large majority of these people *do not* regard Dar es Salaam their home. When you ask someone where he/she comes from, a common answer is "I live in Dar es Salaam, but my real home (*nyumbani kabisa*) is such and such". Close ties with the home village and the relatives there are maintained and it is self-evident to everyone that a person should be buried at home, not in Dar es Salaam, even if his/her closest kin is living there. If we define an immigrant to Dar es Salaam as a person who has moved to the city after he/she has passed childhood, my material still confirms that the audience consists largely of immigrants: 69 per cent of the spectators had their primary schooling in another place than Dar es Salaam. One conclusion we can draw from these figures is that there is reason to believe that the people who come to see traditional dance are often immigrants to the city who do this as a way of cultural maintenance or revival in the urban context.

<sup>16</sup> Swantz 1968:3.

Figure 3  
Regional origin of Dar es Salaam population (1968)

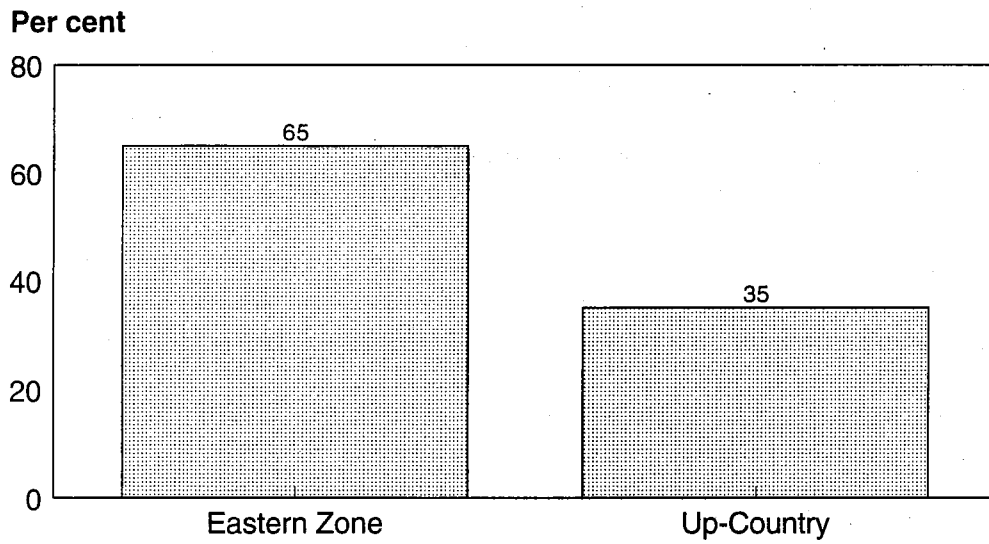
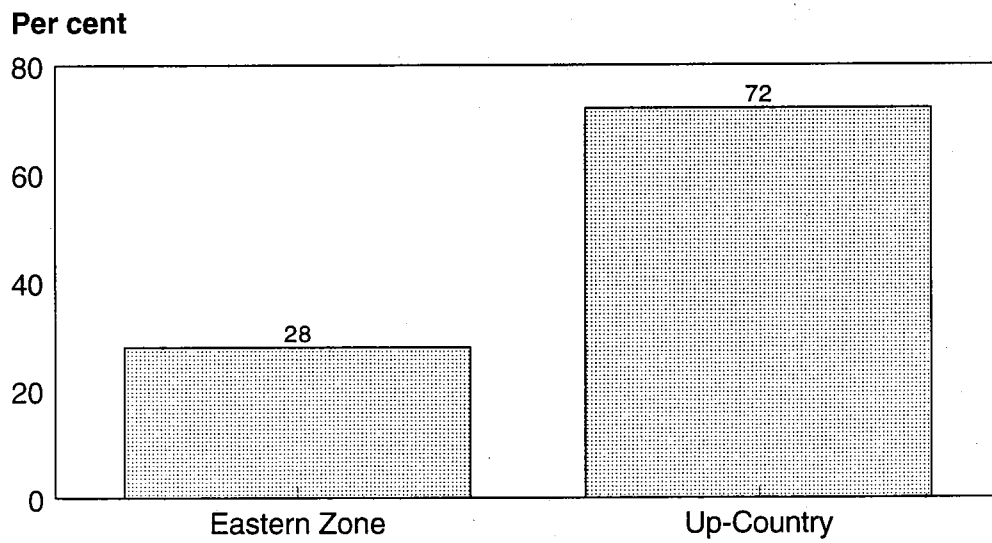


Figure 4  
Regional origin of audience at Cultural performances



When members of the audience were asked which cultural troupe was their favourite, and why, several respondents said that they preferred a certain group because that troupe performed “their” dance:

*Sukuma/Ngoni woman 30: Muungano. I like it very much because of the way they dance our ngoma from home. They dance it really well.*

*Jita man 25: JKT (the National Service group). I like this group because they dance ngoma from our place.*

*Mwera man 30: Muungano. I like it because they often dance ngoma of my ethnic group.<sup>17</sup>*

The goal of the cultural policy after Independence was to create loyalty to, and identification with, the nation. Now, thirty years later, the nationalized dances in the commercial setting actually do the exact opposite for some of the onlookers. The shows have become a way for these urbanites to remember their rural home and revitalize their *ethnic* identities rather than the national. Ethnicity is a touchy matter in Tanzania and the subject is virtually a taboo matter in public debate. Since Independence, clubs and institutions on an ethnic basis have all been illegal (Swantz 1968:5), and this has probably added to the decline of non-commercial performances in Dar es Salaam. For some people, the cultural shows may be one of the few opportunities they have to experience the performing arts and sentiments of the ethnic group to which they belong.

## Conclusion

The starting point of this chapter was President Nyerere’s desire to create a national culture and to help his people “regain pride” in their own culture. In his Inaugural Address, he rhetorically asked his audience: “How many of us can dance or have even heard of, the Gombe Sugu, the Mangala, .... or Lele Mama?” implying that the new cultural policy would bring forth a new situation in this regard. It did not. The educated elite today may watch *ngoma* as it is performed by governmental or commercial troupes, but seldom or never do they dance traditional dances themselves. Non-artists do not even know the names of the most common “national” dances — not

<sup>17</sup> The owner of Muungano is Mwera, as are seven of the thirteen male dancers and drummers.

in Dar es Salaam, where the national/commercial groups usually perform, and even less in the countryside where they occasionally go on tour.<sup>18</sup>

There has been no popular "folk dance movement" in Tanzania. All the groups dancing national dances are either governmental or commercial. Widespread popular participation is, among other things, hindered by the fact that many people, rather than having pride in traditional culture, despise it. This was expressed by a man during an interview at a cultural show:

*There are big problems here in Africa. Like here in Tanzania people despise art and artists and look upon art as the work of hooligans. This attitude make people give up, for instance when someone who wants to learn ngoma is told that it is a thing of hooligans. The surprising thing, however, is that the very same people who say this like the art from other countries like America and Europe. It looks like the art that they oppose is the African one.*

This man is referring to people like the Lyimo (presented under *The cultural revolution goes commercial*), who have just that sort of attitude that Nyerere had hoped to change. Other people I met did not despise ngoma as such, but felt that it was meaningless taken out of its original context. A middle-aged, well-educated man originally from Mbeya in the South-West put it this way:

*Ngoma is everywhere. It is nothing special any longer. It used to be for special occasions only, festivals and feasts, but now it is every day, it's too much. It's O.K that we should have a culture too, but this... They try to take something of the past into the present. To me, it means nothing.*

Ngoma as an invented tradition, as re-ificated *culture*, did not function as a symbol for this man, nor does it for the majority of his fellow citizens. Why did the act of "taking something from the past into the present" not function in Tanzania, when it apparently worked well in 19th century Europe?

<sup>18</sup> The audience at cultural shows were asked during the interviews to name the dances they had heard of. Most mentioned ngomas from their own ethnic group, some mentioned Sindimba. No other national dance was named. One of the teachers at the College of Arts told me that when he came home (Mwanza region), there was "no one there who had heard about Ukala" (one of the most famous nationalized dances, originally from Tanga region).

Sinding-Larsen, who has done a study of the development of Norwegian folk music and dance from the era of nationalism (1814) up to contemporary times, suggests that folk-culture cannot really work as national culture until it has died as a living culture in the local societies (Sinding-Larsen 1983:67). The bourgeoisie of Norway, at the same time as perpetuating their national version of peasant culture through painting and selected folklore (oral literature), suppressed the right of rural students living in towns to speak their own dialects and to enact their own culture (1983:83). The traditional dances gave the nation-builders a head-ache, as they were connected with "sinful" celebrations involving alcohol; moreover, they had too many local variations to be nationally integrative. The solution did not come until 1902, says Sinding-Larsen, when a dance-style called *Sangdans* was brought from the Faroe Islands and given mediaeval lyrics collected in Norway (1983:95). This dance was sufficiently far from any living traditions to fulfil the task of a national culture.

In Tanzania, *ngoma* was still very much alive for the larger part of the population when the nationbuilders tried to transform it. It was, and still is, performed in ethnic contexts in a form that the bourgeoisie finds improper. We could say that for *ngoma* to fulfil its national task, the nation-builders did not transform it *enough*. Had they used traditional dance-styles in an abstracted "ballet"<sup>19</sup> with lavish costumes and made the erotic elements into an exotic garniture, not the main attraction, as the commercial groups have done, then the higher classes *might* have had a different attitude towards it.

Traditional dress – a hot issue in the "Masai Campaign" – has now died out for most ethnic groups and so it has become an object fit to represent Tanzania on postage stamps. Stamps presenting "Traditional Gogo Dress" were introduced in 1989. A little less than thirty years had then passed since Gogo dress was banned:

The dances of the Wagogo belong to the finest dancing and music one can find in East Africa. (...) All the dances of the Wagogo may be a thing of the past soon because a law has been passed by the local Ugogo Council in 1960 banning the traditional dress of the Wagogo. Before that thousands of Wagogo tribesmen used to come every year to Dodoma and

<sup>19</sup> In the West African countries of Liberia, Guinea and Senegal, performances of the national dance troupes are labelled ballet (Dorsinville, 1970:36). The reason for this is probably to make the dance complementary to European high culture. These countries have spent far greater resources on costumes and professional training for their national troupes than Tanzania has.

dance with their long, stylized hair and with their bodies painted with red ochre (Kubik, n.d.).

When I travelled in Dodoma region in 1992, I did not see one single person wearing traditional dress. The ban, which has probably been lifted now, had done its work. Interestingly, the stamp with Gogo traditional dress did not seem to be produced for tourists sending postcards home, as the value (3 Tsh.) is for inland mail. The massive undercommunication of ethnicity which the leaders thought necessary in the early years after Independence, has gradually been relaxed as the nation has consolidated.

In the 1960s, expressions from ethnic contexts (dances) were presented as national. However, in order to play this new role, they had to be substantively transformed, first of all by being linked to political songs in Swahili. In the 1990s, another cultural expression belonging to a specific ethnic group — traditional dress — could represent the nation, and this time without transformations. With the theory of Sinding-Larsen in mind, however — that a local culture needs to be dead before it can serve national purposes — it is significant that it is the Gogo and not the Masai<sup>20</sup> or Barabaig who appear on stamps. The Masai to a large degree still use their traditional dress, and the Barabaig people have recently come in conflict with the authorities of the nation state.

I have titled this section “Traditional Dance as Symbol and Vehicle in the Nation-building process”. Of course, *ngoma* was never presented as a referential symbol, like the flag, the Uhuru Torch or the national emblem. These symbols were all created fresh and anew for the new nation, and they were national variants of something that all nations have. By contrast, *ngoma* was a symbol of a very different character and was meant, I will argue, to work at a different level of consciousness.

In the beginning of this section, I quote Mazrui who says that the ultimate goal of the nation-building policies of the new states in Africa has been “the creation of a supratribal/supraethnic loyalty to a national homeland”. I think that the decision to nationalize *ngoma* was an attempt by the leaders, consciously or unconsciously, to take over the very *content* or *essence* of ethnicity as it was experienced by the people and themselves. According to Jerman, who has studied ethnic versus national identity in Bagamoyo District, folk evaluation of *kabila* “stress that the most important component of *kabila* is *ngoma*, and the boundaries of the *nchi* (country)” (Jerman 1980:42).

<sup>20</sup> The British used Masai on their East African stamps before Independence.



British territorial units had to a large degree corresponded to ethnic boundaries. After Independence, they were abolished. The policy of sending officials to work in other areas than their own, has already been mentioned. In addition, secondary school students were recruited from all over the country for each school, and dormitories were explicitly to be ethnically mixed. By the help of these efforts the territorial aspect of *kabila* would cease to exist, and a national orientation take over, it was hoped. By nationalizing *ngoma*, the authorities likewise hoped to create a feeling of *kabila* which would correspond to the nation, not to an ethnic group or region. As I have showed, the attempt was not successful. A Chagga girl told me that she liked watching *ngoma*, but not to participate herself. "I don't feel it (*sisikie*), because I didn't grow up with it" she said. The 'official *ngoma*' in schools and at national feast days had not given her the sentiments which people get from participating in *ngoma* in their home-villages.<sup>21</sup>

The authorities did not succeed in transforming *ngoma* from the ethnic to the national sphere, but the idea of doing so may not have been that far-fetched. Eriksen has showed how football in Trinidad, which had often been ethnic in character, gave rise to great nationalist sentiment when Trinidad participated in international matches. He writes:

This indicates that the wider, nationalist identity offered by national sports teams operates in the same spheres of relevance as important aspects of ethnic identities, and that this informal, highly emotionally-charged form of nationalist symbolism may therefore replace ethnic symbolism in the fields of question (Eriksen 1993b:10).

*Ngoma* in Tanzania is ethnically defined to a much larger degree than sports in Trinidad, so a national transformation proved unsuccessful. It did not take long, however, before the Tanzanian authorities realized that sports may have a greater potent for arising national sentiments than traditional performative arts. This was reflected in the governmental funding given to sports compared to arts. In the period 1980-85, for example, "more than half the funds geared towards cultural development were given to sports activities" (Lihamba 1991:273).

Eriksen explains why sports, religious feasts etc. — what he calls informal nationalism in civil society — often mean more to people as national symbols than does the formal nationalism represented by the state:

<sup>21</sup> This conversation took place at a Mwera initiation *ngoma* in a Dar es Salaam suburb.

Contrary to the national symbols and practices associated with the state, such as the flag, the national anthem and the national mottoes, sports competitions, *liming*, Divali and other informally constituted cultural institutions have firm roots in the immediate experiences of people, and can therefore more easily contribute to the production of shared meanings (Eriksen 1993:11).

The informal nationalism that Eriksen talks of is informally constituted. The desire of Tanzanians for meaningful national symbols, however, has made governmental institutions experiment with ways of creating modern symbols which are intended to involve the people as active participants and thus their emotions, as in the examples given by Eriksen from Trinidad and Mauritius. In 1992, the National Arts Council was engaged in a project to create a national dance-style (*mtindo ya kitanzania*) to go with modern pop-music based on traditional tunes and rhythms.<sup>22</sup> This dance-style would, if successful, be *ethnically neutral* and *modern*. These are, as we have seen, the very two qualities that *ngoma* has lacked and which seem to have prevented its broad adoption as a national symbol.

The fact that national identity and national symbols enjoy high esteem among Africans, now as at the time of Independence, was reflected in a conversation I overheard between a Tanzanian and a Nigerian at a party organized by African students in Bergen. The latter, dressed in a beautiful West African outfit, asked the former ironically: "Why are you wearing Western clothes at an African party? Don't you have a national dress?" The Tanzanian student was not bested however, he knew he had something which the other did not. He answered with pride: "We don't have a national dress, but we have a national language."<sup>23</sup>

Swahili was inaugurated as the national language in 1967. It is used as a teaching language in primary schools and often unofficially in secondary schools as well. It is understood and spoken by everyone, also the Indian merchant minority, who generally are criticized for not being willing to integrate. In August 1992, I was surprised to hear an unusual song played on Radio Tanzania. The pop-melody had a typical Indian instrumentation and way of singing, but the words were praising "Our land Tanzania" (*Nchi yetu Tanzania*) in unmistakably Indian-accented Swahili, and the song

<sup>22</sup> The most popular pop music in Tanzania at the time was Zairean pop-music, accompanied by various Zairean dance-styles (Kwassa-Kwassa etc.).

<sup>23</sup> Implying that English, the colonial language, was not a real national language in any African country.

ended with strains from the national anthem. After the song, the announcer commented; "How lucky we are to have one language in our country!"

The unifying power of an African national language has been crucial to the remarkable political stability with which Tanzania has been blessed. The stability and peacefulness of Tanzania are often mentioned by Tanzanians, especially when they compare their country to Kenya. The fear of tribalism and the disastrous conflicts that may result from it, has made people adhere to the official policy of relegating ethnicity an under-communicated subject; it has also made them sceptical to current moves towards a multi-party system. For the majority, their ethnic identities have not been in conflict with loyalty to the nation-state. This goes also for families like the Lyimo, where the members almost daily tried to convince me of the superiority of their ethnic group compared to the others in the country. They were supporters of the ruling CCM party, saying that the other parties would not care for the poor, people less fortunate than themselves. I once suggested to the 25-year-old son of the house that ethnic conflicts *might* emerge in the new political situation. He answered me with passion: "No, we are one, it's not like in Kenya."

During my stay in Tanzania I would occasionally meet young people who stated simply that they had no *kabila*, and I think there will be more people like them in the years to come. There has been a large degree of inter-marriage in Tanzania, especially after Independence, and some people may trace descent from eight or more different ethnic groups. The major disintegrating force at work in Tanzania today is not mainland ethnic groups opposing each other, but the possible breakup of the union between the mainland and Zanzibar — a political conflict with economic as well as religious overtones. The leader of one of the newly formed opposition parties,<sup>24</sup> Reverend Christopher Mtikila, calls himself a *Tanganyikan*. He argues that Muslim Zanzibar has nothing to contribute to the union economically, the islands are just parasites on the mainland, the population there enjoying privileges that the mainlanders do not have etc. He further wants all Indians, Arabs and Somalis to leave; according to him, they "steal the country" (*wanaiba nchi*).<sup>25</sup> Mtikila is a true nationalist, but not in the sense Nyerere and the other leaders after Independence hoped for. The nationalism of Mtikila and his like is not held up by pride in reified

<sup>24</sup> The party, Democratic Front has not yet got the official approval as a legal party (March 1995), but it is, according to an informant, the opposition party with the largest following.

<sup>25</sup> Indians are said to take their profit out of the country, depositing it in foreign banks, so that it does not contribute to the national economy.

traditional culture or other national symbols, but by the creation of a separatist nationalism that defines its enemies within the present nation.

Tanzania's cultural policy after Independence did not succeed in establishing a national culture, but the commercial side-effect of the policy grew into a viable urban popular culture, and it is developments of performance in this new context that will be our subject in the coming sections.

### 3 The effects of commercialization and nationalization on traditional dance

#### Introduction

We saw in section 2 that the nationalization of traditional dances has now been abandoned as a nation-building strategy by the authorities, and that commercial dance-troupes were formed in the early 1980s as an unplanned side-effect of the aspirations of the leaders, having a repertoire of mainly erotic dances from the south. Here I want to go a little deeper into some of the changes which the dances brought about when they were transferred from a local to the national context. Leaving aside fields like instrumentation<sup>1</sup> and detailed analysis of choreography, I will focus on the change of songs and the sensualization of dance movements. Developments in these fields determine, as we will see, the degree to which dance is successful as entertainment for a multi-ethnic, urban audience. I will also discuss the social status<sup>2</sup> of artists as experienced by themselves. This theme is not directly connected with the main argument of this section, but the low social esteem of artists was such a striking feature of the Tanzanian art scene that I do feel that it needs some elaboration.

#### The fate of the dance-songs

Not only the content and language of the songs were changed when they were to serve political purposes, but also the form. Whereas the old songs often used figurative language, were humorous and had a narrative structure (Songoyi 1990:23) the new ones were less poetic. The role of the new songs was not so much to entertain or give aesthetic pleasure, as to help build socialism. The political songs propagate the government policies with

<sup>1</sup> Songoyi discusses instrumentation in his work *Commercialization, Its Impact on Traditional Dances*. He writes that the groups tend to use the same kind of drums for all *ngoma*, and that the drummers sometimes mix up the beats of different *ngoma* (Songoyi 1988:35-36).

<sup>2</sup> Social status is not used here as an anthropological concept. The words refer to the lexical meaning, ie. social esteem/rank.

a minimum of literary techniques. They are easy to understand for anyone who knows Swahili. The traditional songs, in contrast, can often be fully appreciated only by members of that specific ethnic group or locality. This is not due only to the use of local languages. Such songs often build on oral literature like proverbs and local myths, and a full understanding presupposes familiarity with this literature. In other cases the songs do not have their themes from specific oral literature, but figurative language is used to communicate words of wisdom. This is the case in the Sindimba song below by a non-commercial group in Mtwara (Makonde):<sup>3</sup>

*Mumba woo*  
*Uyahike ngongolo*

*That spear*  
*You have lost it*

*Nancheta akamwi ng'uku paluvala*  
*watepanawe*  
*Kwiyo, kwiyo, kwiyo, kwiyo*  
*Watepanawe*

*The fox has caught a chicken*  
*in the courtyard*  
*Kwiyo, kwiyo, kwiyo, kwiyo*  
*In the courtyard*

The first stanza is a way of telling people that "You don't always get what you want." In the second, the fox is used as a metaphor for people who have a habit of doing bad and evil things, like theft. Other songs use subtle language to hide from children their real meaning. An example is the final stanza of the Makutano Dancing Troupe's version of Lingokwa (Makonde):

*Namkogoya akule kwetu akule anyoke*  
*Nyapule aliulele mwene*  
*kupweteka nanga*  
*Akule kwetu akula*

*In the swing over there at our place*  
*Nyapule hurt herself*  
*but she doesn't feel the pain*  
*Over there at our place*

The swing is here a metaphor for having sex. That the girl was hurt indicates that she had been a virgin. A song like this is compatible with the erotic movements of the dance. In most cases, however, the erotic dances are accompanied by political songs so that song and movement express completely different things: they are no longer an integrated whole (see also Songoyi 1988:34).

All the songs above are in local languages. Swahili dance-songs are almost without exception of the political type presented in section two. The only dance where the groups have carried on the original and creative style of communication using Swahili is Lizombe. This dance is, together with

<sup>3</sup> As in the introduction, the songs in Swahili are reproduced in normal typing while the use of italics means that the song is in the language of the ethnic group indicated.

Sindimba, the most popular dance with the audience, as we have noted. The lead-singer is usually a Ngoni as he<sup>4</sup> is supposed to sing in a characteristic voice which is difficult for non-Ngoni artists. In the villages the songs were improvised story-telling and a way to criticize in a humorous, informal way. There is no fixed arrangement of the stanzas, and it is up to the singer to decide which of them he wants to perform. The singing is done in-between sequences of dance. The Lizombe songs are long; the stanzas below are selected from the repertoires of Muungano Cultural Troupe and Makutano Dancing Troupe:

Curli Kiti imeleta mzozo  
 Mimi natoka kazini  
 Nimepata mshahara  
 Sasa narudi nyumbani  
 Nimepanga bajeti  
 Hizi hela za kula  
 Tumekaa siku tatu  
 Amekuja shoga yake  
 Wamechukua curli Kiti  
 Imevunja nyumba

Curly Kit has brought quarrel  
 I leave work  
 I have got my salary  
 I come home  
 I plan a budget  
 This is money for food  
 After three days  
 Her girl-friend comes  
 They get themselves Curly Kit  
 It has destroyed our home

*Vasikana valelo kwa viandika  
 barua iyoyo ulolile venavahinu  
 vihonga na vakohano*

*The girls of today are crazy  
 They write lovely letters  
 to their parents-in-law  
 and even give them presents*

Usoma kweli kuna faida  
 Kaka Azmani kachaguliwa  
 Akasoma marekani  
 Aliporudi kaendelea  
 anasema kizungu  
 aliniambia "how are you"  
 Nikaleta machungwa  
 Kaendelea akaniambia  
 "give me some water"  
 nikabaki kucheka  
 Kusoma kweli kuna faida

Education is useful  
 My brother Azmani was selected  
 He studied in America  
 When he came back  
 he continued talking English  
 He asked me "How are you"  
 I brought him some oranges  
 He carried on:  
 "Give me some water"  
 and I kept laughing  
 Education is really useful

<sup>4</sup> The lead-singer is traditionally a man, since this is a men's dance. All the commercial groups dance it with both sexes. The group Tanzania One Theatre has a female lead-singer, since there is no male Ngoni in the group.

Msililie kupendwa  
Kupendwa kuna hasara  
Hasa miaka dunia imechafuka  
Umekuja ugonjwa unaoitwa ukimwi  
Ukikataliwa  
Mungu anakulinda wee

Don't crave for love  
In love there is injury  
Especially these days, because  
a disease called Aids has come  
If people refuse you  
It means God is taking care of you

*Kitendawili*

*Tega*

*Kutega na kutegua*

Unajiona mnene

Heti hutaki kuzika

Wenzako wanaumwa

Unakwenda kwenye pombe

Unalionga jeneza mwenzangu unajificha

Mwenzangu ujijue kifo

hakina mwenyewe

*I want you to listen*

*We are listening*

*To ask and to be answered*

You are boasting that you are fat

But you don't assist in burials

When other fall sick

you go to the bar

When you see a coffin you hide

Mind you

Nobody knows his own day

The songs above show that the artists have managed to continue the tradition of using Lizombe as a sarcastic way to comment on current events also in the urban setting. "Curly Kit", so humorously criticized in the first song, is a brand of hair-straightening where the hair is rolled afterwards. This hair-do was immensely popular among Tanzanian women in 1992, but the men complained over the expense and the bad odour from the hair which often resulted. Questions were also raised whether African women should treat their hair chemically to change its nature, and advocates of African pride were strongly against it. Curly Kit was the theme of one of Muungano's most popular *taarab* songs too, where the male singer puts it this way: "Things these days have changed upside down and cosmetics are doing strange things. One day I was walking I saw a lady coming. From afar she looked like a half-caste, but when she got close I was puzzled to see that she was a local Zaramo."<sup>5</sup> The choir answered him: "Curly Kit has brought wonderful changes." The song was met by roars of laughter from the audience, and crowds of people would run up to give the singer money — among them girls who had undergone Curly Kit treatment themselves.

Song number two, as well as the last one, both reproves the "modern" behaviour of people who do not care about the traditional social rules of conduct. Traditionally, a Ngoni girl should avoid close contact with her parents-in-law. According to a Ngoni informant, the second song suggests

<sup>5</sup> Main ethnic group of Dar es Salaam.



that the girls today behave towards their parents-in-law the way they do towards a lover, thus implying that they may even want sex with their father-in-law. The last song is opened by phrases used in Ngoni storytelling (free translation). This may be a way for the singer to communicate that he is about to present a serious message concerning the morals of society. Well to do, selfish people are the target of criticism.

In the song about education, the usefulness of formal education is questioned and the person who boasts of his knowledge of English is ridiculed. This may be seen as popular resistance to the government's propaganda of the advantages of education, and if interpreted in that way, it is the closest that any of the dance-songs I heard came to political protest. Despite its role as a broadcaster of satire and critique, Lizombe was *never* used to comment on political issues or to criticize blunders made by political leaders. The only group that had a stanza with political content in their Lizombe was The National Service group, and their message was neither critical nor satirical:<sup>6</sup>

*Zili hoi zili hoi zili hoi  
Zinghanga zinghanga lelo*

*Hurray, hurray,  
Celebration celebration today*

*Zura nipele mwana wangu  
Nipakatile*

*Zuhura give me my child  
I want to hug him/her*

*Februari tano  
Mwaka sabini na saba  
Kilizaliwa chama  
Chama cha mapinduzi  
Mwinyi, Kawawa  
Tangulieni mbele*

*The fifth of February  
The year seventy seven  
The Party was born  
The revolutionary party  
Mwinyi, Kawawa  
You lead*

*Mama Biti Chimamula hoiye  
Kukaya kwangu hoiye*

*Daughter of Chimamula, hey  
We know that you are bad, hey*

The only song I found with a political content which was not direct praise of the Party and the Party leaders was the Village Museum version of Lingondo (Makonde), where there is a little stanza commenting on the introduction of multipartyism in the country:

<sup>6</sup> Mwinyi is the President of Tanzania, Kawawa is Deputy Chairman.

*Ngupeleke Tanzania hee*  
Hiyo ni kweli  
Tukavione he!  
Vyama vingi vya amani he  
Hiyo ni kweli

*Let me take you to Tanzania hey*  
Is it true?  
We will see!  
A peaceful multipartyism  
Is it true?

Even this song, however, is a support of the system as it has been up to now, with the CCM party as the only alternative. Why are the songs silent on controversial political issues?

The Tanzanian scholar Songoyi, in his masters thesis "The Artist and the State in Tanzania" (Songoyi 1990), presents the story of two traditional singers, their role in the independence struggle and their very different destinies afterwards. One of them, Mzee Mwinamila, was made a modern "court-singer" at the party headquarters. Under the protection of President Nyerere himself, he could sing highly critical songs (few laymen heard these songs, however). The other, Mzee Kalikali, did not have the same protection and was critical in his songs at a very early stage after Independence. The leaders of the new state were security-conscious. "Any divergent idea was considered to be an opposition to the government... A number of legislations (*sic.*) were passed by the legislature to limit the freedom of the individual" (Songoyi 1990:159). In September 1962, the Preventive Detention Act was passed which "empowered the President to detain any person conducting himself so as to be dangerous to peace and good order ... and the detention order was not to be questioned in any court" (Songoyi 1990:160). In 1964, Kalikali sang a song called "Slavery has not ended":

*Ukwitawala twitawalile  
 A bana Tanganyika  
 Nghana twitawalile  
 Bakulumbaga witawaji  
 Abo bali na milimo mitale  
 Abo balipandika magana  
 Buli ng'weji buli ng'weji  
 Al'abalimi ba buluba  
 Nduhw' iyakupandika  
 Litingag' ili busese  
 Ililima lyingile  
 Tubyulima buluba  
 Buguji bushike  
 Guchel' umpango  
 Tuliginya sumba Ng'wana Mbagule  
 Ming'wana gakwigutaga  
 Kulola ha sa kwesa  
 Na kumigija mu shitambala.*

*We have really got independence  
 The people of Tanganyika  
 Truly we are independent  
 They are giving thanks to independence  
 The ones with big jobs  
 The ones who earn hundreds  
 Month after month  
 But the growers of cotton  
 Have nothing to gain  
 Slavery has not ended  
 As the planting season comes  
 The price falls  
 Son of Mbagule  
 We are fattening other people  
 They are really eating  
 Looking at watches is their only job  
 And blowing their noses  
 With handkerchiefs*

(Songoyi 1990:57-58)

After this song, Kalikali was given a warning by the local and district leaders, but he continued to compose critical songs, among them the following;

*Ba divisheni  
 ng'waginya madako  
 Ba Eliya  
 ng'wakuja madako  
 Ng'waginyiwa sinza wibi  
 Bulimakanza ng'wakomiga banhu  
 Twitoleyagi  
 Jingi ng'walya*

*Division secretaries  
 your buttocks are getting fat  
 Area commissioners  
 your buttocks are getting fat  
 You are growing fat  
 Because of the stolen money  
 All the time you tell people  
 To contribute heartedly  
 You eat some of the money*

(Songoyi 1990:61-62)

This song was the last straw that made the leaders have Kalikali arrested and detained. After two months, he was released by an order from the President. The detention proved an effective way of silencing Kalikali's criticism. After his release, he changed the content of his songs, making them compatible with the Party ideology, in the idiom of praise-singing. In 1979 he was awarded a radio from the party leaders as a sign of appreciation of his songs.

According to Songoyi, the experiences of Kalikali are typical of what other singers have had in Tanzania (Songoyi 1990:11). It is therefore scarcely surprising that political criticism should be absent from the songs of the dance groups. They employ self-censorship on controversial matters, and praise the Party and its leaders in order to win goodwill. The goodwill of the authorities may even lead to trips abroad, a thing which most Tanzanian bands and cultural groups dream of. In October 1992, a delegation from the Norwegian State Foundation for the Nationwide Promotion of Music (*Rikskonsertene*) visited Tanzania in order to find a band for a joint musical project in Norway and Tanzania. Their programme was arranged by the Ministry of Culture and Education and the National Arts Council, and representatives of these institutions accompanied the Norwegian delegation. After their visit to Muungano Cultural Troupe, Chenga, the owner of the troupe, told us proudly: "You see? We help the government and the government helps us." I doubt that any group which might have been politically critical would have been included in the above-mentioned programme.

Even more important is the role of governmentally run Radio Tanzania as a gatekeeper for the distribution of music in the country. Up to 1993 there had been no private or independent radio-stations in the country, no TV broadcasting in the mainland and hardly any recording studios outside Radio Tanzania. The Muungano Cultural Troupe has had three ngoma-songs on the radio, two of those three were praise-songs.<sup>7</sup> The radio has a special programme for educational songs every morning where choruses and bands from all over the country sing songs about working hard for the nation, avoiding HIV, the dangers of alcohol etc. The first opportunity for unknown groups to be heard on the radio is to compose a song that fits this educational profile. Bands playing modern music often make their songs in two versions: one for the radio and one for the beer-halls.<sup>8</sup>

Close to three-fourths of the songs I collected from the professional groups are in Swahili or in a mix of Swahili and a local language. Apart from Lizombe, the songs in Swahili are, purely political, as indicated in section 2. The remainder are traditional songs adopted from village groups. Literature has traditionally been transmitted orally in Africa; this is how dance-songs are taught and learned in contemporary society too, in

<sup>7</sup> Chikocha, Msolopa and Lizombe, all recorded in 1986.

<sup>8</sup> The musician Remmy Ongala is famous for his satirical songs which often include political critique. He is clever, however, to always balance these songs with songs that praise certain political leaders or the nation in general (eg. the songs "Mrema" and "Dodoma" on his 1992 release "Mambo" on Real World Records.)

commercial dance-groups as well as at the College of Arts. In the multi-ethnic situation, however, this oral transmission has a weak point. Artists who do not know the particular local language will pass the song on in their own personal interpretation. After the song has gone through a few such transmissions, it may be completely incomprehensible to a speaker of the language which the song originally was composed in. One specific case where I have been able to document this process is the Ukala dance, originating from the Zigua people. Ukala was nationalized and popularized by the National Performing Troupe and it is performed by eight of the eleven groups studied.

*Original version:*

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| L: <i>Mdimi mdimi nakugambila</i>    | L: <i>Herdsmen, herdsman I tell you</i>     |
| C: <i>Ziya kudya kwe nyika oo ee</i> | C: <i>There they are, at the wilderness</i> |
| <i>Ziya kudya kwe nyika aaa</i>      | <i>There they are, at the wilderness</i>    |
| L: <i>Sidimile kwe isalaka</i>       | L: <i>I didn't graze them nearby</i>        |
| <i>Sidimila kwe inyika</i>           | <i>I grazed them at the</i>                 |
| <i>Kuno hadima</i>                   | <i>wilderness</i>                           |
| <i>Kuno nasangula</i>                | <i>skinning while grazing</i>               |
| C: <i>Ziya kudya kwe inyika oee</i>  | C: <i>There they are at the wilderness</i>  |
| <i>Ziya Kudya kwe inyika aaa</i>     | <i>There they are at the wilderness</i>     |
| L: <i>Naukalae na ukala ndima</i>    | L: <i>Hunting, hunting is difficult</i>     |
| C: <i>Naukalae na ukala ndima</i>    | C: <i>Hunting, hunting is difficult</i>     |
| L: <i>Akomile mwanikile</i>          | L: <i>Roast the meat for the person</i>     |
| <i>na ukala ndima</i>                | <i>who has killed</i>                       |
| C: <i>Akomile mwanakile</i>          | C: <i>Roast the meat for the person</i>     |
| <i>na ukala ndima</i>                | <i>who has killed</i>                       |
| L: <i>Mbili mbili chidye ndala</i>   | L: <i>Let us round up and rejoice</i>       |
| <i>na ukala ndima</i>                | <i>while eating together</i>                |
| C: <i>Mbili mbili chidye ndala</i>   | C: <i>Let us round up and rejoice</i>       |
| <i>na ukala ndima</i>                | <i>while eating together</i>                |

(Maguluko 1991:56-57)

The transcription and translation of the song is taken from the thesis "Continuity and Change in Traditional Dances" by Frank Maguluko. It is the fourth of seven songs which are used in the Ukala ritual, a ritual performed to appease the ancestral spirits. "In every performance the seven songs open the ritual, and they are sung in a framed order" (Maguluko 1991:54). All the groups I have seen perform Ukala use this song, but the

order of the verses and the way they pronounce the words vary considerably from this original version. They are often interpreted in a Swahili idiom. The Tatunane, Muungano and College versions below can be used as examples. The texts are taken from their own handwritten song-books. The songs have been noted down after undergoing a series of oral transmissions. The wording is unintelligible to Zigua speakers and does not give any meaning in Swahili either, even if some of the words have been transformed to pure Swahili.

*The Tatunane version:*

*Zindimile kwai salaka  
Zindimila kwai salaka  
Kununa ndima  
Kununa sangula jee ooo*

*Naukala eee naukala ndima  
Mbili mbili kidye nyama  
naukala ndima —huuu  
Akomile monikile  
Ndyaukala ndala —huuu  
Usizione zikadya  
naukala ndima —huuu*

*Milimili kije nyema  
na ukala ndima  
Kuno hadima kuno nasangula  
Dijeku dwanga nyika oye  
Dijeku dwaga nyika eee*

*Mdimi mdimi Ooyee nakwambia  
Huu mdimi le ooo nyika oooyee  
Huuuu mdimi leo onyikaahie*

*The Muungano version:*

*Naukalae na ukala ndima  
Sekuona sikaja na ukala ndima  
Akomile mwandikile naukala ndima  
Milimili kije nyema  
na ukala ndima*

*The College of Arts version*

*Mdimi mdimi oye nakwambia  
Udimileo nyika oye  
Udimileo nyika eee*

*Sidimila kwa isalaka  
Naukala ee naukala ndima  
Mbili mbili chidwenyama  
Naukala ndima  
Akomile mwanikile naukala ndima  
Usizona zikadwa naukala ndima*

As mentioned above, the song used by the groups is the fourth of seven songs in the original ritual. Songs one to three are sung by the leader to prepare the participants for the ritual and to ask Seuta, the main ancestral spirit, to be calm. The religious content of these songs may be the reason why they are not performed out of their ritual context:

*Tambala, tambala chiwaze nkoba  
Mna chiwaze na mnungu  
Seuta kagone  
we mzimu kagone*

*Sit, sit let us think of the medicine But  
we should think together with God  
Seuta sleep  
You spirit sleep*

*Nachagachaga eee*  
*Nachagachaga sione ntogo*  
*Mzimu kagone nione ntongo*  
*Mkwazu eee Mkwazu*  
*Kale na kale ndiyo fikilo*

*I am wondering*  
*I am wondering I didn't sleep*  
*Spirit go and sleep so that I sleep*  
*Tamarind eee tamarind*  
*For ages has been our stop over*

(Maguluko 1991:56)

The artists performing Ukala do not know the exact meaning of the words they sing, but they know that the songs are about hunting. The dance is usually performed as a dance drama, starting by two to four men miming a hunt in the woods, accompanied by a characteristic drum beat. When the successful hunt is over, they call the women to come and collect the meat, and the women then enter the stage singing the songs. In the case of other dances, however, the artists may be totally ignorant of the content of the words they vocalize.

The teacher of Makutano Dancing Troupe was among the helpful artists who wrote down the songs of his group for me. When I asked him for the meaning of the Mawindi song that he had just written, however, he said that he did not know. It was in Nyaturu, and they had learned it a long time ago, he had forgotten what the words were all about. The logical connection between the dance-movements of the dance and the literal meaning of the song is thus broken – as is the case when a song praising the Party is composed to go together with an erotic initiation dance.

In some traditional dances the movements carry just as much of the communicative load as the song itself. The movements and the songs are meant to reflect each other, as with the version of Mganda wa Kikutu taught at the College of Arts:

*Yaya gwe yaya gwe yaa*  
*Aye nanwana mumbi*

*Yaya gwe yaya gwe yaa*  
*The big bird took*

*Yem Bondo leleleya*  
*Yem Bondo kalasala*

*Bondo leleleya*  
*Bondo had a loss*

*Mwalimu kasema*  
*Tutimize wajibu wetu*  
*Kasema leo tutimize*  
*Tutimize wajibu wetu*

*The Teacher said*  
*Let us fulfil our obligation*  
*He said let us fulfil*  
*Fulfil our obligations*

*Kujitegemea!*

*Self-reliance!*

The Kutu song (the first two stanzas) tells about Bondo who lost his crops to a big bird. The movements corresponding to the first stanza express sadness, the dancers crossing their arms in front of the chest and letting their head rest on one of their shoulders. In the second stanza, the dancers are somewhat aggressive, moving their arms alternately up in the air. When I was taught this dance at the College of Arts, however, we were never told the meaning of the Kutu words in the two first stanzas. Neither were we instructed that we were to dance a sad man in the first part of the dance, and then to represent a big bird flying away.

I asked the students doing the regular Diploma course if *they* were told the meaning or background of the dances, and they said no; only if someone asked specifically. The history or meaning of the dances was never told as a regular part of the course. These students, after graduation, get posts as Cultural Officers in the districts around the country (whose jobs are to promote cultural activities and to supervise/teach local groups) and as teachers of governmental dance groups like the one at Village Museum. Their knowledge — or lack of knowledge — of the origin of the dances is thus spread to other groups and artists. The result will be groups all over the country knowing national dances which have been deprived of their original meaning, and whose movements and words often have little or no connection. I discussed this problem with one of the employees at the National Arts Council who formerly had been a teacher at the College. He regretted the situation and said that he too had reacted negatively to it. He suggested the lack of academic training as the reason why the dance teachers did not give their students any background information.

The songs were traditionally a central part of the *ngoma* event (see for example Janzen 1992:9), but several of the characteristics have been lost when the urban, commercial groups perform today. First, traditionally, “a song was considered good because it effectively employed imagery satire and irony” (Mlama 1983). Apart from Lizombe, none of the songs in Swahili carry on these literary techniques. Second, the ability of the songs to criticize is greatly reduced. Not only the political critique is gone, but also the local gossip in the songs, the social control that made people think twice before they broke social taboos in fear of having their name and their bad deeds broadcasted to the whole village. An example is the Lizombe song *Daughter of Chimamula; we know that you are bad* rendered earlier. This song is taken from a village; it has nothing to do with anyone in the urban audience. As long as the commercial groups move around the city with their shows, they cannot know the local community well enough to produce such rebukes.



Needless to say, the medical and religious and role of songs is also gone with the commercial performances. Rituals are often characterized by formalized acts of speech (Bloch 1989:25) and the performance of songs where non-specialist participants may not understand the words. Examples are given by Rekdal, writing about the Iraqw of northern Tanzania (Rekdal 1991:166), and by Turner describing the ritual life of the Ndembu (Turner 1967:24). This ritual situation, nonetheless, cannot be compared to the modern performances where the audience or artists similarly do not understand the words of some of the songs. The ritual frame gives participants a religious experience of the words even if they may not know their literal meaning.

Since the songs no longer are essential parts of the dances in the commercial performances (Lizombe is a rare exception), a shift in interest has developed, whereby the dance-movements themselves carry a larger part of the entertainment value than they used to do. This development seems to have come as an early result of commercialization. Songoyi, studying the commercial groups in the early 1980s came to same conclusion;

In the present situation, (...) it has become no longer necessary for the songs to have any meaning. There is nobody among the audience who wants (needs) to hear what a dance song is saying. To most people, movement is all that matters (Songoyi 1988:37 [1983]).

### **Sensualization of movements**

With commercialization, there has been a shift in interest, towards dance-movements, at the expense of the lyrics. The movements which entertain the multi-ethnic audience are the erotic ones, as noted in section 2. The result is that the groups perform mostly southern dances, especially Sindimba and Lizombe. Of the 42 performances I saw with Muungano, there was not one single show without one of these two dances or both. Their central place in *ngoma*-entertainment is further reflected by the repertoire of the CCM group Tanzania One Theatre (TOT) which was started during spring 1992. This group had only three dances: Sindimba, Lizombe, and another sensual Makonde dance called Limbondo.

The popularity of hip-swaying dances leads some groups not only to prefer dances which have these movements from the outset, but also to modify the dances that originally do not. An example is the aforementioned Ukala. In the dance drama, the women come to collect the meat from the game which their husbands have hunted in the woods. They enter singing

the songs, and then sit down on their knees, miming the movements of putting meat into their baskets. The way the College of Arts and Muungano Cultural Troupe dance it, the emphasis is on the arm-movements, the rest of the body softly bouncing. When they have finished, they put the baskets on their heads and rise to a signal from the drums.

Having seen the dance being performed in this way many times, I was surprised to see both the Bagamoyo Cultural Youth group and the Kiubata group dance it with vigorous hip-movements at the point when the women are on their knees. A friend from Tanga, the region where the dance originates from, was with me when I saw the Kiubata group perform. She told me that this was not the way the Zigua dance it themselves. "They have added this to increase the sweetness (*utamu*<sup>9</sup>) of the dance", she said. Judging from the movements of the girls, the dance was no longer a dance about hunting and food, but more in the category of initiation and fertility dances. Ironically enough, the Kiubata group comes from Tanga. This fact made a fellow on-looker, an employee of the National Arts Council, insist that what they were performing was the *original* Ukala; it was the other groups who had got it wrong.

The idea that *ngoma* is equivalent to dancing with the hips has become widespread in present-day Tanzania. In section 2 I presented the reactions of the female members of the Lyimo family to Rwandian traditional dance. I asked the son of the family what he thought of it, and he answered: "This is not real *ngoma*, if you compare with what Muungano does, this is nothing." What he missed was the hip-movements. Many of the artists also seem to believe that hip-movements are the essence of *ngoma*. During my fieldwork, Muungano Cultural Troupe were recruiting new dancers to the group. Four girls aged between 16 and 20 years were being trained, as well as the anthropologist. When we were learning Ukala, our teacher, who was a Zigua, complained that the trainees overdid the hip movements. The girls had problems in refraining from what they believed the audience would like, and the teacher finally told them; "This is *not* Sindimba, stop that wriggling!" The same problem occurred with the Msewe dance from Zanzibar. Chenga, who was watching the lesson, told our female teachers that they danced too vigorously with their hips, and that people from Zanzibar would not like it.

In other cases, however, Chenga instructed us to act sensual and not to be shy: "Watch the audience. Look at them in such a way that some of

<sup>9</sup> *Utamu*, sweetness, is not only used to describe the pleasant taste of food. Food and sex stand in a metaphorical relation to each other, and the word *utamu* has strong erotic connotations.

them might think *does she want me?* And someone may even come to you after the show. But you yourselves will know that this is just your work." At lessons at the College of Arts we were told to look at the audience too, but the latter request was unheard of. Sindimba danced in the College-style has nothing of the erotic character it has when groups like Muungano dance it, and it is also less sensual than the dances I saw performed by the non-commercial Makonde youth groups. The school, being a governmental and serious institution, plays down the erotic aspect.

Another way of adding excitement is to choreograph for both sexes a dance which originally has been single-sex. This is the case with the above-mentioned Msewe and with Lizombe. Lizombe used to be danced by men only in the traditional context. The role of the women was to cheer on the dancers who did well. All the groups in Dar es Salaam that I saw perform Lizombe, however, gave performances where both men and women were dancing together. Muungano, in their version, had two couples coming back to the stage after the actual dance was finished. These two pairs would do solos which climaxed with the woman dancing so vigorously with her hips that her partner would fall backwards and end up with the girl on top of him, the audience screaming with surprise and delight. Lizombe, originally danced by young men who concentrated on the foot-movements (Lihamba 1985), has in its Muungano Cultural Troupe version become a commercial winner by crossing the line of common decency.

That commercial audiences prefer erotic dances is beyond doubt, but do they watch and "read" these dances in a different way than audiences at traditional performances? I did not attempt to discuss this question with anyone among the audience, but I did ask someone who has himself written a thesis on dance, and who is now working at the Ministry of Culture. I told him that my anthropological training had taught me that such dances were about fertility, and that the traditional interpretation of them thus was in that idiom, not in that of sex as such. The man laughed and said that he thought people had always seen the dances as erotic. Blacking, however, writing about a highly sensual female initiation dance of the Venda in Zambia, strongly argues that "the music and dance are not meant to be sexy":

Each performance of the dance symbolizes sexual intercourse, and successive performances symbolize the building up of the fetus, for which regular intercourse is thought to be necessary. The music and the dance *are not meant to be sexy*: they symbolize the mystical act of sexual communion, conception, the growth of the fetus, and childbirth (Blacking 1973:80, my emphasis).

I do not know whether any of the Tanzanian dances have had similar functions, but it does not seem unlikely. However, the commercial framework would appear to remove any such connotations, helped by the male dancers who often cry out their allegedly unsatisfied sexual desire in order to make the audience laugh. Some of the dances taught during the initiation rituals of southern ethnic groups are instructions on how to have sexual intercourse (Johansen, forthcoming). These initiations are surrounded by considerable secrecy, but members of other ethnic groups in Tanzania still have an idea of what the initiations imply. Some men from these other groups prefer initiated girls for their special skills,<sup>10</sup> while others — the members of the Lyimo family for example — find such rituals primitive and indecent.



*Plate 12.* Solo part of the Lizombe dance. The solo part culminates with the girl falling on top of the man.

<sup>10</sup> One of my informants told me that her boyfriend had left his wife, who was from his own ethnic group, Pogoro of Morogoro, in favour of herself. According to her, he liked her better because of the special sexual skills which she had learned during her Makonde initiation, knowledge which was not taught as part of the Pogoro initiations. Another informant, when commenting on the relationship between a European man and a Tanzanian girl, claimed that what the man liked about her was not her looks, but the "African things" she had learned during her initiation.

No matter what the attitude, dances from the south are highly linked with sexual practice. By dancing erotic dances in public, the dancers display their own sexuality. For men, this does not affect their social esteem negatively; for women it does, to the degree that they are seen as next to prostitutes. This brings us to the next subject: the social status of artists.

### **Artists and their status**

Artists are generally a disparaged group in Tanzania. Especially the women are looked down upon, and the commercialization which leads to performances like the one just described (solo part of Lizombe) no doubt adds to the negative conception of female artists. This negative attitude is felt even by the artists at the College of Arts, where the erotic aspect is very much played down. I asked the artists at the college if there were any difference in attitudes toward female artists compared to male:

*Woman 31: Female artists are degraded in people's eyes. They say: "What is she..."*

*Woman 29: When it comes to women many people say: "They are prostitutes, bad women, they get drunk." But if they call me a bad woman I know it's just my profession.*

*Man 29: People think that the women have a bad character, that they are bad women.*

*Man 46: It is less expected for a woman to become an artist and rather frowned upon for her to be an actor, acrobat, musician or dancer.*

*Man 41: There are those who look upon female artists, especially in commercial groups, as prostitutes.*

*Man 25: It is believed that those women involved in artistic work are prostitutes. But this is a wrong interpretation. Also women themselves are not able to abolish this wrong attitude.*

*Man 39: The audience think that the women are prostitutes. The way they present the art, they make the audience think that they have to do this so as to earn money. This idea comes from the artists themselves, especially the commercial groups. The way they present themselves make people think...*

*Man 23: I would not mind seeing my daughter dance, but others would, they would forbid her. They don't understand, they will think she is just doing immoral idling, and what will it help them.*

One of the female teachers had this to say about her family's reaction to her being an artist:

*Woman 21: My brothers and sisters are positive, my father is negative. He doesn't like ngoma, it's prohibited. He was very angry when I joined the College and he has still not seen me perform.*

The College has music, theatre and traditional dance as its main subjects. During their third year, students choose one of these fields to major in. It has been hard to get enough students to major in dance, however, and nearly impossible to get girls for that class. One girl told me that her father understood her wish to become a musician, but he did not want her to dance. In autumn 1992, Muungano Cultural Troupe performed at the College. While the group was doing their Lizombe, one of the students, Fatuma, asked me whether the girls in the group were married or not, indicating that she had some doubt about whether dancing erotic dances in public could be combined with marriage. Both she and the other students admired the skill of the Muungano dancers in dancing with the hips (*kukata viuno*), and asked me whether they had taught me that too (as mentioned earlier the College artists do not dance this way). I asked Fatuma if she would have taken work with a group like Muungano. She answered me with emphasis: "No, I could never" (*siwezi*).

The girls at the College generally aspire to do office work, as cultural officers. Many of the boys are also negative to the idea of working in a commercial group because of the low status and pay. Four earlier graduates, however, started their own dance group, Tangoma, as a part-time occupation in addition to their jobs as cultural officers. They were fortunate in getting a promising contract with the largest hotel in town, which would give each of them three times their governmental wage, and that for only two performances a week. The problem was that none of their female friends from the school wanted to join the group. They finally had to "hire" girls from two of the commercial groups.

Flora, who graduated from the college together with the Tangoma artists, was employed as a full-time teacher of the dance group at Village Museum in Dar es Salaam. The girls of the group are about her age, or a little younger. When I watched rehearsals, she would dance with them, but she told me that she never danced during performances. I myself was asked by a woman from the audience of Muungano whether I was married and if my parents were still alive.<sup>11</sup> People do seem to believe that a girl dances in public either as a result of loose morals, extreme financial need, or a combination of both. People in urban areas know that being a dancer in a commercial group is a specialized profession, but in the rural areas the idea

<sup>11</sup> The dance I had performed was Msewe from Zanzibar, a rather innocent dance.

that the dancers are also prostitutes seems to exist. During the tour of Muungano Cultural Troupe to Mwanza region, two of the women of the group were asked by men from the audience to spend the night with them for money.

Five of the nine women artists of Muungano Cultural Troupe are married to or living with a male artist in the group. In a radio-programme discussing the problems artists face in Tanzania, an actress from Mandela Theatre Group said that it was hard for the girls to have a man outside the group because every now and then they would have theatre-roles where they sat close and were "kissing" their male counterpart and so on. If their husband or boyfriend who was not an artist sat among the audience and saw this, he would feel unhappy and jealous (Radio Tanzania, 14 November 92). It is not uncommon for a man to ask his girlfriend to quit her work in the cultural group if they are to marry. Even men who are artists themselves may be sceptical to marrying an artist. Half of the male artists at the College said they did not want to marry an artist, whereas none of the women were negative to the idea of marrying a male artist.

If the social costs are so high for the women dancers, what are the incentives for those who *do* choose to become professional dancers after all? The stories of two Muungano dancers, Amina and Lily, can help us to answer that question.

Amina is 21 years old. She was born in Lindi, the core-area of the Tanzanian Makonde, to a Mwera father and a Makonde mother. At the age of around 11, she was in the bush together with other girls of her age learning to dance the characteristic hip-movements of the Makonde. They stayed there for two months. Later, when she had her first menstruation, she was secluded in the house for three weeks. She was then taught how to take care of herself when she had her monthly period and she was told that no-one should ever know when she was bleeding. People with evil intentions could use her blood to destroy her ability to conceive. She was also taught how to have sex with a man, and how to detect if he carried any venereal diseases.

In addition to this traditional education, Amina completed seven years of primary school. After finishing school, she stayed at home, but almost every night she rehearsed or performed with the dance group and chorus of the local bank. One night the members of Muungano Cultural Troupe saw her when they were in Lindi on tour. They liked her dancing and her characteristic way of ululation (*kupiga geregere*<sup>12</sup>). They asked her to join their troupe, and Amina who was then 17, happily agreed. When I asked

<sup>12</sup> Cheerful sound made by women during ngoma and celebrations.

her why she had left Lindi, she simply said that the conditions were not good there. She has now been with the group for 4 years, and has not been home since she left. "The wages are not too good" she says, "but it is important to have a job, so that those back home in the village will not think that I'm in town just staying with men."

Amina truly enjoys her work as an artist. She says that she loves *ngoma* so much that on Mondays when they do not perform, she will dance Lizombe by herself in her room till she sweats heavily. The only days when she does not like to perform is when she has outbreaks of malaria. There is no other profession she would rather have, and she would not stop dancing even if her boyfriend asked her to. About the future she says; "When I get old and don't have the strength any more, I will go back to the village to farm." Amina is considered to be the best female dancer of the group. Once a man of the audience commented on her dancing to me by the words: "Look at her, she must be from down there, she is a *mwenyewe* (someone whose dance it is). That is what they learn when they are inside."<sup>13</sup>

Lily is 32 years old and a Mwikizu from the Mara region in the north, not far from the Kenyan border. She finished her primary school in 1977 and stayed at home, farming, for five years. She then decided to go to town. Her mother was dead and the family was extremely poor. The family gathered enough money to send her to Dar es Salaam, where she stayed with an older brother, looking for work. She saw an advertisement by the newly started Muungano Cultural Troupe, and applied for a job as a dancer. She had never danced *ngoma* before, but she got the job and was instructed by the teachers of the groups. She later started singing *taarab* and to act as well. She is a very good actress; and as a senior artist of Muungano, she is entrusted with some of the economic administration of the group.

By getting her own job, Lily earned enough to be independent of her brother. At present she is caring for two daughters of her sister (who is still up-country) in addition to her own son. Compared to the conditions she came from, her standard of living has improved, but she still has to fight to make ends meet, especially since the father of her child has abandoned her. She does not dislike her work, but she would not hesitate to take any other job that might be better paid.

Amina and Lily are different in that one of them "was born into" dance while the other started her career as a dancer by accident. What they have in common is that this was their first paid job, and that they have stuck to

<sup>13</sup> The word *ndani*, meaning "inside", is commonly used to express initiation, as the girls in this period are secluded in the house.



it. Only one of the thirteen women employed with Muungano Cultural Troupe has had a paid job before, while *all* the men have had previous employment. Marja Lisa Swantz, who has studied a Zaramo community outside Dar es Salaam, states that young women “do not have the same income earning opportunities as men” (Swantz 1986:13). Becoming a dancer may thus be one of the few opportunities for girls without higher education. I also think that by choosing to become a dancer – which implies that they will have to perform erotic dances in public – the women are taking a more dramatic choice in their life-career than the men. Their identity as dancer becomes imperative; it means more to people than whether they are Christian or Muslim, or whether they belong to this or that ethnic group. As long as they are dancers, they do not make suitable wives. An employed woman or a woman with promising job opportunities in another field would probably not elect to become a dancer because of the social risks described above.

To what degree the artists feel that they lose social esteem by their job choice differs considerably from Muungano Cultural Troupe to the College of Arts, as is revealed in Table 3 below:

Table 3

“How are artists ranked by the general public?” Artists’ opinion		
	High	Low
Muungano women	14 %	86 %
Muungano men	25 %	75 %
College of Arts – performing women	67 %	33 %
College of Arts – performing men	95 %	5 %
College of Arts – theory teachers	6 %	94 %
College of Arts – students	19 %	81 %

The majority of the college performers feel they have high status, while the Muungano artists say that their status is low. In both groups there is a gender difference, as the women feel that their status is lower. College performers probably believe that their status is high because the alternative occupation for most of them would have been unskilled labour or farmers. Now they are titled college teachers. The university-educated teachers compare themselves with a completely different group, and thus feel that their own status is low, as expressed by one of them:

*Man 39: Low. It is not a "high rank profession" like that of doctors or engineers.*

The Muungano artists do not compare themselves with other professions, but some of them mention that the low status of artists is something special for Tanzania and Africa:

*Woman 26: In this country, an artist is a person of very low status indeed. I have heard that in other countries the artist is a respected person...*

*Male dancer 35: Tanzanians say: "Artists are people who did not get other work."*

*Male dancer 35: Many Tanzanians see us as of low status. That is because they don't see the progress.*

*Male drummer 32: Here in Africa generally low. Something like an empty soft-drink bottle. You only remember it when you want another soft-drink.<sup>14</sup> But when we travel abroad it's a little bit better. In Guinea, Nigeria and Ghana the artists have high status.*

*Male dancer 36: Low. It's the very lowest work. They say it has no meaning. I think that since Independence people have thought that it was better if their sons said that they would play football than to dance ngoma. But you people put matters of art high. With us it's just entertainment and then we get something to eat.*

Judging from what the last informant says, the esteem of *ngoma* has decreased after Independence. He says that people rank football higher: this may be due to an idea that football is "modern" while *ngoma* represents the old and out-dated. As mentioned in section 2, the authorities too, who at the outset promoted traditional dance, now seem to rank football higher: "(T)he credibility of the minister responsible for culture hinges on convincing promises about sports performance, especially football" (Lihamba 1991:273). But the disparagement of performers of art is also likely to be a result of the commercialization of the performative arts. Artists have become a specialized group. From the information I have, no-one could make a living solely from dancing or playing drums before Independence. Artists would always be engaged in subsistence production in addition, and apart from getting free food and beer, any payment would be quite symbolic. When someone is paid for what they are doing, the act

<sup>14</sup> It is common practice in Tanzania that customers must bring an empty bottle when they buy a take-away soft-drink.

will be seen in a totally different light, and that is, I suppose, especially so for the women.

The commercialization of *ngoma* in Dar es Salaam, and the negative conception of female artists that has resulted from it, seems to have affected also the non-commercial groups performing in the traditional sphere. In the Msasani area right outside the city centre, there is a large Makonde community (many of them Mocambiquan immigrants). Almost every weekend there are several dance-groups performing under the large mango tree in the village, and I was there to enjoy it several times. I noticed however, that there were two to three times as many boys in the youth groups as girls. I do not believe that this is the way it has always been. Knowing what people think of the female Muungano dancers performing less than a kilometre away, the Makonde girls refrain from joining the local dance group in fear of losing their respectability.

### **Traditionalism and modernization: Artist and audience view**

A chapter on the effects of nationalization and commercialization on traditional dance would be uncomplete without a presentation of the reactions of the artists and their audience to the result of these processes. Among the organizations and individuals who presently patronize folk dance in Scandinavia today, the ruling ideology has been that traditional dances should remain as unchanged as possible. Reference to "tradition" has become a way to legitimate actions within the fields of folk dance and music, and this is what the concept *traditionalism* expresses (Blom 1993:12). In Norway, the dances have become "frozen" or standardized at the stage of development they were at in certain communities around the turn of the century. These authorized versions of the dances have then been taught to people all over the country by the folk-dance organizations, creating a new kind of tradition – the course-tradition (Velure 1972).

The closest we come to this situation in Tanzania is the work of College of Arts. Students at the College learn the dances as the National Performing Troupe once choreographed them, and through their later work as cultural officers and teachers of governmental groups (National Service, Village Museum etc.) they spread stereotyped versions of the "national" dances Bugobogobo, Mawindi, Masewe, Mganda wa Kikutu, Ukala and so. I was surprised, however, at the great variety among the commercial groups. The groups make their own individual versions of the dances, to the extent that it may be very hard to identify a performed dance by the movements, not to say the song. The identity of a given *ngoma* lies in the rhythm, the drum-beat. The choreography and the songs (words as well as melody) may

be changed freely, but the core-rhythm may not be altered, lest the *ngoma* become a completely new one. John M. Janzen calls this the “distinctive rhythmic pattern” of each *ngoma* (Janzen 1992:126). He further credits Blacking for tracing “this feature to the place of rhythm in the very distinction between song and speech” in the Bantu languages.

In contrast to the ideology of the enthusiasts of folk-dance in Scandinavia, the architects behind the nation-building project in Tanzania did not have as their major goal that the traditional dances should be conserved without changes. On the contrary, certain changes were obligatory if the dances were to fulfil their national role:

What are called tribal dances now should be transformed into national *ngomas*. They must be made to belong to the people as a whole. With a national language – Kiswahili – at the nation’s disposal, this should not be difficult to do. The singing can be done in Kiswahili while the dancing can remain in original tribal style (*The Nationalist*, 10 November 1967).

As we have seen, the dancing did *not* always “remain in original tribal style” when the song was changed to Swahili. The lack of first-hand cultural experience or theoretically acquired knowledge about the dances on the side of the artists inevitably makes a national performance of a given *ngoma* a very different spectacle than an ethnic performance. A natural question to ask here is how people react to seeing their own dance being performed by an inter-ethnic group. The only spontaneous reactions I heard on this issue were both very negative. When I analysed the questionnaires from the audiences of commercial groups, however, I found that 70 per cent of those who had seen their own dance being performed by an inter-ethnic group were positive in their evaluation. Most answers were general, like “they dance it well”. Two respondents said that it was good or even *better* than the original because of the commercial group’s use of costumes;

*Yao woman, 24: It’s better than the original because of the equipment.*  
*Nyakyusa woman, 40: Many times it’s good, especially because they are able to buy costumes which add to the thrill.*

Of those who were *negative*, most respondents were also polite, saying that the groups were “trying their best”. Only two were more outspoken:

*Ngoni man, 30: Here it is business. They change it, reverse it, it’s not good. It takes away the prestige of that ethnic group.*

*Yao man, 22: The performance of it is misled and perverted from its origin as a result of supplementing equipment like clothes, voice and language. The clothes that they wear for traditional dances in the cultural troupes are not those that they wear during the original ngoma. So they don't show the real truth of the origin of the ngoma concerned. The singing also has problems in the troupes. For example, at places where it was necessary that a woman should sing you will find a man singing, and where a voice should be thin you will find thick voices, and if you now mix different languages the perverting has become even bigger. So I would really like the origin of the dances to be returned.*

The two women see the use of costumes as positive, while the last man quoted is negative to the way the dancers dress. The most commonly-used costumes by the groups are *kanga*, the every-day wear of Tanzanian women. For *ngoma*, *kanga* clothes are wrapped around the body and rolls of *kanga* are knotted around the waist or hips to emphasize the hip-movements. The *kanga* is either worn on the torso as well as the lower part of the body, or T-shirts are used to cover the upper part. *Kanga* is normally never worn by men, but as an *ngoma*-costume it is used by both sexes. Men in Tanzania generally dress in Western fashion, and among the Bantu there is no trace of an indigenous male dress. As long as the groups want to present themselves as *cultural* groups which perpetuate the African tradition, they prefer the female *kanga* for the men as well, rather than trousers and shirts.

For Sindimba, however, Muungano use specially designed costumes, where Western and traditional elements are combined in the male version. While the girls wear pieces of black cloth of the size of a *kanga* with white edging, the men have a short trouser-suit fringed around the legs. The design is utterly Western, but the choice of colours – red, black, and white – reveals an attempt to create a symbolic link to traditional belief systems. Anja Forssén, who has done a study on the Zaramo in cooperation with Marja-Liisa Swantz, writes about the colour symbolism of this ethnic group (the original inhabitants of Dar es Salaam):

The use of colour in rites ... relates directly to the human body substances and to the heightened emotional experiences connected with procreative and sexual functions of the body. In rituals, the colours red, black and white take on biological, social and moral significance (Forssén 1979:34).

The fact that the Sindimba costumes of the men have red in them, while the costumes of the girls have black and white only, may be due to the ambiguity of this colour:

The use of red is often ambiguous. (...) Because of the central importance of menstrual blood, it is considered to have dangerous powers. Its potential as means of causing harm to the girl or to anyone related to her makes red a fearful colour (Forssén 1979:35).

The symbolic content of the various colours as Forssén and Swantz analyse them, would be too comprehensive to deal with here. There is reason to suppose, however, that by using red, black and white in their Sindimba costumes, the Muungano group actualize the ritual origin of the dance and bring forth certain symbolic associations and connotations among the on-lookers who are familiar with this colour symbolism. Red, black and white are described as symbolic colours among people as far from each other as the Zigua of Tanga region on the north coast of Tanzania (Maguluko 1991:51), the Ndembu of north-western Zambia (Turner 1967:69-71) and the peoples of the Lower Congo (Jacobson-Widding 1979).

In the very south of Tanzania, in Newala, Mtwara region, I witnessed the three colours being used in a healing ritual performed to exorcise a spirit from a young girl. Half of the dancers participating in the exorcism were dressed in a costume consisting of a black loin cloth, red cover of the torso, white cloth around the hips and white or red cloth on the head. As the symbolic use of these colours is so widespread, the colours of the Sindimba costumes of Muungano Cultural Troupe may be read in a similar manner by much of the audience. That the use of these colours in the Sindimba costumes was considered successful, was reflected by the fact that Tanzania One Theatre copied the design – much to the annoyance of the Muungano artists.

Not all were happy about the new Sindimba costumes, however. One of the artists told me that he had complained to Chenga that he had made the costumes too modern, a problem for the group, because, as he said; “the Europeans want to take pictures that look good”. Europeans are a category of on-lookers who will be unable to read the colour symbolism of the Sindimba costumes; they will see the modern element only, a trouser-suit that could have been anywhere in the world and which looks out of place at a performance of African folklore.

What meaning does the value *traditional* have to the performers themselves? What attitudes do they have towards the changes the dances undergo as a result of modernization? Views on these issues were most

commonly expressed by the artists in comparing and differentiating their work to that of other cultural groups. The College artists said about the commercial groups that they danced in bars for drunk people, and that their need to survive on a commercial basis made them give the audience what they wanted (erotic dances):

*Man 29: Muungano are good, if you look at the individual artists. Art has its aim, their aim is money. So it is necessary to add some salt. They don't care about the meaning or the history. It's only booze, booze.*

*Man 42: They (Muungano) are doing good work. But they should not choke the beauty of art just for squeezing out money. They don't dance many ngomas, it's a thing of business. But what is the meaning of culture?*

*Man 21: The problem of Muungano is that they are commercializing their art, they can't educate at all. Their performances are in clubs and bars, they want drunkards to be happy. Sindimba is not a dance that should be danced in a bar. Now it has become dirty, people really see it as dirty dance. Sindimba and other dirty dances should not be in public places, only in their traditional setting. They change if they perform here (College of Arts) or other special places. Then they need to sing about CCM, etc.*

Chenga, on his side, commented after a visit to the College:

*They are destroying the dances. They add so much that it is not a traditional dance any more. American choreography, or whatever it is. Like what they have done to Mawindi.<sup>15</sup> It's like with mchicha (traditional spinach-dish), if you add onions and tomatoes and everything, it's not mchicha anymore. No, just cook in water with a little salt; that's mchicha.*

The artists of Chenga's group were sceptical about the work of the College too:

*Woman 21: Their theatre is good, but not the ngoma. It is very slow, it does not thrill.*

*Woman 26: I haven't seen that they really dance. We do more. They get a lot of money, they eat, and they are satisfied. Not like us who are poor,*

<sup>15</sup> Miming the movements.

*we have to work. Their traditional music, Gogo<sup>16</sup> etc. is very nice, but not the ngoma.*

*Man 32: Good, but they are moving away from the traditional by choreographing etc. In the beginning it was different, more original.*

*Man 35: All in all it is good. But something which is not good, is that they introduce a lot of new things. They change the nature of it, until the origin is completely lost. They may say that this is a Ngoni dance, but the Ngoni themselves will say no.*

*Drummer 36: I don't like it very much, it has a blemish. It's just a place to get a certificate, a governmental place. It's like with a mechanic who has not studied, he can still be very good at repairing cars. The meaning of culture is that I as a Makua can play a Nyamwezi ngoma in such a way that the Nyamwezi who have bought tickets feel happy, feel that it is like it is at home. But in Bagamoyo (College of Arts), a Ngoni will not feel that Lizombe is the way it is at home. And when we went to Mwanza; the Sukuma like very much to dance with snakes, therefore it's very important that we do it well. The College of Arts does not go to the regions. The students are from different places, but the school itself does not travel. People there in Geita (Mwanza) have never heard about the College. Maybe they have heard about Muungano or Mandela,<sup>17</sup> but not College of Arts.*

The two last artists both claim that the College is changing the dances so much that the people from the given ethnic group will not feel that this is their dance. The drummer then says that it was especially important for Muungano to dance well with the snakes when they were on tour in Mwanza (Sukumaland). But who in Muungano can judge whether they did it well or not? There is no Sukuma in the group. One of the Sukuma artists at the College of Arts criticized Muungano for not having enough respect for the origin of the dances, just stirring them together for maximum effect:

*Like when they drag those snakes in at the end of the Bugobogobo. They have nothing there to do. The snake dance is a dance in its own right where the dancers are to move like snakes, with the snakes, but the Muungano roll around on the floor with the snakes till the animals vomit*

<sup>16</sup> Gogo is an ethnic group of Dodoma region. The single most famous artist of traditional music in Tanzania, Hukwe Zawose, a Gogo, is employed at the College of Arts.

<sup>17</sup> Mandela is another Dar es Salaam-based commercial group. Their theatre plays are broadcasted on the radio and at the time of the interview, the group had just been on tour up-country.



*on the stage. If you ask other people they will say it is nice, but if you ask a Sukuma, he will shudder. The same thing goes for the other dances, the ones who come from where the dance is from, will never like it the way Muungano does it.*

The groups criticize each other for moving too far away from the origin of the dances. The most sensitive point in question is the reaction of the members of the ethnic group whose dance it originally is. The government, through their cultural policy, wished to create national dances, and to a certain degree they succeeded: some dances *are* danced all over Tanzania today, but those same dances have not ceased to be *ethnic* dances as well. The instruction "no ngoma are to belong to one tribe" was an impossible one. A Sukuma dance will always awaken greater sentiments in a Sukuma than in any other Tanzanian. If it is performed well, he or she will feel great joy; if it is performed poorly, he or she will feel molested. As was cited from a Ngoni earlier: "It takes away the prestige of that ethnic group."

Dancing dances of ethnic groups not represented among the members is not considered a problem by the cultural groups. It is rather taken as an asset. The leader of one of the smaller cultural troupes proudly pronounced before a performance at a tourist hotel that none of his dancers were from the places where the *ngomas* originated from. He had internalized the governmental policy of nation-building and de-tribalizing, happily ignorant of the fact that the tourists most probably would have been more excited to hear that what they were now about to see was the such and such tribe performing their authentic esoteric dances (as is the case in tourist hotels in Gambia).

Several of the musicians expressed pride that they knew how to play the rhythms of many different ethnic groups. One of the dancers of the Village Museum group, however, refused to dance dances from other areas than the south. He was renowned for his fantastic abilities in dance, but his skills were connected to a feeling for just these rhythms and movements patterns. "You can't teach him Bugobogobo",<sup>18</sup> a fellow artist told me, "he just feels the dances of the south".

There are no Chaggas in any of the commercial groups, although there are several Chagga students at the College. The principal stated as a problem that admission to the College these days is a matter of good exam results from secondary school. As a consequence, there were many students from the north (as is the case at the University). During the first years of

<sup>18</sup> Bugobogobo is a Sukuma dance, and the Sukuma live mainly in Mwanza region in the north.

the College, in the early 1980s, recruitment was carried out by teachers of the College who travelled around the country to find artistic talents. "We didn't even go to Kilimanjaro region" (home of the Chaggas) the principal laughed. An ex-student, himself from the south, said about the same problem: "The Chaggas don't have ngoma. They just clap their hands. If you teach a Chagga a ngoma like this (Makonde) he will dance like a European."

We have seen that the modernization of traditional dances has led to great many changes; an inter-ethnic group performing a choreographed traditional dance in costumes on a stage is something very different from a *ngoma* event in a village setting. Still, the great majority of the audience say that they like the way their dance is performed by the groups. I think the reason for this simply is that they are so delighted to hear and see their own ngoma, that it counts more to them than the negative aspects. No matter how highly choreographed the dance is, the drum-rhythm that some of the people among the audience have grown up with is there, filling the air and giving rise to nostalgia and deeply-felt sentiments in those individuals.

I understood this feeling only after I had participated in an initiation ceremony of the son of Chenga, the owner of Muungano Cultural Troupe. The boy, who was six years old, had been secluded for around two months after his circumcision. During the night before he was to come out, an *ngoma* was arranged outside the house. The dancing started at 10 pm. and went on until noon the next day, when the boy was washed, dressed in new clothes, and made to walk on top of his female relatives who lay down on the ground in front of him, into the decorated neighbouring bar where a festive meal was served. The *ngoma* played during the night and morning was Msolopa, the celebration dance of the Mwera people to which Chenga belong. As this dance is on the repertoire of Muungano, I had heard and seen it many times before the ritual event. It had been like any other *ngoma* to me. Not so after that night. With 14 hours of dancing and celebration to that *one* rhythm, it had got hold of my heart. I felt moved and happy whenever it was performed at a show, even if the framework and setting were completely different from the night we celebrated the coming out of the circumcised boy.

The College and the commercial groups share the ideology that the dances should remain close to the "original", and they accuse each other of distorting the dances. But what is the *original*? Several informants told me that the traditional dances were developed and changed in the villages all the time. "They move with the times" (*zinaenda na wakati*) was the common way of putting it. A Makonde artist at the College told me that in

her village in Mtwara region, Sindimba was now danced more like Malivata. "The way we dance it here at the College is the original" she said. Thus we see the same tendency as in Scandinavia: the dances as they were choreographed at a certain time in history (in the case of Tanzania in the mid-1960s) have become the authorized versions to represent a tradition from time immemorial. In the case of Ukala, when the National Performing Troupe adopted it, they saw the need to *go back* in time in order to make the dance look as authentic as possible. The Zigua, when performing the ritual, use guns (Maguluko 1991:48), as guns are what they use nowadays for hunting. In the national version, however, all the groups make use of bows and arrows, which are what the Zigua used before the spear and (later) the gun (Maguluko 1991:48).

The College and Muungano Cultural Troupe employ very different strategies in order to keep what they call the origin (*asili*) of the dances. The College often tries to tell a story about the traditional society by making a dance-drama out of two or three dances following each other. During the annual art festival in Bagamoyo in September 1992, the Bagamoyo Players joined Sindimba, Mangaka and Ukala to tell the story of a young man being initiated into adulthood (Sindimba), finding a wife (Mangaka), and learning to feed his family (Ukala). A non-artist who commented on the differences between the College and Muungano, said that the College had developed it into a "science" while the way Muungano did it was more "natural". The College artists took pride in their experimental role in contrast to the commercial groups which just did things "the old way" with no artistic creativity.

When presenting themselves abroad, however, the artists of the College need to play down their creativity in order to adhere to what they see as the European idea of tradition. This was revealed to me during a rehearsal the Bagamoyo Players had before their trip to Germany. The group had started to create a similar drama as the one mentioned above, with one dance flowing continuously into the other. The hard work was to choreograph good connections to link the three dances, and the leader of the group was proud of his work when he finally made it. One of his colleagues, who had previously studied in Europe for some years, protested against the method, saying:

*Remember that this is to be shown outside. Those Europeans don't know that this is Masewe, Ngokwa and Bugobogobo. They will think it is all one dance if we don't make it clear by leaving the stage and then coming back in new costumes. And the organizers have asked for traditional*

*dances, so if we make it into a dance drama they will think that we just made up the whole thing.*

The artists are also conscious of the European (at times romantic) idea of primitive Africa. One of the former College artists who was in Sweden participating in a theatre project in 1980, said ironically: "The play we showed there was a great success. You know, we had witch-doctors with paint on their face and such stuff, the way Europeans like."

The artists make efforts to present the dances as originally and traditionally as possible, according to criteria of their own, or those of others, but the local spectators know quite well that what they see at cultural shows in town is not the "real thing". A Makonde man, interviewed at a Muungano show, expressed himself in this way:

*The difference between the traditional and the groups, is that the groups imitate (wanaiga) what they do in the villages.*

Egil Bakka, a scholar of folk music in Norway, terms the performance of folk dance as done by the formal folkdance associations, as *copying* folkdance, while *traditional* folkdance is the dance which lives without any formalized teaching, as a natural part of festivity (Velure 1972:4). These concepts can be applied in the Tanzanian context too, although the situations differ. In Tanzania, in contrast to Norway, the repertoire of the copying folkdance and the traditional folkdance is largely overlapping, as the copying folkdances are versions of traditional dances that are still performed in non-commercial settings. The dances in the villages of Tanzania have by no means remained unaffected by modernization, however, as we will see below.

### **The introduction of separation**

In search of what impact the change in social setting has had on the communicative aspects of dance, a look at village performances before and after Independence may help us. Swantz says about this:

(T)he official Government and party functions, which seemingly encourage indigenous forms of culture, may not in fact have the best impact on them. (...) A spectator exercised in traditional presentational forms is acutely aware that the dances and other performances have suffered a loss of choreographic form which is not without significance. In the ngoma-dances performed for Government and Party leaders it is

very common that the dancers stand and sing, move or dance in lines, facing the celebrities. (...) The traditional democratic, equalizing forms of dance and song are changing. In the coastal areas the circle was the most common form in ngoma. (...) In other parts of the country an alternative form of dance prevailed, with two lines facing each other... Even in that case, the chief was not the focus of the form (Swantz 1986:16).

Mlama is similarly concerned about the different role the new political authorities have taken during cultural performances compared to the traditional rulers:

Ngoma has been promoted primarily to entertain party leaders and government dignitaries. During the performances these dignitaries maintain a detached position in relation to the performance. In traditional society, (...) the tribal dignitaries were an active audience to these performances, many times involving their actual participation (Mlama, 1985).

Both Swantz and Mlama comment on how the *ngoma* in the villages has changed when performed for "visiting dignitaries (and) during national celebrations" (Swantz 1986:16). These dances are not taken out of their original geographical area as the ones I have studied in Dar es Salaam, but their social framework has changed with the new political system. Even without the presence of political leaders or a paying audience, however, the form and aesthetics of the commercial performances affect village *ngoma* and rituals. I witnessed this situation at the coming out dance of the son of Chenga described earlier. During the nightly dance, some Muungano employees were trying hard to arrange the circle we were dancing in, dividing us into single-sex pairs who were to dance into the ring (*kata*) together. Some of the female relatives of the boy ignored the "rules" and danced into the ring in an unorganized and free manner, as is common in village *ngoma*. One of the male artists gave them a reprimand, telling them that they destroyed (*haribu*) the dance. He was promptly corrected by one of the girls of Muungano who told him: "We are not at a show now. This is a celebration!"



*Plate 13.* Celebrating the coming out of a circumcised boy. The dance performed is Msolopa.

*Plate 14.* Msolopa performed by Muungano. In this context the dancers have their backs to the drummers.



When two dancers move into the ring to perform a "solo", the aesthetics of it, at least to my eyes, is the way the dancers move *together*, as one body. Some of the Muungano dancers however, distinguished themselves by dancing very individually compared to the non-professionals. They preferred to show off their own dancing skills, rather than use their energy to create something together with their partner. This *ngoma* event was special, as so many of the participants were professional artists, but the situation may not be too unusual, as many of the groups are used both for commercial and ritual performances. The healing group which I encountered in Mtwara is one such example.

John M. Janzen has conducted extensive research on healing by the use of *ngoma* in central and southern Africa, including Dar es Salaam. He criticizes the Western perspective which has focused on the possession and trance side of this institution, because the outcome of *ngoma* expression is, he says, "the exact opposite of possession, namely, creative self-expression" (Janzen 1992:176). Janzen stresses "the centrality of discourse in *ngoma* interaction and knowledge". All the people present at the performance are active participants in the communicative process, in obvious contrast to the commercial performance where the communication is one-way. Furthermore, the *ngoma* itself, in healing rituals (*ngoma za kutibu*) is considered a kind of medicine, where the patients are healed through the dance. The musicians for such sessions are often hired, and they may well play for secular performances as well;

The sacrality or secularity of *ngoma* depends not on the music or dance form as such, but on its function or use, its context. *Ngoma* performances in night clubs and folkloric events put on by the national dance troupe do not, thus, differ in their form from possession or exorcistic rituals conducted by *waganga*<sup>19</sup> (Janzen 1992:32).

The difference, thus, between the *ngoma* for healing and the *ngoma* for entertainment is the purpose or motive for the performance. In the words of Jane Harrison, when writing of the early Greek theatre; "The ritual dance was (...) a thing to be done, not a thing to be looked at" (Harrison 1983:505). This does not imply, however, that the ritual performances may not *also* be considered good entertainment to the participants. Hilde Nielssen, who has studied spirit possession cults in Madagascar, reports that the members of the cults openly say that the entertainment side of the sessions is important to them (1993, personal communication). Schechener;

<sup>19</sup> *Waganga* is the plural form of *mganga*, normally translated as "medicine man".

who in the tradition of Victor Turner has been interested in the relationship between ritual and theatre, says that "in all entertainment there is some efficacy and in all ritual there is some theatre" (Schechner 1988:138).

Tanzanian cultural policy after Independence has, as we have seen, been a leading force behind the transformation of various ethnic rituals and performances to entertainment. But, as Mlama complains: "Efforts to promote traditional theatre have (...) been restricted to only one theatre genre, *ngoma*" (Mlama 1983). In her thesis "Tanzania Traditional Theatre as a Pedagogical Institution", Mlama shows that traditional institutions like the Digubi initiation of girls into womanhood used to integrate dance and drama in order to teach the novices about things like menstruation, respect for their parents and other elders, the power of prayer, and so on. As the title indicates, Mlama focuses on the pedagogical functions of traditional performance. The transmission of knowledge through performance was not restricted to initiation rituals. It was also the goal of the Mtunya popular dance theatre, which instructed the general public about accepted norms of behaviour, and the Simo storytelling theatre, which instructed children about the morals, values and attitudes of the society.

Elise Johansen, who did fieldwork among the immigrant Mocambiquan Makonde in Dar es Salaam in 1991-92, experienced how dramatization was used as a way of teaching young women who were expecting their first child the appropriate way of behaviour in their new life situation. An older woman would enact, in a humorous way, a young mother leaving her baby behind when she heard that there was a *ngoma* going on. The dramatization was always rhythmic, the theatrical aspects going hand in hand with dance (Johansen, forthcoming).

Traditional forms of drama like those described by Mlama and Johansen were never promoted by the authorities. The theatre form which was used in schools and staged by the National Performing Troupe was based on Western traditions, as I will come back to in section 4. Why was this? Mlama asks herself the same question and suggests that part of the answer may be that the authorities feared promoting anything that could accentuate ethnic differences:

An argument has sometimes been advanced that ethnic cultures have no place in the contemporary Tanzanian society which should be aiming at a national culture. As such, traditional ethnic cultures should not be encouraged for fear of perpetuating ethnic differences (Mlama 1983).

The unwillingness to promote traditional integrated performances may also be a result of the adoption of Western categories of the performing arts on



the part of cultural bureaucrats. In the national art competitions, for example, there is one class for traditional dance, one for theatre, and one for traditional music (as well as several others). In 1984, Mwanza region was "discouraged from too much dramatization of their dances during the zonal competition" (Lihamba 1985).

The overall point I have tried to make in this section is that the commercialization and nationalization of traditional dance in Tanzania have been characterized by *separation*. First, the dances have been taken out of their original discursive context and into a situation where a distinct division is set up between performers and spectators, with little or no communication between them. John M. Chernoff (1979), in his study of African music, concludes that "without participation there is no meaning", something which may explain why *taarab* is more popular among the women than *ngoma* (see Figure 5). When *taarab* is performed the audience, especially the females, participate actively by dancing onto the stage, expressing their feelings by spraying the singers of the songs that they identify with. Secondly, dance has been singled out as a genre by itself, stripped of the narrative and theatrical aspects it was integrated with in traditional performances. According to Victor Turner, this kind of separation is a typical result of the modernization of performance:

"(T)ribal ritual", which embraces ideas and images of cosmos and chaos. (...) uses all the sensory codes to produce symphonies in more than music: the intertwining of dance, body languages of many kinds, song, chant, architectural forms (...) incense, burnt offerings, ritualized feasting and drinking, painting, body painting, body marking of many kinds including circumcision and scarification (...) the enacting of mythic and heroic plots drawn from oral traditions — and so much more. Rapid advances in the scale and complexity of society, particularly after industrialization, have passed this unified liminal configuration through the prism of division of labour, with its specialization and professionalization, reducing each of these sensory domains to a set of entertainment genres flourishing in the leisure time of society, no longer in a central driving place (Turner 1986b:42).

This passage is part of Turner's evolutionary theories on the development of performance. I will return to his work in section 5 where I will discuss the degree to which these ideas can be useful for understanding the Tanzanian case.

## Conclusion

My main intention in this section has been to explore some of the effects of nationalization and commercialization on traditional dance in Tanzania. The process of nationalization started immediately after Independence; commercialization not until the early 1980s. The main result of nationalization was that the songs which accompanied traditional dances were transformed into a political idiom, using the Swahili language. These songs were meaningful to people as long as they believed in the message; but 20 years after Independence, the Ujamaa policy had not brought the promised wonders, and the songs appeared to many people as empty phrases. The political dance songs had become a convention, however, and the commercial troupes were encouraged by the authorities to carry on this new tradition. As the audience did not find the political songs very entertaining, the groups now mixed them with songs in local languages, knowing that there were people in the audience who appreciated hearing songs of their own ethnic group.

The most important development which commercialization brought with it was the sensualization of the movements. The erotic performances of Sindimba and Lizombe were not what the puritan Nyerere had envisaged when he called for a revival of traditional dances. The erotic aspect of traditional dances was played down by the governmental groups performing for national purposes after Independence, and it is still played down at the College of Arts. The commercial troupes, on the other hand, seem to compete with each other in their attempts to challenge the boundary for how far a group can go in this field.

The creativity of the groups in this domain seem to hinder their creativity in other fields. The songs are a telling case. Apart from the Lizombe songs, there have been few attempts to make songs in Swahili which are meaningful to people, not only repeating old political slogans. Also, since the dancers tend to use sensual movements in all the dances, and the same kind of drums are used for all *ngoma*, the dances become stereotyped. The ethnic and regional variety is blurred: all the dances I saw performed by the commercial troupes, short of the Sukuma dance Bugobogobo, have been transformed to fit the commercial convention of sensual traditional dance.

I have made no attempt to analyse why and in what way these erotic movements are meaningful to people. I have chosen, rather, to concentrate on another major development which has taken place after the commercialization of performance in Dar es Salaam: the rise of theatre.

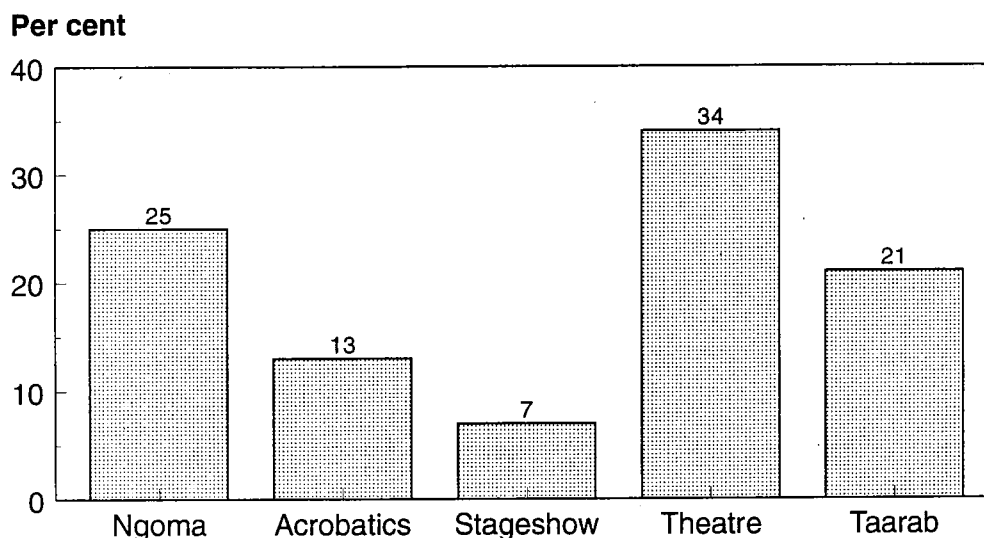
The theatre plays were introduced into the shows in order to get a more varied programme. Not only did the new genre make a single performance event more varied, theatre also had a much greater opportunity than dance

for variety from one week to another. I had not been in the field long when I noticed that the theatre plays were met by much more enthusiasm from the audience, especially the children, than the dances. I asked people what they liked about the cultural groups, and found that most of them had liked theatre rather than *ngoma*. This fact was confirmed when I analysed the questionnaires I later did with the audience. Theatre is the most popular genre, slightly ahead of *ngoma* and *taarab* (see Figure 5 below). As mentioned in the introduction, the popularity of the groups is to a large degree based on the fact that they have a varied programme with several genres. Respondents were unwilling to state their *one* favourite item, so numbers in the Figure are not the percentages of people liking this or that, but the percentage each genre got of the "votes" in total.

The quality of the theatre plays of a given group was often used as an argument when respondents were to state their favourite group. One of the major cultural groups of Dar es Salaam, Bima Modern Taarab, do not perform dance at all. While one group survives well without *ngoma*, none of the groups have taken the chance of omitting theatre. Moreover, the name of theatre play of the week is stated in the newspaper advertisements, but never the names of the dances.

Figure 5

"Which part of the show do you like the most?" Audinece's opinion



Frederick Cooper, suggests that people in Africa may “develop cultural alternatives to the sterility of officially sponsored hymns to the glories of traditional African society” (quoted in Barber 1987). This is an interesting perspective for understanding the development of popular theatre in Dar es Salaam. In contrast to the dance songs, there is no political propaganda in the theatre plays, and no attempt to make the plays appear “traditional”.

David B. Coplan writes that “common experience and perceptions based upon shared values and understandings provide the context within which any performance becomes aesthetically, emotionally, and socially meaningful” (Coplan 1986:156). As I will show in the coming section, the popular theatre plays appear to have the very premises for meaningful performance which Coplan indicates above, and this is probably why theatre is the most popular genre of the cultural troupes. In section 5, I will discuss how this seemingly Western drama form can be seen as representing a modernized version of traditional performance, carrying on some of the elements which dance could not when it was transformed to entertain multi-ethnic audiences.

## 4 Popular theatre: A cultural alternative

### Introduction

What kind of entertainment value makes theatre the most popular entertainment? What do theatre plays give the urban audience which traditional dances do not? I asked a visitor to one of my neighbours if she liked *ngoma*, and she replied: "Yes, very much. I used to go to all the Muungano shows when I lived in this area." I then questioned her what she liked better, *ngoma* or theatre. "Theatre", she answered, in an almost apologetic voice, as she knew that I was into dance. I asked her why she preferred theatre;

*It talks about the reality, the reality of the country. And it teaches people. When I watch it, I learn something. With ngoma you watch the flexibility only. Some dancers are better than others to swing it.*

What reality do the theatre plays depict and what do they teach people? Before presenting summaries of contemporary theatre plays, let us start with a short history of how Western drama was introduced to Tanzania, and how it became transformed to an indigenous theatre form.

### The transformation of Western drama in Tanzania

The introduction of Western drama to Tanzania may be seen as part of the overall colonial effort to "domesticate" the native mind. The Europeans saw their own arts as more developed and civilized than the African performative arts, and they thought that the educational system would be a good place to popularize Western drama to the African audience. In the words of the Provincial Officer in Mbeya, 1949:

In general Africans lack initiative and application, as also experience in matters of this kind and I consider that our best line of approach is to encourage those educational agencies, both government and mission, which are under direct European guidance, to give a lead in the provision of entertainment (Lihamba 1985).

By having the educated Africans watch and perform Western classics, the colonialists would make these people see the world as the Europeans themselves saw it. That this was a conscious move, is revealed by the statement of the colonial bureaucrat quoted earlier: "We must do our best to form ... a class of persons ... English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect" (Poddar 1970:36).

Hussein, in his Ph.D thesis "The Development of Drama in East Africa", describes how European drama first was used in the European schools in the colonies from around 1922. It was later introduced in the African schools as well, as part of the subject of English literature. Theatre enthusiasts organized Drama Associations which performed European plays, mainly the Shakespearean classics. By 1952, almost all Tanganyikan schools were active in dramatics, and in the period 1957-1973 national drama competitions were arranged yearly. It was not until 1963 however, that the competition was opened to entries in Swahili, and for many years most plays continued to be in English. In 1969, the judges "complained about the lack of rapport between performers and audience in most play entries that year" (Lihamba 1985). To improve the actor - audience relationship, the judges suggested "emphasis on audience participation (and the) abandonment of imported dramatic structures" (op cit.). The advice of the judges did not result in any substantial changes, however.

At that time there had already developed another form of theatre in Tanzania which had a much greater degree of rapport and which was easily understood by the general public. This genre, called *Vichekesho* (the things that make one laugh), comprised short plays inspired by the Western drama in Tanzanian schools and by comedy films like those starring Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. A forerunner, dating back to 1900, was the sketches used as interludes during *taarab* performances in Zanzibar and later Tanga, Dodoma and Dar es Salaam (Hussein 1975). The plays had a simple structure and were open to improvisation. Mlama says about these plays:

The Vichekesho share some characteristics with Italian Comedia Dell'arte. They make use of satire, irony, ridicule and the comic sense to comment on certain aspects of life and often to make the audience laugh and ridicule evil. Although they provoke laughter they are often very serious comments on incorrect and unacceptable behaviour (Mlama 1983).

This is how the Vichekesho functioned in the early 1980s. During the colonial period, however, these plays were used mostly to ridicule "uneducated" Africans who could not cope with European manners and

ways of life. After the Arusha Declaration, as part of the socialistic cultural policy, *vichekesho* were introduced in factories and governmental institutions, to propagate national politics and various campaigns in areas like health and agriculture. Radio Tanzania broadcasted its own weekly theatre play featuring the stubborn character Mzee Jongu, a traditionalist who refused to learn and change.<sup>1</sup>

When the commercial groups started their activities in the late 1970s, early 1980s, they were *ngoma* troupes, performing dance only. It did not take long, however, before one of the groups, DDC Kibisa, introduced five-minute *vichekesho* to give the dancers time to change costumes. These plays proved popular, and the other groups soon followed the example of DDC Kibisa (Plane, forthcoming). During their first decade of existence, the groups have developed their shows into a four-hour long performance consisting of four different art genres: *ngoma*, *taarab*, acrobatics (*sarakasi*) and theatre. The theatre plays are called *maigizo* (sing. *igizo*), and differ from the *vichekesho* genre in being much longer. They usually last for about an hour. In other respects, the plays have kept the central characteristics of the *vichekesho*. They are farce-like plays depicting and discussing the social realities of urban life, commonly with a clear moralistic message. I asked Jason Kami, the theatre director of Muungano Cultural Troupe, how he decided the theme of a new play. He said that generally, it always had to do with "living with people" (*kuishi na watu*), and that he in a given play wanted to address a certain problem in this respect, which would then be the main story. In addition, there could be interesting side-stories. Kami also said that the *vichekesho* style could destroy the play if it got the upper hand; it was thus important to keep the main theme intact.

The plays are contemporary and urban. References are often made to the rural home area of given actors, but the setting is Dar es Salaam, and the time is the present. When the groups go on tour, they refer to the place they are, instead of Dar es Salaam. In this way they keep one of the most central aspects of the plays, namely to give the audience the feeling that what they see on stage is in fact their *own life*, in a dramatized, exaggerated version. There is room for improvisation in the plays, and some of the actors take the opportunity to change their lines and body language according to their own feelings and the mood of the audience. Kami however, took pride in the fact that Muungano is one of the few cultural

<sup>1</sup> In 1989, the director and main actor of these plays, Jengala, formed his own private cultural group called Mandela Theatre Group (Radio Tanzania, 19 September 1992).

groups to have written scripts, and he maintained that the actors ideally should stick to it, so that they did not confuse each other.

In order to keep their customers, the groups need to present a new play every week. Some of the plays however, are serials, a feature taken from the magazine serial format (Barber 1987:25), and a smart move to make people come back for the next show, eager as they are to see how the drama ends. Kami told me that he has about ten theatre scripts at home, and that he simply starts over with number one again, with minor changes, when they all have been performed. That the plays can be repeated regularly and still attract customers, indicates that the author has managed to touch on certain life experiences that remain relevant to the audience.

### **Popular theatre plays and social reality**

A few general notes on the performance of these theatre plays will help the reader to envisage them better. The stage set is very simple, usually just a few chairs and a table from the bar where the group is performing. After dark, the stage is illuminated, but there is generally little means for artistic stage lighting. Muungano is the only group to have painted backcloths, made to represent houses of various social classes. There are no special costumes for the plays; performers wear their own everyday clothes when acting. The group has a small stock of costumes however. A *kanzu*<sup>2</sup> is used by men to signify a traditionalist, and torn old *kangas* and clothes are used when the protagonists are meant to be very poor. Clownish characters are gestalted by making their belly (men) or buttocks (women) oversized.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the above, the artists make use of any props which happen to be at hand. At times I would see my little Scandinavian backpack being carried proudly across the stage to add to the modern and young image of a given character.

The dialogue is central to the plays, and the actors use microphones to amplify it, at the cost of freedom of movement. To counteract the audience-distance that may result from the use of microphones, some of the actors have developed a fine art of eye-communication with the audience. The acting on the stage is often commented on by the audience, not uncommonly directed as questions or advices to the characters. The artists generally do not reply to these communications, although they may

<sup>2</sup> A white gown worn by Muslim men on the coast.

<sup>3</sup> A man's big belly is generally a sign of wealth, and a woman's big buttocks a beauty asset, but in the plays these physical features are overdone for comical effect.



comment on a member of the audience crossing the stage, or leaving, as if he/she was a part of the play. The actors of Muungano Cultural Troupe have been given personal artist names that are used in all the plays, disregarding the age or social status of the character they are acting. The names are African or "neutral", in contrast to their own personal Christian or Muslim names. The artists tend to use the artist names as nicknames when addressing each other outside the performance context, and members of the audience identify their favourite stars by these names.

i) **King Majalia** (*King Majalia*). Muungano Cultural Troupe, April 1992  
A young girl has become pregnant. She tells two different men that they are the father, hoping to get money from both of them for an illegal abortion. She takes abortive pills, but ends up in great pain, crying for her mother. The mother takes her daughter to a traditional medicine man. The medicine man is portrayed in a ridiculing way. He flutters an animal-tail whisk and various amulets over the girl and puts his buttocks against the girls head. He then acts as if possessed, beating his own head while shouting "Get out, get out!" After the treatment of the medicine man, the stomach of the girl continues to grow. It turns out that she was pregnant with twins, and there is still one baby left. The girl is alone on the stage, complaining over her state, saying that she just "did a little bit..." In the next scene, the baby has been born and is crying constantly. The young mother is fed up with the noise, and throws her child into an abandoned cardboard-box. The crying, from a tape broadcasted through the loudspeakers, reaches even higher levels. The girl runs away. An old woman, dressed in rags, carrying fuel on her head, passes by a few minutes later. She can hardly believe her ears when she hears the crying from the card-box. "A nice baby-boy!" she says. We then see the boy in a glimpse when he is around five years old, living with his stepmother in a simple mud-house. She has named him Majalia, "the one who cried".

In the next scene the old woman is standing in front of an attractive concrete house. She tells us that her son has become a professor, he has made her this beautiful house, and today she is expecting him home from one of his many trips to Europe. "The Europeans like that boy", she says, and goes on to list the names of various Western countries. "And this time he is going to come with a video." Then all of the sudden, her fellow villagers violently attack her. They are jealous, why should she get all these things? They say that her son is a sorcerer, then they kill her, and leave her dead body in some card-boxes.

When the boy comes home, the villagers are running around the stage in a clownish way, much to the amusement of the audience. The son,

addressing the audience, says gravely: "Humans... The Africans say that I'm a sorcerer, the Europeans say that I have a very big computer in my head." Taarab music is heard in the background as he finds his dead mother. He cries for a long time. Still crying, he catches up with the *taarab* tune, singing about the evilness of the world, with the refrain: "There is no one like your mother in this world." The audience, who were laughing just some minutes ago, are now deeply moved. People go up to the actor to give him money (common practice at *taarab* performances), and some of them comfort the man by patting his shoulder before they go back to their seats. After the song, the stage goes dark, and dramatic music is played. There is lightning, and a skeleton rises. The son and the skeleton leave the stage together. The producer, Kami, whom we do not see, holds a little speech over the loudspeaker, where he summarizes the moral of the story.

This play touches upon several negative social aspects of modern Tanzanian society. First, the case of young girls who get pregnant without being able to take care of the child. Second, and more central in the play, the problem of jealousy directed at people who happen to succeed financially in a society where most people have very little. Swantz has commented on these attitudes in her study of the Zaramo:

A general characteristic of the studied society which becomes obvious in all communication with people is the attitude of mistrust prevailing in most relationships on one level or the other. (...) The people who are most vulnerable to suspicion and most prone to be watched with jealousy, even hatred, are those with better material conditions than the rest of the society, particularly those who are well known to everybody and who have risen from the same background and same families as the others (Swantz 1986:142).

The theatre play has revealed negative aspects of society and made the audience feel sympathy with the victim of the play, a figure they in real life actually might have envied. The play can also be said to illustrate the Swahili proverb "There is no one like mother" (*Nani kama Mama*). Surrounded by evil-wishers, the only one to be trusted is your mother (here the social mother, not the biological one). The next play to be presented similarly communicates that the only persons you can really trust are those of your own blood.

ii) **Think before you marry her** (*Fikiri kabla kumwoa*). Muungano Cultural Troupe, July 1992

A man and a young girl are talking together. They are planning to marry, and discuss the amount of money that he will give her parents as bride-

price, 100,000 shillings. The girl tells him not to forget to buy furniture, to which he replies: "I don't have any problem with money." Before leaving she asks him when they will meet again. He says: "I will come tomorrow." "Are you sure of that?" "Yes, you know that I have European manners, so when I say I will come, I come." Just a few minutes later his wife, dressed in rags, arrives from up-country. She complains to him that he has not sent any money to her and their son, Kauzibe. The husband blames his delays on the fact that his wages have been late, and says that out there, in the countryside, they don't need money anyhow, since they eat their own produce. As the wife goes to the kitchen, Kauzibe, who is around 15-16, approaches his father for a private talk. He tells him that there are rumours in the home village saying that he is running around with girls, girls as young as himself. The father scolds him, saying he is shameless. He quarrels with Mama Kauzibe too,<sup>4</sup> and when she asks for money for food, he reluctantly gives her one hundred shillings. Just down the road, however, the husband meets his girlfriend and gives her three thousand shillings to buy soft-drinks for their forthcoming wedding. He is caught redhanded by his wife, and tries to make her believe that the other woman is a CCM officer calling him for a meeting. Witnessed by two elder men, the two have a violent quarrel at home. The husband throws his wife out of the house, and when she says she wants her son with her, he answers: "You have no child here." The son stays confused and passive in the background.

In the next scene, the father is bringing his new wife home. Kauzibe is looking away, embarrassed in front of his agemate. The father tells his son: "This is your mother",<sup>5</sup> and the girl: "This is our child." He then gives the wife three thousand shillings to buy groceries, and the son money to buy himself a shirt, before he leaves the house. Kauzibe says to his new mother: "Mother, I'm going out to buy a shirt." She answers him: "Come here for a minute, are you scared of me?" He wants to leave, but she refuses him, sits down on his lap and starts to caress him. He is begging her to let him go. After a few minutes, the father is back, and Kauzibe takes him aside to tell him what happened. The wife then gives the husband *her* version, saying that it was Kauzibe who made a pass at her. "Am I supposed to be *your* wife, or the wife of both of you?" she asks. The husband excuses the boy by saying that he is only a country bumpkin, and that he will have a talk with him.

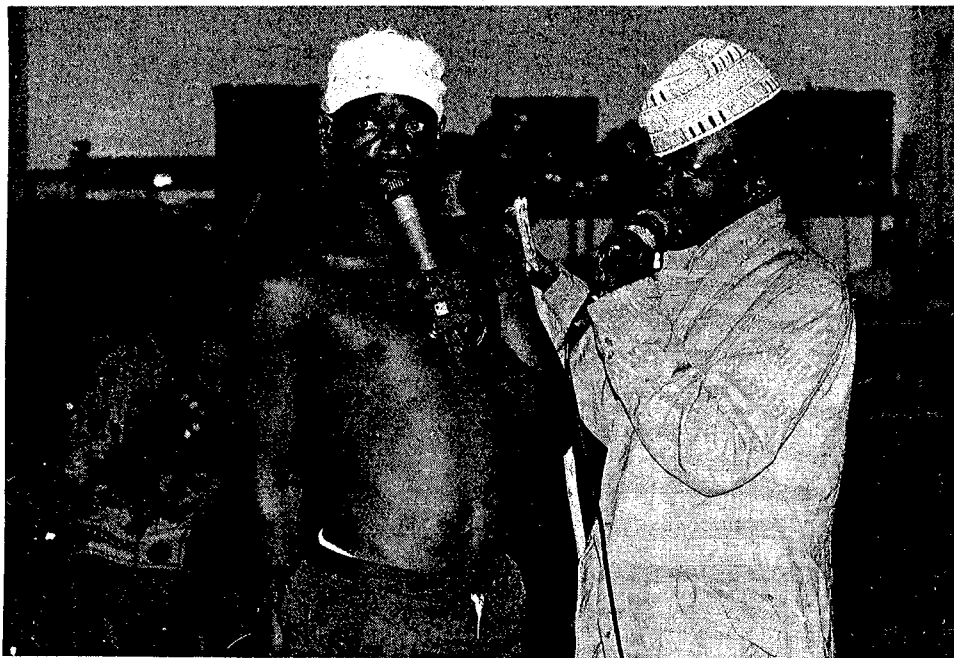
<sup>4</sup> Women who have given birth are usually referred to, and addressed as, Mother of ... (name of first-born child) rather than by their personal name.

<sup>5</sup> He emphasizes "Mama yako mzazi"; literally "the mother who gave birth to you", to distinguish her from aunts on the maternal side who are also called mother.



*Plate 15.* Scene from *Think before you marry her*. The mother and father are fighting about their son Kauzibe.

*Plate 16.* Father and son are talking together. The new wife, Kauzibes stepmother, is seated in the background.



As soon as the father is out of the house, the wife springs on the boy again. He says he does not want to, and that she is "really doing this herself". She then orders him to cook, do the dishes and so on. She follows him to the kitchen where she continues to force herself upon him. She then prepares a bed by putting a few kangas on the floor, and tries to push KAUZIBE onto it. When he fights against her, she runs out of the house tearing her clothes, screaming and crying for help. The husband arrives and tells the three elders who have been attracted by the noise: "Look at my son, what he has done!" He beats KAUZIBE severely and then expels him from the house. The old men protest, saying that he should not do this to a male child. Among themselves they say: "think before marrying her." The father then leaves the house again, and so does the girl a few minutes later, with a sly smile on her lips. She pays three gangsters to come to the house, and these men tell the husband that the girl is already married to a brother of theirs. As punishment, they then pull off all his clothes, take his money and leave him with his hands back-tied. The girl goes off with the gangsters, laughing. The cries of the husband are heard by the neighbours and the old men, and they all come running. When they hear the victim stutter "That woman...", the old men giggle and say in a singsong manner: "Think before you marry her! And don't leave your wife just like that, and don't throw out a boy child!" The play is over, the actors leave the stage, and the saying of the play is repeated once more through the loudspeakers; "Think before you marry her!"

I discussed the content and moral of this play with a Tanzanian artist now living in Norway. I asked her whether "Think before you marry her" is a proverb too, like "There is no one like mother". She said: "No, it's a new expression. In traditional society your parents were normally the ones who decided who you were to marry." In modern, urban society the system has changed, and people to a greater degree choose their spouses themselves, in some cases without knowing much of their background.<sup>6</sup> As your parents no longer do the thinking for you, a reminder that care needs to be exercised in taking such an important decision is communicated by the play. There is also an underlying message saying that it is better to trust your own son than a "stranger" who may easily betray you, in this case the new wife. A play very similar to this one, but putting even more emphasis on this last aspect, was staged by Tanzania One Theatre.

<sup>6</sup> One of the junior artists at the College had been married for about a year. When I asked him what ethnic group his wife was from, he had to think hard for a while before answering that he did not really know.

iii) **Who is standing up** (*Ni nani mwanaume*). Tanzania One Theatre, June 1992

A boy of around 15 is selling cooking fat on the street. An older man takes interest in the poor boy and asks him where his father is, what his name is, etc. The boy says that he has never seen his father, but he knows that his name is Vumbi.<sup>7</sup> The old man is astonished. Mzee Vumbi is his neighbour! He tells the boy to come with him, he will take him to his father. In the next scene we see Mzee Vumbi and his wife sitting in their house, each with a screaming baby on their arm. The old man and the boy knock on the door, and they are reluctantly let in, the husband murmuring that they have *two* babies and that people may...<sup>8</sup> The old man says to Vumbi: "In Kigoma you had a wife, this boy is your blood." The father examines the boy carefully and agrees that he must be his son. He is pleased and very moved. A little later the father leaves on an errand. The young wife of the father calls the boy and orders him to carry the two howling babies, a task not commonly done by boys. When the father is heard at the door, the mother rushes to take the babies from the boy. She tells her husband that the boy has been impudent and that he refuses to carry the children. The father angrily tells the boy that he had better obey his mother. He sends the boy out with the babies to fetch water and then leaves the house again. When the husband is back, the wife starts crying, saying that the boy has been spying on her in the bath. The father expels the boy, throws water at him to make him run away, and tells him never to come back. He does not even give him his bottles of cooking oil back. The boy cries and sings a moving *taarab* song. The old man then comes by, telling him that he may stay with him. He then goes to the house of the couple and starts a comic stick-fight with the father. He throws one of the babies on the floor and jumps on it, to the astonished laughter of the audience. The actors then chase each other off the stage.

Divorce rate is high on the coast of Tanzania, as is the number of illegitimate children (Swantz 1986). As children legally belong to the father, the case of children living in a family with a stepmother is not uncommon. Informants expressed that such arrangements could be difficult for the children as the stepmother would not treat them properly. The problems that orphans or stepchildren may face are reflected not only in

<sup>7</sup> Vumbi means dust. Characters are often given such names to add to the humour of the play.

<sup>8</sup> It is believed that the blessing of having a baby can lead to such jealousy in others that they may use witchcraft in order to harm the child.

theatre plays, but in popular songs as well. The song below was collected by Anne Leseth, who did fieldwork in Dar es Salaam in 1992.

Nyama zipo  
mnanipa mifupa  
Nikiuliza mwasema  
baba yako kafa

There is meat  
but you give me bones  
When I ask you why  
You tell me that my father is dead

Another song from this material, called "O mother come back" (*O mama rudi*), tells of a man who has two wives and chases one of them. Her child, left with the father, is mistreated by the stepmother and asks the father to bring its own mother back home. Although maltreatment of stepchildren might be an actual fact that concerns people in Tanzania and other parts of Africa, Karin Barber warns against seeing the frequency of such themes in popular culture as a direct reflection of life. Sorrow may be a convention of the genre, as it is in Ghanaian popular theatre (Concert parties) and highlife, but "it does not mean that this is the only available perspective on social reality, let alone that Ghanaians in real life are particularly obsessed with sorrow" (Barber 1987:37).

With the Western influence and general modernization, the husband-wife relationship has become more important than it used to be in traditional society. The two last plays criticize this situation, where a man is prone to favour his wife at the expense of his agnatic kin. Also in the next play this is the theme, although here the victim is the younger brother of the main character, not his son.

iv) **The fruits of my own work** (*Jukumu la kazi yangu*). DDC Kibisa, September 1992

A man tells his wife that his younger brother is coming from the countryside to stay with them, as he has now finished his schooling. The boy comes, very poorly dressed and walking with a limp. He has brought with him cassava from the farm, and he is very happy to see his older brother. Being a country bumpkin, he sits down on the floor, but is told to use a chair. The husband introduces his brother to his wife and then leaves the house. A girl from the neighbourhood comes for a visit. The boy tells his sister-in-law that he likes the girl, but when the husband comes back, the wife tells him that the boy has made a pass at *her*. The husband scolds his younger brother. The same thing happens the day after, and the husband, believing the words of his wife, decides that enough is enough. He throws the brother out. The young brother returns to his parents up-country, crying bitterly. He is met by good news, however: he has been

selected for studying law.<sup>9</sup> In the next scene, the older brother comes home to his wife totally broken-hearted. The wife asks him in an alarmed voice: "What is it? Do you have diarrhoea?"<sup>10</sup> "No, it's not that", answers the husband, and in between sobs he tells her that his boss at the office has accused him of having embezzled of a large sum of money. She advises him to go to his parents for help. When he arrives there, the parents are at first unwilling to let him in, knowing how he has treated his younger brother. They finally let him in, under a stream of accusations and abuse. A little later, the younger brother comes home, now looking very distinguished and wearing exquisite clothes. He is given the place of honour while the older brother has to sit on the floor. The young brother tells his family that he has passed his examinations with distinction, and that he has been offered a job as a judge in town. The parents are overjoyed, dancing around the house. The older one takes his father aside. He excuses his earlier conduct and tells him that he needs help, as he is to be put on trial. The father asks the younger son to assist his brother, and he answers that he will try, but that it will not be easy as "the laws of the United Republic of Tanzania are very strict on such matters". The final scene is situated in court where a policeman is greeting the judge, the earlier peg-leg, with full honours. The audience is visibly delighted at seeing the power to which the originally poor younger brother has risen, and when he reads out the conviction for his brother — ten years in jail — the audience laughs with glee.

The play urges people to fulfil their traditional obligations to their kin, and not to be fooled by their wives who do not want to share these obligations. The play is further a typical example of a common theme in the plays: the story of the Numbskull Jack who starts in rags and ends up rich. This theme is among the most common also in Cameroonian theater (Harrow 1982:848). Numbskull Jack is a central figure in fairy tales — not only in Africa, but the world over — in Norwegian oral tradition he is called *Espen Askeladd*, literally "Espen of the ashes", a poor peasant boy who ends up marrying a princess and winning the land of the King. In Tanzania, where the large majority still are poor and must struggle to make ends meet, such a character seems to have more strength than he would in contemporary Western society. The figure gives people hopes and dreams of a better future, and teaches them not to judge anyone on the basis of their poor appearance. That one should not judge on the basis of distinguished appearance either is the theme of the next play.

<sup>9</sup> University studies are fully sponsored by the government.

<sup>10</sup> Diarrhoea is considered a common first symptom of Aids.



v) **With bitterness I said** (*Kwa uchungu nilisema*). Muungano Cultural Troupe, October 1992

Tausi has a fiance, Kauzibe, who is studying medicine. As the play starts, she tells her mother that she does not want to marry him. She would rather marry someone who is rich, a man who has a car, a video and so on. Her mother tells her that she should wait for her fiance. He will also get those things after some years, when he has completed his studies, and besides, it is not necessarily so that a marriage will be happy just because the money is there. The mother goes on to tell the story of her own marriage, and we see this flashback staged. In short: she married a rich man, but they were not happy. One day the husband got cheated and all his property was lost. They became poor, but their marriage was now much more harmonious. Tausi, however, does not follow the advice of her mother. She leaves Kauzibe. The rich father of one of her schoolmates has a car, and he starts giving Tausi a lift to and from school. He also asks her out for dancing, and she soon becomes his girlfriend. By an irony of fate, it turns out that it is the *wife* of this man who really has the money, not him. She has a lucrative private business project, while he is just a government employee.<sup>11</sup> When the wife finds out about the relationship, she throws the husband out and keeps the house and the car. Now, the man has nothing to offer Tausi, and expelled from her family because of her shameful conduct, she ends up in the gutter, suffering from mental illness. Kauzibe finds her there, and the loving man he is, he brings her home to his parents.

The fact that older, wealthy men “buy” the love of young girls is a recognized problem in Tanzania — this goes not only for Dar es Salaam, but also for many villages. In one of the popular theatre workshops described by Penina Mlama, the villagers of Malya stated that pregnancy among unmarried girls was one of the most serious problems of the village. “The problem had grown bigger with time and with the increased dependency on cash income” (Mlama 1991:113). In the play above, the girl’s mother is trying to make her daughter understand that money is not everything, and that her fiance will be rich in due time. Some of the villagers in Malya, however, maintained that “some parents encourage their daughters to misbehave ... because they cannot cope with the economic situation” (Mlama 1991:113). The same situation is reported by Liv Haram, who has done fieldwork in the Meru area in northern Tanzania (Haram, forthcoming). The play “Upbringing”, depicts this situation and its tragic result.

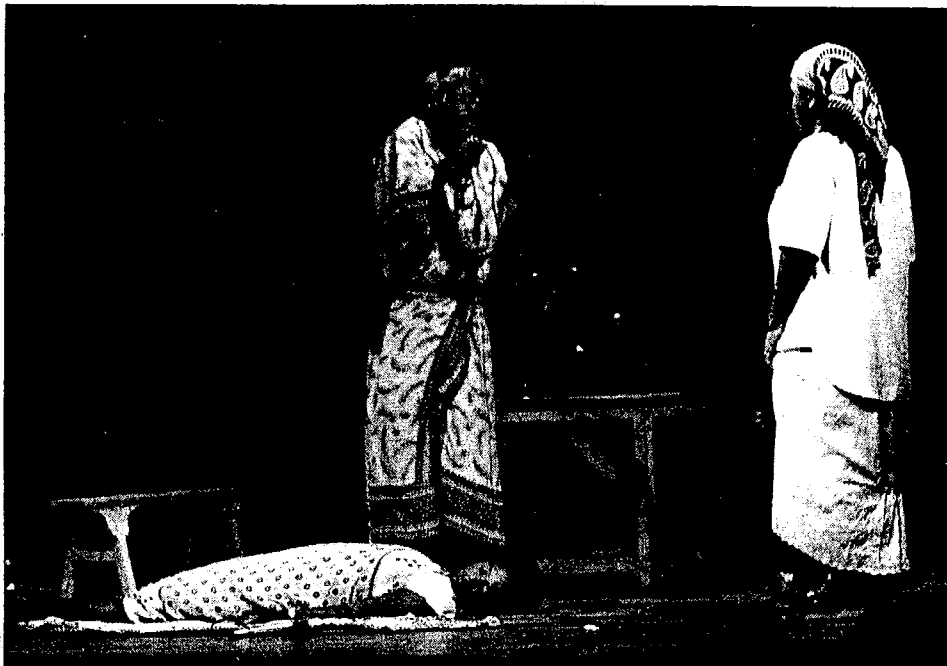
<sup>11</sup> Government wages in Tanzania are generally too low for a person to survive on.

vi) **Upbringing** (*Malezi*). Muungano Cultural Troupe, July 1992

This play was one of the most popular plays of the troupe. It was performed many times in Dar es Salaam, and it was also the play the group chose to perform on their tour upcountry. The main characters are the young lovers Kauzibe and Tausi. The first scene shows Kauzibe at home with his parents. Kauzibe says he is now an adult, it's time for him to have his own home. His mother is strongly against the idea, but his father gives in after a lot of quarrel. In the next scene, we are at the home of Tausi. Tausi, in her school-uniform, is just coming home. Her mother starts asking her why she is late, and what she has been doing. She also wants to know who gave her the nice *kanga* which she is carrying with her. Tausi answers that a friend at school, Kauzibe, gave it to her. The mother is impressed, and says that this Kauzibe must be well off. Some days later, when the mother needs salt, she tells Tausi to go to Kauzibe to fetch some. Kauzibe, living a happy bachelor life in his new home, is just telling his criminal friend Bobea of all the girlfriends he has, when Tausi comes knocking at the door. Kauzibe is surprised to see her, saying to the audience: "Well, these days the girls have started to come on their own invitation!"<sup>12</sup> The boys invite Tausi to share a marijuana cigarette, and they all get very "high". Bobea tactfully leaves, and Kauzibe tries to seduce Tausi. She says that she is afraid.

At the home of Tausi, the father has come home from work. He asks his wife for Tausi, and she lies, saying that Tausi is still at school, doing evening classes. The husband then finds Tausi's school uniform, and he rails at his wife, demanding the truth. He then runs off to the house of Kauzibe, a big manchete in his hand. Tausi recognizes the furious voice of her father and hides under the bed. The father breaks the door open, starts a dramatic fight with Kauzibe, and finally chases the two lovers off stage, to the thorough enjoyment of the audience. In the next scene, Tausi is alone with her mother. She is wringing her hands, looking unhappy and shy. The mother asks her what the trouble is. Tausi says: "Since that day when you asked me to go to Kauzibe to fetch salt, ... I have not had my ...." The mother is shocked, but not irresolute. She calls a female quack, who asks Tausi when she last had her menstruation, and then gives her some medicine to drink. She says "it" will come right out, Tausi only has to lie down and wait. Tausi is in great pain, having cramps. A few minutes later she is lying still.

<sup>12</sup> According to the norms, a girl should always be called upon before visiting a man. When the actor was in the mood, he would elaborate this scene by likening the girl to attractive objects like a Mercedes Benz, saying things like: "The Benz rolls in" etc.



*Plate 17.* Scene from *Upbringing*. The quack tells the mother that Tausi is just sleeping.  
*Plate 18.* The dead body of Tausi is carried away. To the right; Bobea, next to him; Kauzibe.



Her mother is very worried, but the quack tells her that her daughter is just sleeping and that she should be left alone to rest. She then takes her bottle and tip-toes off. The mother soon realises that Tausi is dead. She screams, and all the neighbours come running. The scene with the neighbours running in from all directions is portrayed in a very comic way, the one person crying and howling more desperately than the other. As the dead body of Tausi is carried away, Kauzibe, with his arm still bandaged after the fight with Tausi's father, and his friend Bobea, stand in the background wondering what is going on.

The name of the play, "Upbringing", refers both to the parents of Kauzibe who let the young boy live on his own, and to the mother of Tausi who encourages her daughter to visit Kauzibe. In the play called "Europe", the parents of a girl are similarly indirectly criticized for caring more about the money their daughter can bring them than for her actual welfare.

vii) **Europe (Ulaya)**. Village Museum, June 1992

A man, living in Germany, writes home to his father in the village, asking him to find a wife for him. The chosen girl is not informed until right before the wedding, her parents caring only about the high brideprice the man has offered, and the nice things they will get later as gifts from Europe. The husband-to-be has nice clothes and the stay in Europe has given him a foreign accent on his Swahili, something which he is ridiculed for. Next, we see the newly-wed couple in Europe. There is a tablecloth on the table, flowers in the living room, and even a telephone. The girl looks uneasy, but the husband tells her that she will get used to it all. Nonetheless, after two months the wife is so homesick that she desperately wants to return home. She asks a friend of the husband to explain the situation to him. They all go back to the village. There, the girl tells her parents that the husband has given her pork to eat, and that he has been beating her. The play ends with the husband and his friend being chased off the stage by the family of the girl and the other villagers.

The moral of the play, apart from criticizing parents who "sell" their daughters for money, is that the "grass is not always greener on the other side". Many Tanzanians dream of a trip to Europe, but the play shows that it may not be the ideal place after all. A similar theme is rendered in the next play, where a woman leaves her husband for a richer man.

viii) **The woman who wanted everything (Mwanamke mwenye tamaa)**. Village Museum, May 1992

The first scene depicts a poor couple with a baby. They do not have anything to eat, so the husband leaves to see if he can get hold of some

food or money. A woman comes to visit. She tells the wife: "I have brought your ex-boyfriend, he has come all the way from Nairobi to see you." A little later the husband comes home, still without money or food. The wife asks him to hold the baby for a minute, she then says "good bye", and leaves with the other man. The poor man asks the audience: "What shall I do with the baby? I have no milk." He decides to go to his mother-in-law. His wife, however, arrives there before him and is asked by her mother: "Where is your child and your husband?" The woman answers: "You see, he gives me nothing, but now I have another boyfriend who is rich." "That is good", answers the mother, "go with him". The husband then arrives at the house. The mother-in-law lies, saying that the daughter has just left for town. The husband wants to leave the baby there, but the mother refuses, telling him that he should just go to buy some milk at the store. When he has left, the parents are laughing behind his back, telling each other how poor he looks, he does not even have any buttocks left. We then see the wife in her new home in Nairobi, dressed in a nice, new *kanga* and ordering the houseboy to do this and that for her. The idyll does not last long, though, as in the following scene the husband is drunk and refuses to let his wife into the house, where he is keeping a young mistress. He tells her to go back to Tanzania. When she asks for money for the journey, he just says that she go on foot. We then see the first husband. He is now well dressed, accompanied by a beautiful woman, and he is talking English. The first wife comes up to him, saying that she is his wife. He replies that he does not remember her, and moreover, he has now got a new wife. "And I'm doing very well" he boasts, showing off his finery to the audience.

This play has the theme of Numbskull Jack as well as the lesson of not trusting affines.<sup>13</sup> In this case the man is betrayed not only by his wife, but also by his parents-in-law. The moral of the story further tells people that their bad deeds might very well turn back upon themselves. This is how sorcery is believed to work as well. If the person you directed the sorcery against takes protective medicine, the sorcery will be cast back at you and make you die or get very sick. This is what happens in *The landlady*, although in a more direct way.

ix) **The landlady** (*Mama mwenye nyumba*). Muungano Cultural Troupe, November 1992

In this play, Kauzibe is a young man coming from the countryside to Dar es Salaam to find work and seek his fortune. He rents a room from a

<sup>13</sup> An affine is a person related to Ego by a marriage link.

landlady, a woman much older than himself. The landlady displays an erotic interest for him from the very start. She invites him for food, and Kauzibe's bumpkin background is revealed when he thinks that the spices in the Pilau dish are some strange medicine, and when he admits that he has never tasted a soft-drink. The landlady seem to think that his lack of knowledge just adds to his charm, and she does her best to seduce him. She does not succeed in this until one night when she manages to get him drunk. Kauzibe soon thrives as the "husband" of the landlady. He has a job, gets nice clothes, and the landlady tells the other tenants that they are to pay their rent to *him*, since he is now the man of the house.

After some time, Kauzibe receives a letter from his parents. They tell him to come home immediately, as they have something important to tell him. As Kauzibe is leaving for the journey, the landlady is crying and clinging to him. Kauzibe just looks at the audience as if asking for an explanation of this strange behaviour. In the village, his parents are waiting for him with his bride-to-be, Tausi. She is young, sweet and shy, and Kauzibe's blood runs hot. He brings his wife with him to town. The landlady receives them well, calling Tausi her sister-in-law (as if Tausi were the sister of Kauzibe and she herself was his wife) and telling her that she may come to her anytime if she gets in trouble. Kauzibe then tells her that Tausi is his wife. When he later that day visits the landlady alone, he finds her crying. She says that if he cannot leave Tausi because of his parents, she wants to become his second wife. Kauzibe says it is impossible, Tausi would just go home and tell. The landlady replies that if that is the case, he will have to sleep at her place every night, and then tell his wife that he is working over time. If not, she will throw them out. And she demands the deal to be valid from *that night*.

In the next scene, Tausi is complaining to the audience that her husband never sleeps at home. She decides to go to the landlady, as she had invited her to come with any problems she might have. The landlady listens attentively to Tausi and advises her to go home to her village again. No, says Tausi, "What will they say?" Well then, says the landlady, "You better get yourself a lover." That night she sends an old friend over to knock at Tausi's door. Tausi refuses to let him in, and subsequently, the man tries to force the door open. Tausi shouts that there is a thief, and all the neighbours come running out, including Kauzibe. Tausi is shocked to see Kauzibe there, even more so because he is wearing only a loin-cloth. She scolds him, and starts to attack the woman who is wearing the same kind of fabric as him. The husband of this woman, however, tells her that she has been sleeping with *him*, so it can't be her that Kauzibe is with. They all return to their own places.

The following day Tausi goes to the landlady again, disclosing her trouble. The landlady is full of sympathy. "But", says Tausi, "It will soon be revealed who it is. I have written to my parents about the whole affair, and my grandfather is a medicine man. He will look into magic water, and when he puts a knife into the water, the woman with whom my husband is sleeping will die, and blood will be running in the water." The landlady is scared, and decides to kill Tausi by poison. When Tausi is out for a moment, the landlady pours the poison into her soft-drink, and then leaves on an errand. Tausi comes back and is just about to take a sip of the bottle, when she feels she needs to tell the audience how terrible she thinks Kauzibe is. She lifts the bottle to her mouth again, but stops to say that she should never have come to town etc. This goes on, with the audience screaming every time she is about to take a sip. Then suddenly, in her affected mood, she knocks the bottle of the still absent landlady over. She says to herself: "It does not look good that her bottle is half empty when she comes back, I'd better give her mine." When the landlady is back, she drinks the soft-drink that was meant for Tausi. As she is just about to finish it, Tausi asks her for a rag to dry the floor, as she has spilt Fanta on it. "Whose Fanta?" the landlady asks hysterically. "Yours, so I swopped." "What!" screams the landlady and rolls on the floor, trying to vomit. Tausi calls the neighbours, who are wondering what the trouble is. The landlady finally admits that she has had poison in the soft-drink of Tausi, but consumed it herself. She is carried off to hospital. Kauzibe wants his wife to go home with him. She refuses. Addressing the audience she says: "One thinks that the husband is at work, and then he is with other women ...."

The sympathy of the audience in this play was with Tausi, of course, but there was also understanding for the difficult situation of Kauzibe coming as a country bumpkin to the large city. The man sitting next to me during the performance told me that housing is a very big problem in Dar es Salaam. Extra-marital affairs are not at all uncommon. In the final two plays it is the adultery on the side of women which is humorously mocked.

x) **The world tells** (*Dunia inasema*). JKT (National Army Troupe), October 1992

A man is going away for a seminar, and asks his mother-in-law to come to look after his wife while he is away. After he has left, the wife goes to the market where she meets her ex-boyfriend. They are both very happy to see each other, and they agree to meet that night. The mother, however, peeps out and sees the lover when he arrives. The next morning, she tells her daughter that she saw something which looked like legs passing during the night. The daughter answers that it must have been a rat or a cat. The

mother decides that she will not trust the young woman to go the market again. She goes there herself, and comes back telling the daughter that people are already talking about her behaviour. In the night, the lover comes back. To everyone's surprise, the husband returns from his trip the following morning. The mother is able to keep her son-in-law occupied with talk so that her daughter gets time to hide the lover. She then tells her son-in-law that his wife has been sick, and that the medicine-man has prescribed that they must cover his head with a *kanga*. The plan, to hide from the husband that the lover is sneaking out, is just about to work when a friend of the husband arrives. He tells the poor man about his rival. The husband goes into the bedroom where the lover is still hiding under the bed. He starts spraying mosquito-killer around the bed, and discovers the other man, who crawls out, shivering with fright. The jealous husband throws poison from a bottle into his eyes, making him blind. The cries and screams of the wife attract the ten-cell house leader who comes to settle the case.<sup>14</sup>

xi) **The census** (*Sensa*). Makutano Dancing Troupe, November 1992  
A woman goes to visit her lover. While she is there, the governmental House Survey Team arrives, and her husband happens to be a member of the delegation. Wife and husband fight wildly, and the little play climaxes with the two chasing each other off stage.

## Conclusion

In giving these summaries of the theatre plays, I have tried to relate them to the lived experiences of the low-income urban audience who watch them. We have seen that the plays are about the problems of coping with poverty, about rural-urban migration,<sup>15</sup> and about the changing family relations following modernization and urbanization. These are the themes of the plots, the explicit or surface level of meaning. On a deeper level, the plays are about *value systems*, expressing what their authors see as correct or bad/evil behaviour. The audience, as expressed by the woman quoted in the introduction, feel that they learn something from the normative values inherent in the plays.

<sup>14</sup> Part of the Ujamaa policy has been a system where every tenth household is represented by a leader who acts as a link between these households and the local CCM office.

<sup>15</sup> Almost 70 per cent of the audience are immigrants to Dar es Salaam, see Table 7.



In Table 4, I have listed some of the implicit values which I found central in three or more of the plays. The fact that these values recur in plays by different groups indicates a shared concern about them. In the table, I have specified the *positive values*, but these values are often illustrated by dramatizations of its *opposite*, eg. the negative value. In *King Majalia*, for example, the values of motherhood are expressed by the dichotomy between the biological mother who abandons her new-born baby and the social mother who takes care of the boy. The drama form gives the onlookers an emotional experience of these values, visible most clearly to an observer through the melodramatic effect of the *taarab* song "There is no one like mother." In *Upbringing* and *The woman who wanted everything*, the opposite of good motherhood is exemplified by mothers who encourage their daughters to bad behaviour in order to gain material wealth. Such solutions are always portrayed as dead-end, and sometimes with an utterly tragic outcome, as in *Upbringing*, where the mother realizes that abortion medicines have killed her only child.

The existential question of what is more important in life — material wealth or ethically correct conduct — is articulated in several of the plays. The moral is not that there is anything wrong in becoming rich as such. The heroes in *King Majalia*, *The fruits of my own work*, and *The woman who wanted everything* all rise from poverty to material wealth, and the audience is made to disassociate themselves from the villagers who kill the mother of *Majalia* out of jealousy. What the plays communicate, however, is that material wealth should not be won at the expense of fairness in human relations.

*Who is standing up*, *Think before you marry her* and *The fruits of my own work* all depict a man who trusts his treacherous wife at the expense of his son or brother, i.e. his consanguineal kin. Here negative examples are used to communicate the value of loyalty between men related through blood-ties against in-married women (their affines), persons who are not trust worthy. This theme — the conflict of loyalty that can arise when a person marries — was reflected in other media as well. *Kangas* always have a saying printed on them,<sup>16</sup> and one of the 1992 designs of the Mwanza Textile Company had a picture of a boat with the text: "If the boat overturns, whom do I save, my parents, wife or child?" (*Wazazi mke na*

<sup>16</sup> Women may use their *kangas* to communicate to other people messages that are not possible or proper to say in a direct way. A *kanga* with the words "You have yours and I have mine, so why this hatred?" (*Wewe na wako mimi na wangu chuki ya nini*), for example, can be used to tell a jealous neighbour that you are not after her husband or lover.

*mtoto ngalawa ikizama nimwoke nani*), reflecting just this conflict of loyalty.

In the short stories of Agoro Anduru, lack of trust in matrimonial/love relationships is a perennial theme (Anduru 1982). Here the villain may be a man just as well as a woman, in contrast to the theatre plays where there is a preponderance of women who lack any moral sense. Women in these plays perform acts which totally break with social taboos and the gender role they are assigned to. Examples are the mother in *Think before you marry her* who tries to seduce her son (son by classification) and the landlady who buys the love of a man much younger than herself. The validity of traditional gender roles is also the subject when the young boys in *Think before you marry her* and *Who is standing up* are ordered by women (their "mothers") to do household tasks. The stress put on these situations reveals to us that this is work that really should be done by the women themselves.

Three of the plays depict adultery. In *The landlady*, a man spends every night with another woman than his wife, but he does this involuntarily, actually forced by the woman, and this is what makes the story entertaining and fun. In the plays where "real" adultery is committed, however, the sinners are women. I do not think that *The world tells* and *The census* would have been entertaining to people if the women's roles were taken by men. Adultery on the side of men is taken for granted and does not really shock anyone, while the same thing for women conflicts with what society takes to be the moral standard. It is striking that the bad deeds in the plays are consistently performed by women; in the cases when men do wrong, they are lured to do so by women. One could argue that these plays are written by men and that they thus express a male view on what modernization "does to women", but women by no means seem to take offence at the way their sisters are portrayed in the plays. On the contrary, they agree that the acts of the women in these plays are "evil and insane" (and very entertaining as well).

Max Gluckman has argued that the former rituals of reversal among the Zulu, where the women were allowed to act as if they were men, "gave expression, in a reversed form, to the normal rightness of a particular social order" (Gluckman 1982:116) and that it was the women's basic acceptance of the normal order which made the ritual effective. These theatre plays can be seen in the same light; they express the correct values of the society — motherhood, loyalty, etc. — by giving the audience an emotional experience of what it would be like if the rules were broken.

As mentioned in the main introduction, performance theorists see many parallels between modern performing arts and more traditional forms of

performance like rituals. The final section discusses the popular theatre plays and the commercial *ngoma* in the light of these theories.

Table 4  
 Recurrent values in eleven popular theatre plays

	1. Motherhood (parenthood)	2. Loyalty between male consanguineal kin versus deceit by affines	3. Traditional gender roles and trust	4. There are things more important in life than material wealth
i) King Majalia	x			
ii) Think before you marry her	x	x	x	
iii) Who is standing up	x	x	x	
iv) The fruits of my own work		x		
v) With bitterness I said	x			x
vi) Upbringing	x			
vii) Europe	x			x
viii) The woman who wanted everything	x			x
ix) The landlady			x	
x) The world tells			x	
xi) The census			x	

## 5 The modernization of performance

### Introduction

Both traditional dance and popular theatre are performed within the framework of commercial “cultural shows” in Dar es Salaam. As entertainment genres however, the two are considered qualitatively different. Ngoma is seen as part of the African customs and traditions (*mila na desturi*), and is more appreciated by those belonging to the ethnic group of the given dance than others. Its entertainment value is judged by the spectators as well as artists in relation to the “village original”, and it contains little or no literal meaning. Popular theatre, on the other hand, relies heavily on spoken text, is appreciated equally by all ethnic groups, and is looked upon as a new and modern genre. Although it is the dance genre which has been granted the honour of carrying on the rich tradition of African expressive arts, I will argue in this section that also the popular theatres share central characteristics with traditional performance.

### Reflexivity in performance

The popular theatre plays take their themes from the realities of urban life. This, however, is not to say that they present a direct mirror of society. The conflicts and their resolution are dramatized and exaggerated beyond the real life-situations — as when the neighbours of Majalia kill his mother,<sup>1</sup> or when the old man in *Who is standing up* tramples on his friend’s baby to punish him for his bad behaviour towards his first-born son. Such exaggeration is, according to the performance theorist Richard Schechner, a characterization of all aesthetic drama;

Aesthetic drama compels a transformation of the spectators’ view of the world by rubbing their senses against enactments of extreme events, much more extreme than they would usually witness. The nesting pattern makes it possible for the spectator to reflect on these events rather than flee from

<sup>1</sup> That envious people may kill the person they envy is a recognized fact, but this is believed to be done through sorcery or witchcraft, not by physical beating as in this play.

them or intervene in them. That reflection is the liminal time during which the transformation of consciousness takes place (Schechner 1988:172).

The Tanzanian audience perceives this "transformation of consciousness" as learning. In the introduction to section four, I quoted a woman who said that she preferred theatre to *ngoma* because she learned something from it, and other informants expressed themselves in similar ways. In line with the socialistic cultural policy, the political songs that go with the dances were meant to "educate" the audience. It is therefore interesting to note that the only *ngoma* which informants said was educative was Lizombe, which ironically enough has apolitical songs.

The authors of the plays say that the theatre should educate, but they do not feel obliged to write about the political issues of the Party, and they employ a different strategy to "teach" their audiences than the convention of political songs. The plays are about values, and often have a moralistic tone, in the form of a cautionary tale. But in contrast to the political dance songs which are simple propaganda messages, they make the audience reflect upon the fiction on the stage in relation to conflicts they experience in their daily life. I do not have data on how these plays are talked about in daily situations or made relevant by the people who watch them, but it is beyond doubt that the production of the plays is a result of reflexive processes. I referred to MacAloon's definition of reflexivity in the introduction to this report. Reflexivity, he says, is "the capacity of human beings to distance themselves from their own subjective experiences, to stand apart from and to comment upon them" (MacAloon 1984:11).

Reflexivity in cultural performance has been a debated subject among anthropologists. Don Handelman has studied and compared reflexivity in festival, symbolic reversal, joking relationships and spectacle. He employs the "play" concept of Bateson when he argues: "because the world of play is based on an idea of make-believe, it raises questions and doubts about the validity of ordinary experience" (Handelman 1982:162). He continues:

Unlike, for example, ritual and ceremony which "discourage untrammelled inquiry" (Moore and Meyerhoff 1978:14) into the phenomenal coherence of cosmic and social order, the messages of play do exactly the converse. They take apart the clock-works of reality, and question their organization, and indeed their very validity as human and as cultural constructs (Handelman 1982:163).

Bruce Kapferer would disagree with the generalization made by Handelman, who label rituals un-reflexive. He calls on anthropologists to

pay more attention to the audience at ritual gatherings and the way they are ordered. In the Sinhalese demon exorcisms studied by him, the audience at various stages of the performance were distanced to, or directly involved in, the ritual and it was the times of distance which allowed them to "reflect upon their own and others' actions and understandings" (Kapferer 1982:180). In this way they could objectify themselves, just as Handelman argues that the play frame enables the self to "regard itself and others as object" (Handelman 1982:163).

Victor Turner has also taken interest in reflexive processes. His work is especially relevant for our study, since we are interested in the relationship between the modern popular theatre and traditional forms of performance. Turner has attempted to construct a theory that can explain how performances, ranging from ritual to theatre and film, are not only reflexive, but representations of the redressive phase in what he called the social drama. He sees "primitive" ritual and modern theatre as two steps on the evolutionary ladder of performance. I referred to Turner's writings on this theme in section three when I illustrated how dance as a commercial art genre had been separated from an amalgam of performative arts. In an earlier publication, called *From Ritual to Theatre*, he writes:

It would seem that with industrialization (and) urbanization (...) the former integrity of the orchestrated religious gestalt that once constituted ritual has burst open and many specialized performative genres have been born from the death of that mighty (...). These genres of industrial leisure would include theatre, (...) film, the novel, folk drama, major sports events and dozens more (Turner 1982:86).

Turner perceives the modern entertainment genres of leisure-time in modern society as descendants of the rituals of traditional society. Let us see to what degree his theories and models, originally constructed to explain processes that have taken centuries to evolve in Europe and Japan (Turner 1984), can be useful for understanding the development which Tanzanian performance has under in the course of the past thirty years.

### **From ritual to theatre: Turner's theory of performance applied to the Tanzanian case**

Most anthropologists associate Turner first and foremost with his work on the Ndembu of what is now Zambia. In his early publications, Turner focused on the conflicts of this society as they were expressed in ritual life, and he introduced the concept *social drama* to explain the processes that

he had witnessed (1968 [1957]). The concept was modelled on a cultural form, the stage drama, and Turner explains the background of his choice in this way:

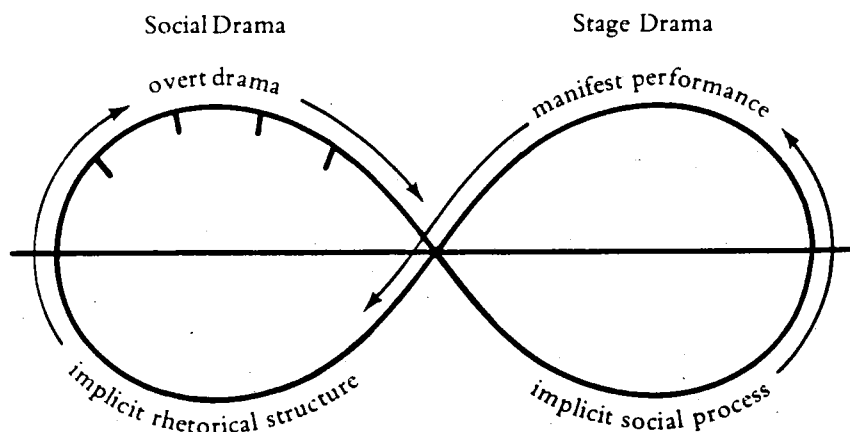
(N)o one could fail to note the analogy ... between those sequences of supposedly "spontaneous" events which made fully evident the tensions existing in those villages, and the characteristic "processual form" of Western drama (Turner 1982:9).

The concept was at the outset intimately related to the rituals of the Ndembu. Later, however, Turner found that social dramas "with much the same temporal or processual structure as ... detected in the Ndembu case (could) be isolated for study in societies at all levels of scale and complexity" (Turner 1974:33).

In complex societies, Turner holds, where stage drama is among the genres of cultural performance, there is an interdependency between the social drama and the stage drama. The "manifest social drama ... influences not only the form but also the content of the stage drama of which it is the active or 'magic' mirror" (Turner 1985:300). The stage drama, in turn, acts back on the social drama by equipping the protagonists of these dramas in the real world "with some of their most salient opinions, imageries, tropes and ideological perspectives" (Turner 1985:301). Turner has collaborated with Schechener in making a model which shows this interdependence between social drama and stage drama:

Figure 6

The interrelationship of social drama and stage drama (Turner 1985:300)



The model confirms something which we have already found to be true for the stage drama in Dar es Salaam: popular theatre plays take their themes from the conflicts of urban reality. The connection which the model establishes the other way – from stage drama to the real world – is an influence which is harder to demonstrate. The plays are, as we have seen, expressions of values. They present models and concepts to people for understanding conflicts they meet in the real world. People say they learn something from seeing the plays, and there is the possibility that they make the plays relevant in situations in their own lives in the ways suggested by Turner above. The potential effects these plays have on real-life conflicts, and the effects which these again will have on the theatre, will take place in a spiralling way (Turner 1985:301). These developments will be part of a historical process; although this is an intriguing subject, it falls outside the field with which I am now dealing.

Let us leave the interrelationship between stage drama and society here, and continue with the relationship between ritual and theatre as Turner sees it. As noted, he views “primitive” ritual and modern theatre as two steps on the evolutionary ladder of performance. The reflexive and therapeutic character of theatre is “essentially a child of the redressive phase of social drama” (Turner 1985:297). The redressive phase of the social drama is the last of the three phases which Turner has found to be central to this institution, the two first being breach and crisis. (For the relationship between social drama and ritual process, see figure 7.)

A social drama may occur at any level from family to state, and breach occurs when one or more social norms are broken. In the next phase, crisis, people take sides. Old conflicts may be re-articulated and the basic unity and continuity of the group is threatened. At this point the agents of redress interfere. Let me quote Turner at some length here, as it is the redressive process which is central to us:

In state societies ... failure to resolve crisis at the local or regional levels may result in redressive action by the central political or judicial authorities operating through their courts and police. In the simpler, preliterate, stateless societies redressive machinery is often of two kinds, jural or ritual. (...) What is of special interest to us here is ritual action. (...) If outbreaks of illness or a series of untoward events (plagues, ... famine, drought, unexpected raids by outsiders ...) coincide with breaches of rules and relationships *within* the community, and there appears to be no rational settlement of dispute in terms of customary law, recourse may be had to divination or oracles, procedures to detect the invisible causes of conflict and to prescribe the appropriate type of ritual to propitiate or exorcise the afflicting spirit or witch's familiar. Such rituals, which I have



called "rituals of affliction" in the Central African context, are found in many societies and often develop an elaborate symbolism. (...) Not only rituals of affliction but even life-crisis rituals ... and seasonal rituals ... have reference to conflict. Whereas rituals of affliction are sometimes a direct response to misfortune regarded as a manifest symptom of hidden conflict, the other main types may be viewed as *prophylactic* against conflict, anticipating and averting it by vividly demonstrating the blessings of cooperation (Turner 1982:108-10).

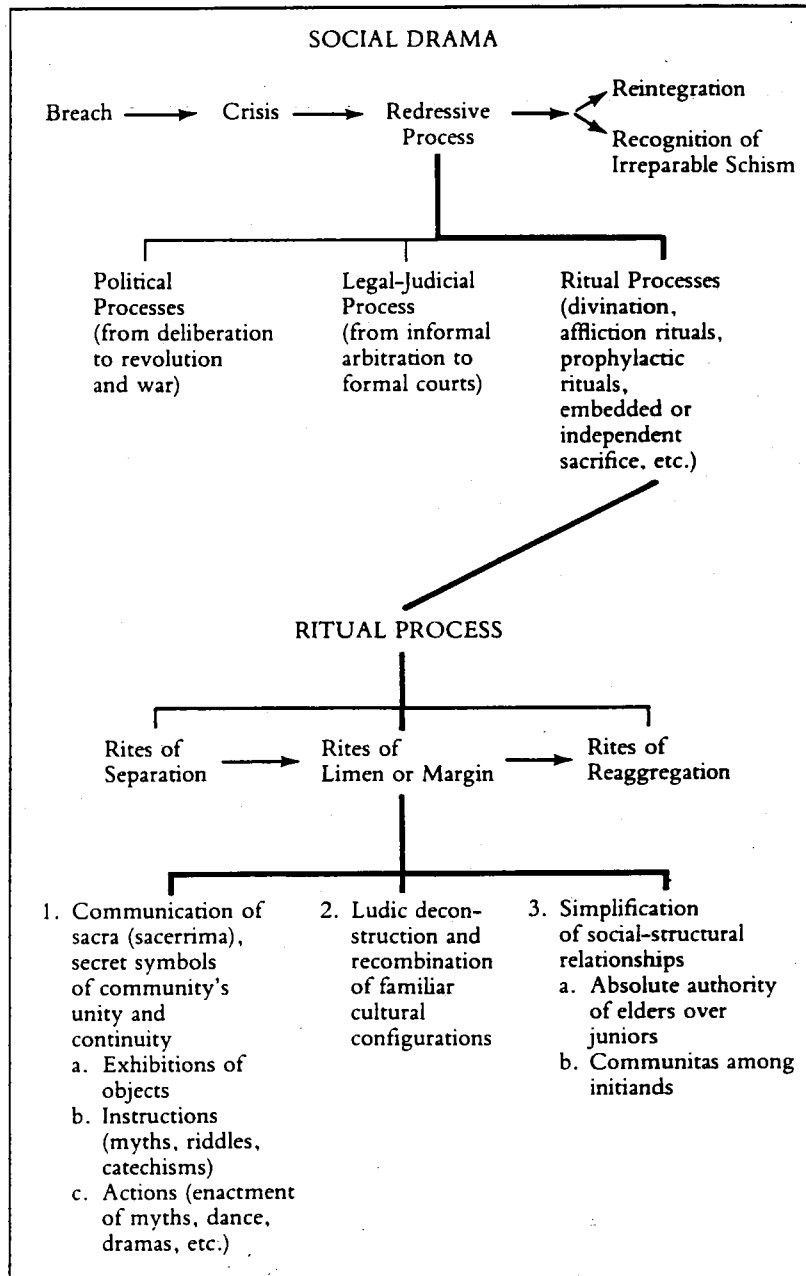
The rituals of affliction have redressive functions in the small communities in which they are performed. But what happens when such rituals are taken out of that specific context — when they are nationalized and commercialized, as in the Tanzanian case?

I referred earlier (section three) to Magulukos work on the Ukala ritual dance when comparing the national version with the ethnic original. Maguluko writes about the occasions and frameworks of this dance:

Normally Ukala ritual dance is performed annually to appease the spirits. In (*sic.*) other occasions it is performed if a member of the community falls sick with an undiagnosed disease, or other abnormalities. This is done after consultation with the community diviner(s). The dance can also be organized by a group of hunters before a hunt, to protect them during their hunting expedition. In other times it is performed for purification of guns in the community (Maguluko 1991:49).

We see from what Maguluko writes that Ukala fits well with the type of rituals among the Ndembu which Turner labelled rituals of affliction. In its nationalized form, however, Ukala is no longer a ritual of affliction, as it does not relate to "abnormalities" or conflicts in the society. It is performed at any random time by national or commercial troupes to entertain a (paying) audience, miming a hunting expedition and the women who come to collect the meat. When the commercial groups address conflicts of today's urban society, they do this through the performances of theatre plays, not by traditional dances.

Figure 7  
 The relationship between social drama and ritual process  
 (Turner 1985:293)



Turner further writes that the boys' circumcision ritual and the girls' puberty ritual among the Ndembu "dramatize the characteristic divisions and opposition between men and women" in a matrilineal society where there is a "structural conflict between female structural continuity and male contemporary authority" (Turner 1982:110). The national dances taken from life-crisis rituals in Tanzania all come from matrilineal societies, and there is reason to believe that some of these dances in their original settings worked in similar ways as Turner reports from the Ndembu. For a multi-ethnic audience however, the dances are simply erotic entertainment, and although they at one level say something about gender roles and important aspects of the relationship between the sexes, they do not seem to invite the on-lookers to reflect on "oppositions between men and women". Problems of gender are, however, of the major issues of the theatre plays.

We have seen that the ability inherent in traditional performance to relate to conflicts and act redressively is lost with the secularization of the traditional dances, and that this role has been taken over by the theatre. We have in fact documented a local variant of what Turner holds to be a general rule in the historical development of performance:

(A)s our species has moved through time ... we have become somewhat more adept in devising cultural modes of confronting, understanding, assigning meaning to, and sometimes coping with crisis... The third stage, modes of redress, which always contained at least the germ of self-reflexivity, has moved out of the domains of law and religion into those of the various arts. The growing complexity of the social and economic division of labour, giving specialization and professionalization their opportunity to escape from embedment in the total ongoing social process, has also provided complex socio-cultural systems with effective instruments for scrutinizing themselves (Turner 1982:11).

Traditional and modern performance have in common that they deal with problematic sides of the society in a time (and often place) which is clearly distinguished from "normal" time. The concept of 'liminal' in rituals is well known to anthropologists, it refers to the *rite de passage* context where the novices are kept in an in-between state until the rite is completed and they are reagggregated to the normal world. Turner introduces the concept *liminoid* to characterize leisure genres such as art, sport, pastimes, games, etc. in modern industrialized societies. Liminal phenomena "tend to be ultimately eufunctional even when seemingly inversive for the working of the social structure, ways of making it work without too much friction." Liminoid phenomena, on the other hand, like books, plays, paintings and films, expose "the injustices, in-efficiencies, and immoralities of the

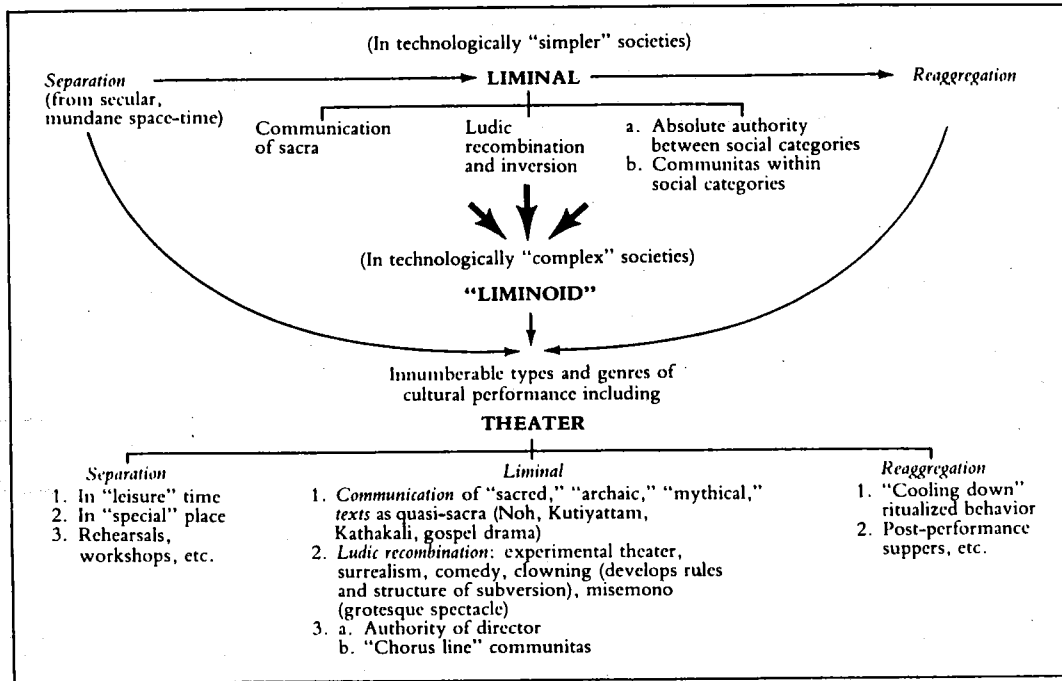
mainstream economic and political structures and organizations" (Turner 1982:54-55).

The authorities of Tanzania wanted performance in the modern sphere to keep the society-sustaining quality of traditional liminal performance. Artists were told to "propagate the Arusha Declaration" through their artistic works. They did so in songs, and sometimes in theatre too, when for example, it was made for sale to Radio Tanzania. However, the independent popular theatre ignored the calls of the politicians and performed plays about issues they themselves saw as important, or issues which they anticipated their audiences would find entertaining. I have not seen plays that express political critique or discontent, listed by Turner as typical themes of liminoid phenomena. Referring to the then communist states Russia, China and the countries of Eastern Europe, Turner writes that these systems tend to "reduce the potentially limitless freedom of liminoid genres" (Turner 1982:54); the same is true in Tanzania. Only seldom is there a need for the authorities to enforce the censorship laws on theatre (Lihamba 1985), as the groups employ self-censorship.

Turner has schematized the affinity between liminal phenomena in technologically "simpler" societies and the theatre as an example of a liminoid genre in technologically "complex" societies in his figure "The evolution of cultural genres of performance" (figure 8, below). Of the categories listed under "liminal" alternatives in the theatre, the Tanzanian popular theatre fits into *ludic recombination*. The plays have a comedy form, although with some melodramatic aspects. The *reaggregation* phase is not ritualized in the Tanzanian context. The *separation* phase is clear, however: the performance takes place in leisure-time when people go from their home or work to the social halls, and the majority of the audience dress up for the occasion.

Turner uses his knowledge of ritual life among the Ndembu to explain the "origin" and function of arts and other liminoid genres in technologically complex societies, but nowhere does he discuss the development of performance in contemporary modernizing countries. The theatre which he studied is one of the major cultural forms in the society in question. I would not categorize the popular theatre in Tanzania "a major cultural form", not yet. In the rural areas, and probably in Dar es Salaam as well, traditional performances are still the central cultural forms and they may continue to be so, theatre never becoming so widespread as in the fully industrialized countries Turner refers to.

Figure 8  
 The evolution of cultural genres of performance:  
 from "Liminal" to "Liminoïd" (Turner 1985:296)



I am aware that the use of Turner's general models for a completely different situation may seem overly simplified. However, I still feel that his models and theories can help us to see more clearly the relationship between popular theatre in Tanzania and traditional ritual performances. The theatre, a modern genre, seems in fact to have a closer affinity to the reflexive and redressive functions of traditional rituals than do the commercialized traditional dances which were, in many cases, taken directly out of these ritual contexts.

From abstract theories and models, let us now return to the empirical world. Drawing on the works of other researchers, I will compare the popular theatre to traditional performance in Tanzania. While I have used the theories of Turner to show the relationship between ritual and popular theatre, the next portions will in addition deal with performance genres like ceremonies and storytelling. I intend to show that there is an affinity between popular theatre and traditional performance generally, and that theatre thus may represent the "African tradition" in the modern sphere just as much as ngoma does, even though the first impression may tell you

something else, and even though most Tanzanian "cultural nationalists" probably would disagree.

### **Traditional and modern performance compared**

Traditional performance in Tanzania includes a host of forms. There are initiation rites, spirit exorcisms, street dances, celebration dances and story-telling, to mention a few. The various ethnic groups have their own varieties of some or all of these forms, making a thorough empirical comparison between the popular theatre and traditional performance an unrealistic task. I have therefore chosen to take the theatre plays as my starting point, and refer to material on performances in Tanzania which show a relation to these, as expressed either in form or content. In section three, I discussed the fact that governmental efforts to promote traditional expressive arts have been restricted to ngoma. I referred to the works of Mlama and Johansen in arguing that traditional performance often had theatrical aspects as well. Empirical examples of such events are reported from many different areas of Tanzania, and a few of them will be reviewed below.

In the Digubi initiation of Kaguru girls into adulthood, initiated women dance in a circle and short mime-plays are performed by one of them in front of the novice(s) sitting in the centre of the circle together with an interpreter who explains to them the meaning of the mime-plays (Mlama 1981:4). The Meru people of northern Tanzania celebrate a ceremonial wedding dance when the marriage has lasted for one year. The ceremony takes place at the bride's home, and men and women drink home-made beer separately. Before the beer-pot is removed, it is to be danced around, lest hunger and misfortune strike the family. An all-female assembly then performs "three scenes depicting love-play, birth, and care for the newborn child" (Haram 1992). In the love-play scene, one of the women takes the role of a man, forming a penis from her *kanga*. This scene is the object of much fun and laughter, but the ceremony as a whole is a serious expression of Meru values concerning the relationship between the sexes. Among the Chagga, mimical play was used in a ceremony traditionally performed during the last month of pregnancy. During the ceremony, "a practical demonstration of the act of giving birth (was) given with all its attendant observances and ritual". The women present would act the part of the one to be delivered, the part of the diviner, the part of the husband, and so on (Dundas 1968:197 [1924]).

All these performances aim at the transfer of knowledge in some form. Mime has also been used in religious performance, however, as in the Ukala ritual dance referred to earlier. The dance is part of a ritual to

appease the ancestral spirits so that they will help the prayers of the living to reach God. The ritual is under the leadership of a diviner, and it passes through stages of prayer and sacrifice before the dramatization of a successful hunt is enacted (Maguluko 1991). The Pogoro of Morogoro region perform satirical scenarios as part of their burial ceremonies. In the plays, material from the dead person's life, his relationship to the spirit world and the world of the living, form the basis for both serious and comic treatment (Lihamba 1985).

These examples should give enough evidence to show that drama was and is a part of traditional performance in Tanzania, even if the cultural policy after Independence gave the impression that traditional performance was *ngoma* only. Traditional drama, however, differs from the modern popular theatre in many ways. Among other things, it does not have the dialogue form, and dance is usually an integrated part. The content, too, is bound to differ from a religious performance to a secular one, and from a one-sex initiation context dealing with the deepest secrets of life, to a commercial performance open to people of both sexes and all ages.

Nonetheless, in the material collected by Elise Johansen, who studied the rites of the urban Makonde, I have found some striking similarities to the popular theatre themes. Just as the Kaguru mentioned above, the Makonde make use of mimical plays when girls are initiated into adulthood. The initiands stand together in a row, and the mimical plays are performed by ritual specialists just next to them.

In the first mime to be shown to the initiands, the two ritual specialists meet in an imagined forest. One of them is carrying a chicken, and she represents a man. The ritual specialist explains the meaning of the exercise in this way;

"There is a man who wants to marry you, and he comes to you giving you a present of a chicken and clothes. But, the chicken he is carrying, he has stolen it, the clothes he is bringing you he has stolen them, and he even has the falling sickness (epileptics)!" (...) The purpose of this exercise and song therefore, she says, is to teach the girls to choose their husbands carefully, and not be dazzled immediately with the presents and richness he boasts about (Johansen, forthcoming).

The lesson taught to the initiands here is a startling parallel to the moral of the theatre play *With bitterness I said* where Tausi, against her mother's advice, leaves her student boyfriend in favour of an older man who drives a car which is not his own. Another play, *The destitute man (Mwanaume fukara)*, presented a young man who wanted to marry, but who did not have the material means needed to enter married life. He decided to borrow

furniture and money from his friends, enough to make a girl marry him. The action and fun of the play takes place when all his friends and relatives come to his home to get back their things, and the poor man is finally left in his underwear. A very angry and disappointed wife adds to the misery.

In the second and third exercise, the Makonde girls are taught to avoid men while in seclusion. For an initiand, sex is absolutely taboo, and it would be a great shame to both her and her parents should she become pregnant. The men may pretend to have no sexual intentions, still they should never be let near the initiates. The tradition of secluding the girls from the time they got their first menstruation until a suitable suitor was found and the family had found "the means for providing the necessary things for the coming out ceremonies" (Swantz 86:391), was widespread on the coast of Tanzania until recently. Marja Liisa Swantz reports that all of her informants had been "inside", most of them for about two years, some for as long as five years. The practise has declined since Independence, first and foremost as a result of the introduction of compulsory primary school, which does not allow students to stay away for such a long time, but also because many people see it as old-fashioned. Swantz interprets the seclusion period to symbolize the intended death of the girls' former social self (Swantz 86:365). Secluding girls from the time they became fertile until marriage was, however, also a practical way of avoiding the problem of unwanted pregnancies and babies born out of wedlock. In the theatre plays *King Majalia* and *Upbringing*, the young girls watching the plays witness what might happen to them if they enter relationships with men, and they can thus be said to be warned against such behaviour, in a similar way as the Makonde girls are during their initiation.

The last set of mimical plays of the Makonde initiation of puberty is concerned with adultery, as the girls are prepared for married life. The ritual specialist explained the act and the song that went with it in the following way: "Do not spread fire everywhere, your husband could happen to stamp on it" (Johansen, forthcoming). Fire is here a symbol for sex, and by the way the ritual expert expresses herself, the moral is not so much that adultery is bad, but that a person involved in it will be caught and get in trouble. This is exactly what the theatre plays *The world tells* and *The census* communicate too. At a later stage of their initiation, the girls are made to assume the male part in sexual intercourse while the ritual specialists plays the female part, thus showing the initiate the "physical movements necessary for a satisfactory sexual life" (op. cit.). It is the ritual context which allows the Makonde to perform acts in "public" that would otherwise be scandalous. Similarly, the theatre frame allows the cultural troupes to discuss and act out themes that are otherwise taboo. Their



activities, however, are regulated by censorship laws. Lihamba says about the laws:

In spite of the lack of follow through in these laws governing theatre performances, control has been effected in other ways. Radio Tanzania for example, follows a rigorous censorship of its theatre output on ideological and moral premises. The plays aired must contain the correct ideological position as well as exclude "unacceptable" activities. Such items as adultery and armed robbery are censored. Only the mildest form of profanity is allowed (Lihamba 1985).

As mentioned earlier, the Makonde are renowned for their traditional dances. More than half of the "national" dances which have been promoted by the government come from this ethnic group alone. But their rich tradition of mimical theatre has never been promoted, nor was it ever mentioned to me by any of the cultural bureaucrats that I was in contact with. The performance genre labelled storytelling, however, is acknowledged and represented as an art form by itself at the national art competitions arranged bi-annually. Storytelling is less theatrical than the mimical theatre of the Kaguru and Makonde presented above, but still makes creative use of body language and voice, making the written transcriptions but a bleak image of the real performance.

Mlama renders several stories in the appendix of her thesis "Tanzania Traditional Theatre as a Pedagogical Institution: The Kaguru Theatre as a Case Study". One story tells about Mwegoha, a famous elephant hunter. Mwegoha always killed the biggest elephants and thus got the largest tusks, which gave him a lot of cloth in exchange. His friends became jealous of his successes in hunting, and one day they killed him on the way back home from a hunt. Mwegoha, however, turned into a bird, and the bird fled to the village and sang a song telling about the murder. The murderers were punished by death and Mwegoha restored to life by the help of medicine (Mlama 1983:406-407). Similarly, the main character in the play *King Majalia* experiences that his neighbours kill his mother because they envy his success in life.

The single theatre theme that struck me the most was that featuring the deceit of affines. This theme is perhaps the most salient example of how the theatre framework enables a discussion of things that are disguised in daily life. The plays revealed to me a basic mistrust in the wives which men married, a mistrust that I never heard communicated in everyday life. When discussing the plays, I suggested that the theme might be seen in the light of the fact that men nowadays choose their wives themselves and that changing family relations and Western values lead men to favour their

wives at the expense of traditional kin obligations. Although these factors may play their part, the idea that in-married women are treacherous is not only restricted to urban centres and modern performance. The following story was given as response to a question by the anthropologist Gunnar Bårdli concerning the local rules of inheritance among a matrilineal people living in a village of Tanga region:

A man wanted to find out who loved him the most. One night he went into the woods, slaughtered a sheep that he had brought with him, and smeared the blood on his own body. He then went to his wife, woke her up from her sleep and whispered: "I have been fighting and I have killed a man. Let me have one of our children so that I can give him/her as compensation." "You must be crazy" answered the wife, "I can't do something like that". The man then went to his sister and said the same thing to her. But the sister answered: "Yes, you will have one of my children. If I have to choose between my child and my brother, then I choose my brother." The man then went to his brother, told him that he was guilty in murder and that he needed his help to bury the body and hide all traces. The two had quarrelled a lot through the years, but the brother still agreed to help. In the mean time, the wife had run off to the husband's best friend from his youth, who was now a police man, and told him about the terrible thing that had happened. When the man returned home, the two were waiting for him there. His friend, the policeman, hand-cuffed him and threw him into jail. The next morning, he was taken out to show where the body was buried. When they arrived to the place in the woods where the dead sheep was lying, the man pointed at the carcass and said: "I have not killed anyone. I have slaughtered this sheep and smeared its blood on myself to find out who love me the most. It turned out to be two only, my brother and my sister. The man then cut the meat of the sheep, cooked it, and invited his brother and sister for the meal. To his wife he said: "Go away, you are my enemy!" (Bårdli 1992, translated from Norwegian by the author).

The story was used to illustrate why brothers and sisters should inherit from each other, rather than spouses. It is not stated whether this story was created by the informant or whether it was part of the classical oral tradition. In either way, the narrative shows how stories are used to explain both existing orders and the potential conflicts in close relationships.

Beidelman has analysed two of the well-known folktales of the Kaguru, the same people studied by Mlama. The stories are concerned with two general social features which the Kaguru hold in common with all matrilineal peoples: "the importance of women in linking men with one another in such a society", and "the relations of authority between a man

and his sisters' children" (Beidelman 1963:54). Beidelman writes that the folktales "can be seen as miniature social drama(s) expressing some of the most important social problems faced by Kaguru men and women" (1963:56). In both stories, a mother's brother, represented by a hyena, misuses his authority over his sister's children. The children are represented by smaller animals — a rabbit, a genet and a civet. Genet and Civet are both fooled by Hyena, but Rabbit proves to be the smarter one, and he is able to unmask the evilness of Hyena.

By simplifying and abstracting certain important social situations and by making the characters animals rather than humans, Kaguru are able to provide themselves with sociological models which aid them in inculcating traditional values in their young people and reaffirming these same values and beliefs for the pleasure and remembrance of adults. The use of animals dissociates the hearer from actual people and events and the strong emotions these may involve. This, in turn, allows the Kaguru listener some objectivity and perspective when he is provided with such analysis by his elders (Beidelman 1963:62).

The stories invite the listeners to reflect on the values of society in much the same way as the theatre plays do, and Beidelman sees the folktales as conducive to social order. The folktales do in fact encourage the young to oppose their elders, but these are elders who are not really humans. Mothers brother (Hyena) behaves completely anti-socially, in a way only a witch would do, and he is duly punished by his own evil deeds.

If we compare the tradition of story telling to life-cycle rituals, we see that both intend to transform knowledge, but that they do this in different ways. Stories are open, they reveal tensions and may take side in situations of loyalty conflict as in the story above, but they invite listeners to interpret for themselves and to learn by making the story relevant to their own lives. In this respect the theatre plays are closer to the storytelling genre than to educative ceremonies or rituals where the message communicated may take the form of a simple authoritative order, as in the songs performed for the bride in the Shambaa wedding ceremony:

**Tegeleza**

*Tegeleza mwanangu mdodo  
nina mbuli mwenga naiwe  
mbuli shinu mwanangu  
utende kwei*

**Listen**

*My young daughter listen  
to my word  
a single word  
Be truthful*

**Neuonge vyedi**  
*Wifi neuonge vyedi*  
*hako hanguighwe*  
*moto*

**Talk kindly**  
*Be kind in talking*  
*our sister-in-law*  
*so that people can*  
*ask for fire*

**Mghoshi**  
*Chonge kangwe ni isho*  
*Chonge usheeke Mghoshi*  
*ukieka mgoshi Chonge*  
*usheuye kaya*

**Husband**  
*Chonge never leave*  
*your husband*  
*If you dare do that,*  
*never come this way (home)*

(Mngumi 1992:13-16)

These songs are non-discursive, an aspect noted by several writers as typical of ritual (Rappaport 1971, Bloch 1989). Bloch argues that formalized speech, of which song is the end-product, is used in the communication of traditional authority as well as in religion, and that "it is impossible to draw a sharp line between the two social phenomena" (Bloch 1989:45). Tanzania's leaders after Independence hoped that the political *ngoma* songs would have just this kind of authoritative power; and it seems that they indeed did, in the heyday of Ujamaa. As people realized that socialism did not bring them higher standards of living, however, the songs lost their effect and they became empty phrases, performed mainly to please the political leaders.

We set out to detect the empirical connections between modern popular theatre and traditional performance, and we have found many similarities in form as well as in content. We have also seen that there are some traditional themes that cannot be treated by the cultural groups, like those intimately connected with procreation. Lastly, we found that there are traditional ceremonies which do not share the reflexive qualities of the popular theatre.

Karin Barber, in her article "Popular Arts in Africa", sets out to construct a model of popular African arts. She introduces the concept of "the unofficial in traditional culture", in contrast to the official which is governed by generally-agreed rules and usually controlled by the elite. "There is the possibility", she writes, "that modern popular genres, insofar as they drew on traditional elements, tended to draw more on the unofficial strand of traditional culture" (Barber 1987:17). The roots of highlife, for example, can be found in the informal recreational music of West Africa rather than in the "traditional music that accompany ceremonial religious and political events" (Chernoff 1985:163). The notion of "unofficial art" is not discussed in the works of Turner where he makes the connection

between ritual and modern performance. As I see it, however, there is no necessary contradiction between the two ideas. The popular theatre may share aspects with the redressive function of traditional ritual, and in addition share characteristics with theatrical art forms that are not ritual.

Further, the modern theatre draws on a host of different genres and forms – not only traditional, but imported as well. Barber says about popular culture that it is recognized by just this syncretism, and that some see this as “a deplorable corruption of the authentic culture” (Barber 1987:10). *Ngoma*, even its commercialized form, is seen as much more “authentic” and African than popular theatre by the general Tanzanian public. I shared this general view, too, before going deeper into the material. Now, however, I would argue that the dances taken out of their original context constitute a new and modern performative genre just as the popular theatre does, and that neither is more *traditional* than the other, even though *ngoma* is rhetorically spoken of as tradition while popular theatre is seen as a completely modern genre.

One important aspect of traditional performance which neither of the two genres have incorporated to any extent is *participation*. The aspect of active participation, which Chernoff and others see as the most central in African musical events, is in the modern context carried on in the new popular dance styles, many of which are imported from Zaire. That it is the participation aspect which makes the dances meaningful to people, is reflected by the fact that Kwassa-Kwassa dance and music as passive entertainment (Stage Shows) emerge as the very least popular genre of the cultural troupes (see Figure 5). The main attractiveness of the dance lies in performing it, in the personal bodily experience of it together with others, not in watching it only.

There is a preoccupation with dance in Tanzania, be it village *ngoma* or modern popular dance forms, which is fascinating and somewhat incomprehensible to someone coming from outside. Indeed, perhaps it is “incomprehensible” to Tanzanians themselves too. Bateson has suggested that the unconscious of the mind can be communicated in non-verbal terms only; that this is what the dancer Isadora Duncan meant when she said: “If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it” (Bateson 1972:137). *Ngoma* was (and is) a major tool for self-expression in the traditional African society. I have argued that theatre in the urban setting has overtaken some of the functions of traditional performance. The theatre gives the audience an opportunity to reflect upon their own experiences, but it does not give them much opportunity to express what they themselves feel.

In the modern context, elements of the integrated *ngoma* event — which in the traditional context includes music, dance and mime — can be found in the various cultural genres. I have schematized this situation in figure 9. The two contexts, “modern” and “traditional”, do not represent different historical periods; both are contemporary. By “performance in modern context” I mean secular, multi-ethnic performances. Such performances may be categorized into participatory events and stage entertainment. Participatory events are concerts where people go to dance. Most of the bands play in the halls and bars where the cultural troupes have their performances. By stage entertainment, I mean the performances by the cultural troupes. The aspect of participation is present here too, but mainly in *taarab* and stage show, not in the genres which I connect directly to the traditional *ngoma* event: traditional dance and popular theatre. The form of traditional dance has been influenced mainly by the conventions of folklore (communication directed at the audience, not between the dancers and drummers themselves), and by the post-colonial cultural policy. The form of popular theatre builds on the *Vichekesho* genre, inspired by school theatre (originally introduced by the British), by American comedy films popular in the 1940s and 1950s, and by storytelling.

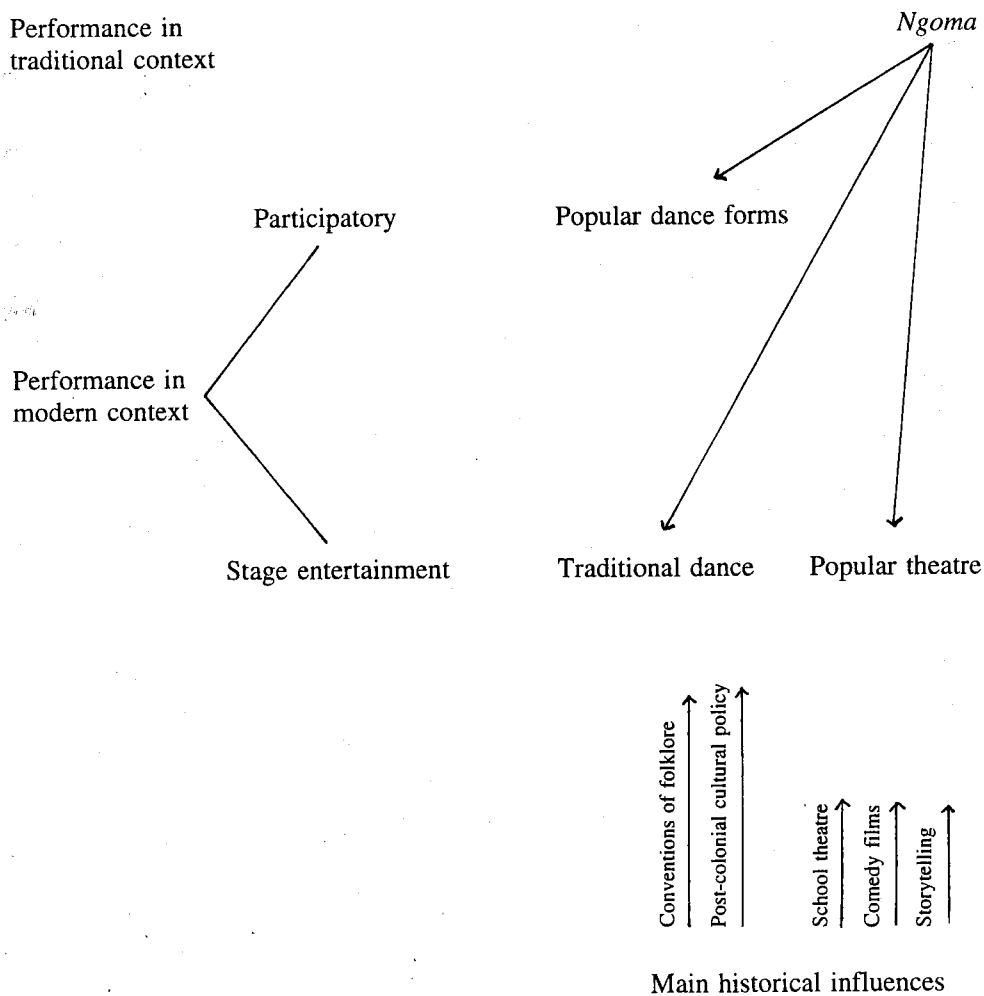


Plate 19. *Ngoma* event with mime (same event as plate 13).

The figure is not meant to illustrate performance in Tanzania or Dar es Salaam generally. It is simply intended to present, in condensed form, my field of study, which is limited to the performances of traditional dance and popular theatre by the commercial cultural troupes and their relationship to traditional performance.

Figure 9  
Traditional dance and popular theatre  
in relation to other modes of performance

Contexts:



## Performance and ideology

Popular theatre, in the form we see today, has a history of some 10 years only. The genre is an unplanned child of Tanzania's socialist cultural policy, unofficial and unacknowledged. *Ngoma* failed its nation-building task, but it is still perpetuated, as one of the major subjects at the College of Arts – in contrast to the farce-like popular theatre of the commercial troupes, which is not represented at the school at all. Drama at College of Arts can roughly be categorized into the following genres: Plays by acknowledged African playwrights,<sup>2</sup> short sketches usually in a middle-class setting, participatory educational theatre, and a genre called "African Theatre".

African Theatre is stage drama based on African myths and legends. The setting is always a diffuse pre-colonial past, usually in a small kingdom, and magical power and ancestral voices are natural elements. The plays often have a storyteller figure, and they may incorporate traditional music and dance. These plays were not very popular with the Bagamoyo audience. The local people who were watching the plays were often visibly bored, and impudent youth would sometimes tell the storyteller to leave the stage so that the play could continue.

I discussed the lack of popularity of African Theatre with the theatre director Kami, who said that Muungano would never be able to survive if they were to perform such plays. Even though the plays surely touch upon questions (existential and others) which are relevant in our time too, they are essentially seen as "historical" plays referring to the past, and that is not what the audience want to be served. People in Dar es Salaam as well as in Bagamoyo want to see their own reality dramatized on the stage, and they do not seem to be able to make the conflicts of the African Theatre relevant to their own life. The contemporary context of the popular theatre makes it easier to respond to the problems of present society, and the reflection process of the audience is made easier by direct identification.

Another important aspect is the form. African Theatre (and most of the other genres at the College as well) is art theatre, with little use of humour. Its form has much more in common with European classical theatre than the comical, overacted and burlesque popular theatre has. In this way, ironically enough, the African theatre is rather "Western", yet it claims by its very name to be uniquely African, in contrast to the other genres which supposedly are more foreign. The producers of popular theatre are not

<sup>2</sup> Professional productions by the teachers for the annual festival.



concerned about linking their art to any past tradition, they do not feel the need to justify what they do. If we look at the rapport and degree of reflexivity of the two, however, popular theatre is closer to the performances of the traditional society than African Theatre. It is noteworthy, also, that in several of the traditional performances that have been described (Johansen, forthcoming; Haram 1992), humour is a central feature.

The African Theatre genre at the College of Arts is yet another outcome of efforts to find an African identity in the arts, finding its parallel in other African countries. In Malawi for example, university plays are mainly set in "an ahistorical folkloric realm" (Barber 1987:44). The earlier attempt of "inventing a tradition", the nationalization of ethnic dances, was problematic in many ways, and very few students are willing to major in dance. One told me that to major in dance would be all right for someone with aspirations of going abroad, but that theatre was much more useful for those staying in Tanzania. Dancing *ngoma* is something "anyone" can do; moreover, it belongs essentially to "the past". By contrast, theatre production is modern and thus gives more prestige.

In section 2, I referred to Mbuguni and Ruhumbika who criticized the central place awarded to *ngoma* in the creation of the national culture. Writing from a Marxist viewpoint, they argued in 1974 that African leaders and artists in their search for their traditions should be guided "by the fact that his past culture is worth only if it helps his people to develop. If not he is being anti-revolutionary" (Mbuguni and Ruhumbika 1974:276). They further claimed that Nyerere's inaugural address, where he spoke in favour of the revival of traditional music and dance and the creation of a national culture, had been misunderstood. The cultural organs which perpetuated *ngoma* in schools and other governmental institutions, they said, had ignored the passage where Nyerere stressed the importance of learning from other cultures. According to Mbuguni and Ruhumbika, *ngoma* was in fact one of the things from the past which did not help the people to develop:

Let us take the example of the *ngoma* which accompany and indeed are an essential part of our rites and traditional religious beliefs. It is obvious that as we come to better master and therefore better understand our environment our attitude towards all sorts of religious belief and mystifications will also change. And hence, inevitably, our attitudes towards these *ngoma*. It is indeed only logical to foresee cases where it will be our political duty to speed up the dying out of some of these *ngoma*. Even before we come to that, it is very doubtful whether a boy or girl who completes standard VII onwards can go back to his or her people and really enjoy *Sindimba*, or *Bucheyaki*, or *Obusimbuzi* as much

as his or her father, or even cousin who remained at home, does. (...) (Is it not much more meaningful, instead of forcing a young man to return to the traditional dance which no longer interests him, to build for him *theatre*, using material out of that *ngoma* in combination with borrowed technique? (...) The choice of theatre would not be an arbitrary choice or slavish copying of a foreign art and imposing it on the African scene. We all know how close to theatre traditional African dances are. Rich in chant and song, rich in music, rich in acting. In fact we can say that even the simplest of them is underdeveloped theatre (Mbuguni and Ruhumbika 1974:281).

On the surface, the authors in fact see the development of performance in much the same light as Victor Turner. Theatre, they argue, should replace the religious and mystical *ngoma*. Turner, needless to say, did not have any ideological reasons for favouring one form over the other; he simply sketched what he believed to be historical development. In contrast to Turner, Mngumi and Ruhumbika, when comparing traditional performance and theatre, do not look at the functions of the former, but at the artistic components of it: song, music and acting. They want to take "material from *ngoma*" into a revolutionary theatre that is to be "an instrument of instruction and mass-mobilization" (1974:281).

Mbuguni and Ruhumbika wrote this article long before the formation of the commercial cultural troupes. The theatre of these troupes does not fit into the ideas expressed by the cultural bureaucrats above. First, what they were asking for was a revolutionary theatre that would incorporate traditional dance and music; the popular theatre does not: *Ngoma*, which they hoped would die out, has survived as a genre by itself, used only very seldom in the plays. Second, the plays have a farce form which the cultural bureaucrats seem to find incompatible with the idea of an instructive theatre, and few of the theatre themes of the groups would be recognized as "revolutionary", in the Marxist sense. Lihamba, for example, treats the commercial popular theatre in an off-hand manner when she evaluates the effect and impact of the Arusha Declaration on theatre production:

The Arusha Declaration engendered a theatrical euphoria but also disillusionment towards Tanzania's path towards socialism. (...) With the expectation of the army cultural troupes, the active urban based cultural troupes have been motivated by survival instincts and financial gains rather than professionalism in their work. (...) The cultural revolutions in China, North Korea, the German Democratic Republic and other socialist aspiring nations laid the foundations for the dynamic theatre (socialist and otherwise) developments in those countries. Even in capitalist countries where cultural production has become big business, cultural communica-

tion and theatre are part of social practice. Except in villages where traditional theatre performances continue to be part of the people's existence, contemporary theatre practice has not become an integral part of social practice in Tanzania (Lihamba 1991:274-75).

Lihamba does obviously not share my view on the popular theatre when she argues that theatre practice in Tanzania is not an integral part of social practice. But I have showed that the popular theatre reflects urban social realities — is not that indeed what social practice is about? Lihamba does not mention the themes of these plays at all, but concentrates on the plays of university-based playwrights like Penina Muhando Mlama, Ibrahim Hussein and herself (Lihamba 1991:273-274). These plays have been staged mostly at the university, for an audience of intellectuals; the claim that they remain separate from the social practice (of the majority) is thus understandable.

The tendency of African scholars to study only written texts, is, according to Michael Etherton, a result of the educational system which emphasizes the study of published play-texts “and on the formal ‘artistic’ productions of them in performance” (Etherton 1982:317). Another tendency among the intellectuals is to glorify the “virgin” performing arts of the peasants while ignoring the modern and dynamic urban cultural productions. The fact that many of the groups are owned by individuals and run on business lines make “revolutionaries” at the universities reject them as “capitalist”. But the owners of the groups are only slightly wealthier than the artists they employ, and very much poorer than the university people themselves.<sup>3</sup> The Tanzanian situation differs in this respect from the Nigerian, where the owners of travelling theatre companies have become wealthy after promotion through television and radio, a fact that has affected the themes of the plays:

<sup>3</sup> The ideology of university-based theatre scholars in some cases works directly against their own good intentions. From the early 1980s, Lihamba and Mlama have been engaged in what they label Popular Theatre, a participatory theatre for development. Some of the problems that the rural communities express in these workshops are similar to the ones addressed in the urban commercial theatre, teenage pregnancy is one example. The two theatre forms thus may have positive functions in common, but Lihamba, unfortunately, dismisses the urban theatre on the grounds that it is commercial and working for financial gain. This is particularly unfortunate when we realize that her alternative, the Theatre for Development Workshops, relies on foreign funding and thus is arranged once a year at the most, in contrast to the commercial theatre which reaches several thousands every single week.

The concept of the "personality" enables the owner of the theatre company, who is also that personality, to exploit his fellow actors, his "workers". The dramas produced can therefore be critical of obvious social injustices like colonialism or racialism which fit into a simple moral framework, but they are unable to attack the root causes of social coercion. Instead they provide an illusion of individual success once the obvious injustice has been removed (Etherton 1982:52).

Sara Dickey, in her book *Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India*, comes to a similar conclusion concerning the conservative role of film as popular culture in India. The genre is melodramatic, and the class-based problems of the poor "are portrayed and interpreted in individualizing and individual terms" (Dickey 1993:173-174). None of the Tanzanian plays I saw encouraged collective efforts either, but in contrast to the Tamil films which rarely showed poor people improving their status through education (1993:102), this was a situation portrayed in several of the theatre plays.<sup>4</sup> The authors of the plays, who in the cases I know best (Muungano Cultural Troupe and Mandela Theatre Troupe) have higher education, thus support the government ideology which holds that formal education is the path to success. The actors themselves are generally poorly educated. Of the Muungano artists, three had attended adult education classes only, 17 had completed primary school, and one had started secondary school but not completed. A view on the governmental ideology that might represent the feelings of this group is articulated in the Lizombe song where education is ridiculed (see section 3). The cultural groups thus may support conflicting values in their different genres, and I find it hard to categorize performances in general terms in the way Etherton and Dickey have done. Another example of double-sided communication is the portrayal of sexuality, which is generally a source of conflict in the theatre plays, while the dances make it an object of happiness and fun. Neither theatre nor *ngoma* features romantic love: that theme is restricted to *taarab* songs.

The most striking discrepancy between "official ideology" as communicated by the theatre plays and the "folk evaluation" is to be found in the portrayal of medicine men. Medicine men and witch doctors are very common figures in the plays and they are always portrayed in a ridiculing way. Yet they are taken seriously by large parts of the population, and the number of people who are able to make a living from traditional healing, approximately one out of fifty urban Zaramo, reveals that there is an enormous market for them (Swantz 1990:13). Students and teachers at the

<sup>4</sup> King Majalia, The fruits of my own work, With bitterness I said.

College of Arts spoke of medicine men with respect (interview situation). The owners of the cultural troupes, at the same time as caricaturing medicine men in their plays, may themselves employ such practioners in order to attract more customers, just as football teams rely on such help for winning games. A newspaper article entitled "Is there witchcraft in the arts?" ("Uchawi uko kwenye sanaa?" *Mfanyakazi*, 28 November 1992) reports that the leader of one of the cultural troupes blames the falling popularity of his troupe on the use of witchcraft by a competing group. He warns that he will now ask someone from Zanzibar or Bagamoyo (places believed to have very powerful practioners) to help him counteract this witchcraft.

Why are medicine men caricatured in the plays despite the respect they are offered in the real world? There are at least two conceivable possibilities. First, the ridiculing of the medicine men and witch-doctors may be a way to relieve anxieties of figures that appear to be dangerous and powerful in people's lives. Secondly, the theatre directors themselves may want to write plays which are in line with the official ideology, an ideology which promotes modernization and sees medicine men as unwanted remnants from a "backward" past. Interestingly, when medicine men appear in African Theatre, they are not ridiculed. This genre is based on *another* official ideology, one which seeks to rehabilitate African self-esteem and identity. To caricature one of the central figures of the traditional society would work against the very idea of the genre.

Thirty years after Independence, Tanzanians are still struggling to find their own identity and way of being modern. Torn between the values of the "civilized" world which promote education and a scientific outlook on life, and their wish to take pride in their own way of life and live according to their own values and beliefs, artists at various socio-economic and intellectual levels produce performances which reflect these dilemmas.



*Plate 20. Daybreak. Relaxing after an all-night ngoma.*

## The modernization of performance: Conclusions and afterthoughts

At the end of the fieldwork, I felt that there was so much more to do. I wanted to see more cultural groups, I wanted to interview more people at all levels of the cultural scene, and above all I wanted to get a deeper understanding of how the audience experienced a cultural performance and what the performance meant to them. I have the same feeling now, as the process of writing is coming to an end. Popular culture is a fascinating field of discussion that I could well have gone deeper into. My aim with this work however, was to present a picture of the processes which performance has been undergoing in Tanzania after Independence, in Dar es Salaam specifically, and that story ends here.

In broad terms, we have seen a situation where popular theatre, together with other genres of urban cultural troupes, have taken over some of the roles of traditional performance in the lives of low-income Dar es Salaam dwellers. The cultural shows are separated from the daily activities of the audience and the theatre framework creates a situation where realities and problems of urban life can become the object of reflection. *Leisure time* is a product of industrial society, and I have presented the theories of Victor Turner who holds the evolutionary idea that theatre and other cultural genres are developments which societies will produce as they grow in scale and complexity.

In the new states, in most cases former colonies, the theatre is syncretistic to a much larger degree than in the older states. What may appear to be a European<sup>5</sup> theatre tradition with a set plot and dialogues, is transformed to fit local tastes, and often material from traditional performance is included. In South Africa, traditional dance forms part of the popular theatre; in Tanzania it constitutes a separate genre, a result of the cultural policy which actively promoted dance in the early years after Independence *before* the popular theatre was established. Dance as entertainment was unable to fulfil the reflexive role that theatre later did because it was forced into a convention of political praise. That convention is largely still upheld in the dance songs, which partly explains why the urban audience prefers theatre. The popular theatre genre is a child of the

<sup>5</sup> The lack of dance elements, and the rehearsed dialogues, were among the things that caused me to see the theatre as belonging to an European tradition rather than an African when I arrived in the field. The fact that a theatre genre called African Theatre has been introduced, indicates that the initiative-takers to this genre perceive the other theatre forms in the country to be non-African, i.e. European.

unofficial commercial popular culture, and there have been no serious attempts on the part of the authorities to control the content of it. Theatre also has the advantage of being ethnically neutral. The dances never lost their ethnic affiliation despite active nationalization efforts.

The nationalization of traditional dances was part of the striving of Tanzania's leaders to define a national identity. Like the nation-builders of other countries, they sought to "invent a tradition", and these efforts are still under way. The newly constructed theatre genre "African Theatre" represented at the College of Arts and at the department of drama in the university, is a case in point. Among artists, there is an on-going debate concerning how traditional dances should be performed, and those at the College of Arts and the commercial troupes criticize each other for destroying them.

In contrast to the dances, the theatre in its further development is not subject to ideological restrictions which dictate that it should remain unaltered or "traditional". Its very nature is syncretistic, open to anything that increases its popular appeal, and most probably it will need to develop continually if it is to keep its customers on. One of my last days with Muungano Cultural Troupe, the theatre director Jason Kami told me that he would like to start the production of Video Aided Theatre. If, he said, the plot for example involved a man leaving in a car, or someone travelling to his home village, they could show this on a screen and then continue the play. This is in fact a technique which has already been in use for some time by the travelling Youruba theatre in Nigeria, where motion picture has been combined with live performances (Etherton 1982:50). Karin Barber reports that lately, stage plays in Nigeria have been declining as "an indigenous film industry ... using the personnel, styles, and themes of the well-established travelling popular theatre" has replaced not only the theatre but also the foreign films as entertainment (Barber 1987:25).

The Dar es Salaam audience does not go to see theatre plays to add to their symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984). Contrary to the West, there is no notion that theatre has a higher "cultural value" or status than, for example, cinema. Tanzanians prefer theatre to the films because it relates to *their* life. The theatre directors know well that the local production is their main competitive advantage. Jason Kami said it was important for them to "avoid completely" things that were not part of the everyday life of the audience. "For example", he said, "if the play depicts a fight or quarrel, it should be with knives or poison, as in real life, not with guns, which is what people see in the films at the cinema".

In the West, films like *Fatal Attraction* and *Indecent Proposal* brought questions of adultery and moral into the public debate, triggering reflection



in similar ways as the popular theatre does. Western and Asian films cannot really fulfil the same role for Africans in Tanzania, however, as they reflect and respond to socio-cultural realities completely different from the African. If a viable cinema production is established in Dar es Salaam, there is the chance that the popular theatre genre will die out, just as Beni was extinguished as popular culture around 50 years after its birth, when new popular dance forms took over. It remains to be seen if Tanzanian popular theatre by that time will have been elevated to the dignity of being called "tradition" so that its decline consequently will worry the cultural bureaucrats who today ignore it.

In the modern, multi-ethnic urban context, popular dance forms like Kwassa-Kwassa have replaced ethnic dances as the dances which everyone in society — young and old, rich and poor, and regardless of ethnic affiliation — can dance and use to express emotions that they may not be able to verbalize. The "jazz" style, also originating from Zaire, had something of the same position in the 1960s and 1970s. It remains to be seen how long the popularity of the present popular dance styles will last, and it will be interesting to see what the Swahili lyrics of the local bands playing this music will express.

Just as Mitchell used the Kalela dance to understand the reactions of African migrants to changing social systems, and just as Ranger saw the colonial history of East Africa in the light of the Beni dance, we can use the popular theatre and other genres of popular culture to understand urban consciousness in Africa today. In connection with the forthcoming democratization, for example, popular culture may be the voice of the otherwise voiceless. The articulation of political questions in popular culture, however, depends on the degree of freedom of speech (actual and self-employed) as well as the interest people have in these questions. The way of talking about politics in cultural media is often indirect, and messages need to be decoded in a similar way as the symbolic expressions of traditional performance. In Ghana, for example, a theatre play which on the surface was about adultery and personal morals, was found to have a political sub-text, where "self-control in the face of sexual temptation represent(ed) service to the state" (Barber 1987:62).

We must also be prepared to look for political discourse in media that may give the impression of being anything but political. A popular magazine in Dar es Salaam is called *Wowowo*, slang expression for the attractive large buttocks of a woman, and most of the jokes and cartoons of the magazine centre on the physical attractiveness of women and the things men do to win their favour. In one story, however, the hero, who materially is an average guy, is taken captive by a sorcerer who plans to

sell pieces of his skin as medicine. This medicine will make people rich, and the customers of the sorcerer turn out to be the well-fed, sun-glass wearing and briefcase-carrying men and women of the city. The sorcerer tells his customers that he will sell the medicine for foreign currency only, not Tz. shillings. He then asks them if he should start flaying the captive, so that they can get a piece of his skin each. All the rich customers shout out their consent and tell him to hurry up.

I do not know whether the shoeshine boy or underpaid worker who reads this magazine sees the analogy between the story and his own situation, or whether a political comment on exploitation was intended by the author or not. But, as Karin Barber has stated: "difficult as popular art forms may be to interpret ... they do undoubtedly talk about what the people themselves think is important" (Barber 1987:3). If we want to understand the processes taking place in African cities today, we will need to make popular culture a central field of our study, just as ritual has been central for the anthropological understanding of traditional societies.

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## Appendices

### Glossary

*Kabila* (sing.) *Makabila* (plur.). The Arabic origin of the word is *qabila*, and denotes a political kinship group. Among the coast people who are Swahili-speaking, the word is roughly translated into “kind” or “type”. A common English translation of the word is tribe or ethnic group.

*Kanga*. Pieces of coloured, patterned cloth worn by women. *Kanga* fabrics are sold in pairs, and they commonly have proverbs or mottos printed on them.

*Ngoma*. The term denotes both traditional instruments (especially drums) and a traditional musical event where music, dance and mime form an integrated whole. The term can also be translated as ritual, as rites are referred to as *vitendo vya ngoma* (acts of ngoma), but when ngoma is performed by urban cultural troupes, it translates as dance.

*Ujamaa*. Literally “familyhood”. Introduced by Nyerere as the Swahili term for African Socialism.

*Taarab*. A music style originating in Zanzibar. It has been influenced through time by Egyptian, Lebanese, Turkish, and Indian music, as well as African rhythms. Song texts often follow a formal metrical arrangement.

### Interview forms

Students and artists of the College of Arts and artists of Muungano Cultural Troupe

1. Name
2. Age
3. Marital status
4. Religion
5. Place of birth
6. Ethnic origin
7. Languages
8. Education
9. Work
10. Have you travelled abroad? If yes, to what countries?
11. Father's education, occupation and ethnic origin.
12. Mother's education, occupation and ethnic origin.
13. Ages of own children.

14. If married: occupation and ethnic origin of spouse.
15. If you are not married, would you prefer to marry another artist?
16. Numbers of brothers and sisters.
17. Have anyone else in your (extended) family had a connection to the arts? If yes, who?
18. What is the reaction of your family to you being an artist?
19. How and when did you get an interest in the arts?
20. What kind of arts were you practising before entering the College/Muongano?
21. From whom did you hear about the College/Muongano Cultural Troupe?
22. What was your main reason for applying to the College/the group?
23. Which traditional dances did you know before entering the College/the group?
24. Do you have any favourite *ngoma*?
25. Many of the theatre plays at the College/by Muongano feature a medicine man or witch-doctor. Have you ever seen such a practitioner at work? If yes, describe the event.
26. Since the 1960s the Government of Tanzania has urged artists to propagate the country's politics and to help educate the people politically. How have you personally felt about being given this task?
27. What role do you think artists should play in the new political situation?
28. Should artists concentrate on preserving traditional dances or rather choreograph new ones?
29. When Tanzania is presenting herself culturally to foreigners, how should this be done/what should be presented? (If you were the one to decide.)
30. Is there anything such as a "Tanzanian national culture"? If yes, what does it consist of?
31. Have you seen a performance by Muongano Cultural Troupe/the College of Arts?
32. What do you think of cultural groups like Muongano/the work of the College?
33. Provided the pay was satisfactory, would you wish to be employed with a group like Muongano/with the College?
34. What kind of status do you think artists have among the general public?
35. Is there any difference in the attitude towards female artists compared to male?
36. What is your favourite music?

37. Have you seen a performance by the Tatunane group? What do you think of their music? (Tatunane plays World Music based on traditional rhythms and melodies.)
38. To the general public in Tanzania, what do you think is more important to them when they listen to music: melody and rhythm, or the words?
39. What is more important to you?
40. Your comments to my work/critique of the interview.  
Muungano artists only:
41. What kind of people come to see the performances?
42. What part of the show do you think the audience enjoys more?
43. What do you yourself most enjoy performing?
44. Which is the best cultural troupe in Tanzania/Dar es Salaam?

*Members of the audience at performances by the cultural troupes*

Name of group. Place and date of performance.

1. Mwanamke/mwanaume (sex).
2. Umri (age).
3. Sehemu ya kuzaliwa (place of birth).
4. Kabila (ethnic origin).
5. Kabila ya mama (ethnic origin of mother), kabila ya baba (ethnic origin of father).
6. Dini (religion).
7. Sehemu ya kusoma shule ya msingi, sekondari (place of studying primary school, secondary).
8. Unafanya nini? (occupation).
9. Mara ngapi unakwenda maonyesho ya sanaa? (How often do you go to cultural shows?)
10. Vikundi gani umeshawahi kuviona? (Which cultural groups have you already seen?)
11. Kikundi gani unakipenda kuliko vyote? (Which group do you like the best?)
12. Nini unapenda zaidi? Ngoma, sarakasi, stage show, maigizo au taarab? (What do you like the best: *ngoma*, acrobatics, stage show, theatre or *taarab*?)
13. Ngoma gani unayopenda kuliko zote? (Which *ngoma* do you like the best?)
14. Kwa nini unapenda sana ngoma hii? (Why do you like this *ngoma* so much?)

15. Na wewe mwenyewe unacheza ngoma? (Do you dance *ngoma* yourself?)
16. Ngoma gani unaijua kucheza na ulijifunza wapi? (Which *ngoma* do you know to dance and where did you learn it?)
17. Umeshawahi kuona ngoma ya kabila lako ikichezwa na vikundi vya sanaa? (Have you seen an *ngoma* from your own ethnic group being performed by any of the cultural troupes?)
18. Unaonaje uchezaji wake? (How do you find the performance of it?)
19. Vikundi vingi vya sanaa wanaimba Kiswahili (Na kuhusu siasa). Unaonaje Kiswahili au kilugha ipi inapendeza zaidi? (Many cultural groups sing in Swahili, about politics. What do you think is better, Swahili or local languages?.)

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This study focuses on Tanzania's efforts to use elements from ethnic expressive arts in political propaganda and in the creation of a national culture after Independence. It analyses why nationalized traditional dances failed to work as national symbols, and further shows how certain central aspects of traditional ritual performance — aspects lost with the nationalization and modernization of the dances — are now being carried on in a genuinely new cultural form: commercial popular theatre to entertain the low-income masses in Dar es Salaam.

*Siri Lange (born 1966) completed her Cand. polit. degree in social anthropology in 1994. She is presently affiliated to Chr. Michelsen Institute as a Ph.D. student sponsored by the Research Council of Norway. The project is an extension of her earlier work on Tanzania, and bears the working title "Politics from below: Popular culture, political consciousness and nation in Tanzania".*

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