

## **Experiences of moving. A history of women and sport in Tanzania**

Anne Birgitte Leseth

Centre for the study of professions

Oslo and Akershus University College, 0130 Oslo, Norway

Anne-birgitte.leseth@hio.no

### **Abstract**

Although the literature on the history of sports in Africa is growing, the literature on women and sports sport in Africa remains limited. This article explores women and sport in Africa through a focus on women's experiences of moving, drawing on Tanzanian women's accounts and memories of their ongoing practices related to activities such as walking and fitness training. In order to broaden our understanding of women and sport in Africa, we should expand the scope of our inquiry to include everyday movements, and explore the ways that athletic activities form part of a broader context of moving in time and space. The Swahili word for sport, *michezo*, has connotation that suggest this broad approach to sporting activity. The article draws on material from anthropological fieldwork in Tanzania in the 1990s, as well as the author's experiences at a sport development project run by Norwegians in Dar es Salaam.

## **Introduction**

African nations have entered the global sporting arena in the last thirty years particularly through their successes in running and soccer<sup>1</sup>. Although the literature on the history of sports in Africa is growing, the literature on women and sports in Africa remains limited. There was a lot of significant writing in the 1980s on African women in the colonial and postcolonial area, yet none of these works mention sports<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the record of the participation of white women in sports in Africa is much greater than exists in reference to black women. One important contribution is the work on sports and women from an international perspective written by Hartmann-Tews and Pfister<sup>3</sup>. However, there are few writings on women and sports in particular and sport in general which takes the individual experience of moving as a point of departure for analysis. This article explores women and sport in Africa through a focus on women's experiences of moving. I apply a broad approach to women and sport that includes their experience with all sorts of bodily movements. I support the view of Nauright<sup>4</sup> that in order to develop our knowledge of sports in Africa, we need to understand more of the historical development of embodied practices in Africa, particularly in urban Africa where Western culture began to have a marked influence on social and cultural mores by the early twentieth century. Moreover, drawing on anthropological fieldwork in Tanzania, this article approaches a historical development of gendered embodied practices in Tanzania through Tanzanian women's lived experiences of moving<sup>5</sup>. The analysis starts from the body emphasizing two main points: First, I situate myself within a phenomenological tradition where the body is taken as the fundament for culture, self and experience<sup>6</sup>. Second, an embodied point of departure for research implies perception as culturally structured and historically grounded. As formulated by Jean and John Comaroff: "The body (...) cannot escape being a vehicle of history"<sup>7</sup>. The analytical approach is in particular inspired by Paul Connerton's perspective on incorporating practices (bodily

practices) as social memory: through people's continuous performance of bodily practices and rituals cultural continuity is reproduced. According to Connerton much of our cultural knowledge is reproduced through our bodily practices, through 'living models' of people walking, sitting, working etc., and our bodies keep the past in an entirely effective form in their continuing ability to perform certain skilled actions<sup>8</sup>. Let me start with my own first encounter with sport and women in Africa in order to make this perspective concrete:

**“White person, do we get paid for exercising?”**

In the late 1980s I participated as an instructor for a couple of months in a Norwegian sport development project, Sport for All, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. As a newly educated teacher in physical education from Norway, I was prepared to organize a daily physical training program for women in rural squatter areas of Dar es Salaam as part of a pilot project on sport directed towards women. The aim was to offer working class women sporting activities on a daily basis, with the aim of increasing their health, happiness and contributing to a strong female community. The sport project tended to portray Tanzanian working class women in terms of what they were lacking; the project took it for granted that the women wanted to exercise, that they would immediately see the purpose of aerobic training and that they would appreciate my help as a “sports expert.” I couldn't have been more wrong. The participants questioned everything that I proposed: “*Mzungu* (white person), do we get paid for exercising?”, they asked. Why should they jump around like small kids waving their arms up and down? They laughed jokingly at my stiffness. My whiteness and strange way of moving was probably more of an attraction than the idea of sport for all. I realized that I knew nothing about Tanzanian women's lives, their experiences of moving and their ideas and notions about sports and exercise. My concepts about sports and fitness were incorporated and taken for granted as part of my embodied culture, and I had never reflected upon them. The next

time I returned to Dar es Salaam, it was not as an instructor in fitness, but as a student in social anthropology. Of crucial interest was to develop a perspective on bodily experience as a way of cultural understanding. In the following I draw on material from two long term fieldworks in Dar es Salaam in the 1990's with a particular focus on two Tanzanian women: Angelina, who lived in the squatter area but who was not involved in any kind of sports, and Sheila, a middle class women living and participant in the fitness group Young at Heart. What histories are these women bearer of?

### **Angelina – “a child of independence”**

Angelina was a Tanzanian woman in her early 50s in the beginning of 1990, living in a small wood house in a squatter area of Dar es Salaam. She was quite tall, slim and with a strong body, bearing the marks of many years of daily manual labour. While walking to and from the market, Angelina moved like a giraffe, with elegance and rhythm, as well as strength and direction. As most Tanzanian people, Angelina's way of moving was considered by herself and others to be a part of her personality. When I was talking to her, she always sat on the ground with her back straight and her feet relaxed and forward, while she always provided me, as a guest and *mzungu* (European), with a chair. I was surprised to learn the way ways of behaving and moving were not only gendered, but also 'racialised', which often placed me as a white woman, in an asymmetric and disagreeable power relation, where whiteness represented an unspoken and often incorporated position of power.

Angelina was born in a village in Tabora region in the mid1940s (she did not know exactly what year), when Tanzania, then called Tanganyika, was a British mandate. She was raised by her parents and grandparents. From the time she was a child, Angelina used to work together with her mother out in the fields, harvesting maize and working the plough. Angelina did not receive any formal education, but was taught to read by her father. He worked as a

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doctor during the British colonial period. Angelina was married at the age of sixteen to a friend of her father and gave birth to four children, two of whom were born in the village where she grew up. She moved to Dar es Salaam in 1968, seven years after independence. She worked for many years as a servant for a European family. After some years she divorced, and since the late 1980s she has been living alone, renting a house in a squatter area called Msasani. Now, she depended upon her grownup children, especially her youngest son who supported her economically and assisted her with everyday tasks. I return to him later on. Comparing the past with her present situation, Angelina recalled her colonial childhood as a good time, as a time when she had been “fat and healthy” and a time when there was always enough food. Today she lacked money and food; she was anxious about her body ‘diminishing’ and her skin being loose and wrinkled. However, Angelina still had a strong physique. She was walking to and from the market in Msasani every day, fetching charcoal and vegetables. This was not only a matter of keeping in shape, but also a way of remembering.

Angelina’s history is in many ways typical of many urban Tanzanian lower class women: hard work, early marriage, many children and an unsatisfying husband. It was a history of learning gender. “You know Anne,” Angelina told me once, “women in Tanzania know how to endure”. My field assistant, July, grew up in a village close to Angelina. Although she was ten years younger and had been educated at the university, July shared many childhood experiences with Angelina. They knew many of the same games and dances. One of them was played with six girls. When trying to describe this game to me, both Angelina and July were laughing while squatting and jumping around on the ground. Their bodies still remembered, although their social classes had diverged. In the game, six girls line up facing each other in rows of three, Angelina explained. “The girls would squat facing each other while singing ‘Mother, go to prepare vegetables; we eat with porridge, and we clean out,’”

July said. “We jumped like frogs, and the other side would cross, and then we’d do it again. This game was a way to learn housework.” Another game July and Angelina recalled was running with a bucket of water on their head without spilling a drop.

The *michezo* Angelina and July knew from their childhood were gendered in specific ways<sup>9</sup>. Their activities were educative and closely related to what was considered as women’s work; chores such as fetching water and doing housework. Competence in these basic tasks of daily life is handed down from generation to generation. Several young girls I talked to in the 1990s still knew these games of jumping like frogs and running with buckets on their head. When I spoke to the only female football player in Angelina’s neighborhood, a woman of 22 named Anna, she told me she had two daily chores. One was doing exercises and playing football, the other was housework. It seems to be difficult for a woman to sustain activities such as football or running after getting married. Most women I interviewed claimed that after marriage, your old life is gone, and you become slow (*plepole*). A grownup, married woman should leave her childish behaviour behind and not run around and play; she should become *plepole*. Younger children in the household assist the grownup women by running small errands. If possible, a married woman should not go to fetch water; she should get one of her daughters to do it instead. This is part of “proper conduct” and it gives women honor and pride. These idea of slowness seem to be reproduced as an ideal of moving for women in a postcolonial context, a point to which I return later on. The ideal of moving for white women also seem to be reproduced in Dar es Salaam in the 1990s through living models of white women walking fast, without moving their hips and being constantly in a hurry<sup>10</sup>. According to Angelina, *plepole* was not only a style and speed of walking, but part of a socialisation process, especially for young girls. In general, a child has to learn “proper behaviour” (*adabu*) early so that she/he can behave in accordance with rules and etiquette. July explained that when she reached maturity, she was not exactly told to walk slowly, but more broadly to

change her habits by becoming more organized and civilized. As part of this socialization, she followed her elders' example in learning to sit properly. \*Her mother used to come and push her back whenever she bended over while sitting. "Sit straight like a snake (*kama nyoka*)!" her mother would say. This education consisted thus both of practical exercise and verbal instruction. Storytelling was a crucial source of communicating this knowledge, together with more formalised rituals connected with menstruation and later on, marriage. July recalled that her grandmother used to tell her and her siblings stories in order to teach them good morals and proper conduct. Every day, from noon to evening, they sat around the fire and listened to stories.

The educative aspect of play as recounted by Angelina and July was a crucial aspect of cultural performances such as oral literature, music and dance, in Eastern Africa before the colonial period. One characteristic of these performances is that they vary according to ethnic group, geographical surroundings, age and gender. Compared with modern sports and games, with their specific temporal and spatial distinction from other daily activities, indigenous practices in East Africa are part of everyday life, and follow the rhythm of the seasons of labour<sup>11</sup>. The rainy season was a time for agricultural work and there was little dancing and playing. When it did not rain and when people had finished harvesting, they had time to perform different games and dances. The performance and practice of dance and sports may have been more subject to change and adaptation than is reflected in histories of sports from East Africa. As with everyday life, sports and dance were characterized by a gender division<sup>12</sup>. For a man it was important to be strong and to train strenuously, or else it would take him a long time to achieve manhood, which was symbolized by marriage. Men competed in different forms of *michezo* than women; their *michezo* included tug-of-war, wrestling, running, javelin throwing and swimming. A good sportsman obtained prestige among his peers.

Although dance and sport were gendered, the distinction between men and women's activities was flexible. Women featured in most of the traditional activities, even in "combat" games such as wrestling (*mieleka*). Women wrestled in order to settle their disputes or for recreational purposes and they could even wrestle against men. Half of Tanzania's national wrestling team in the beginning of 1990s consisted of women. Some have argued that *mieleka* attracts more women than other *michezo* because it has been a sport for both women and men since pre-colonial times, as opposed to newer sports such as football. Women who join wrestling teams today are recruited through the military service. One of them, a 26 year old married woman, answered the following when I asked her why she decided to wrestle: "Sport is a belief. I love it. I was sitting for a while after giving birth to two children. Then I thought 'No. It is time I do something. Why am I sitting here?' Then I started wrestling. People were surprised and asked 'How strong can a woman be?'"

Several women I met could identify continuities between wrestling and their everyday life. Tanzanian women fight frequently, whether because of jealousy, injustice or other reasons. July told me about a time that her sister-in-law fought so violently with her brother's wife that she could hardly walk afterwards. With reference to their experiences of moving, women might describe themselves as enduring and strong, even though they are also often idealized as soft and weak.

Angelina experiences of the colonial period are somehow an experience of competition. She recalls the arrival of British in her home district in the early 1950s, when they organized a competition called 'the healthiest child.' This is her account of the competition:

*I must have been six years old when the Europeans came to our district. I remember they made a competition for girls; a mixture of European and Tanzanian styles. First we competed in traditional dance in our village. I loved to dance and I was the best child. I was sent by the British to the colony, to participate in a modern competition called "the healthiest*



*child." I was very fat, and the Europeans came to watch us, a range of small girls from nearby villages, lined up in a row. The competition was supposed to encourage parents to take care of their children. I won, and I was very proud. I was "the healthiest child." I was given biscuits and sweets.*

The competition to be "the healthiest child" formed part of a political program whose aim was to encourage parents to take care of their children the "western way". Implicit in this program was also a preoccupation with bodily appearance, health and physical education. Through discourses on health, sports and appearance, the European colonizers sought to achieve higher "imperial efficacy," civilization and progress in their colonies<sup>13</sup>. There is a wide range of research documenting the various ways the British attempted to "civilize" the people in their African colonies by placing a strong emphasis on the "correct" presentation of the body, in regards to clothing, health and hygiene as well as body practices<sup>14</sup>. My concern here is with the way the British colonists conceptualized the female African body with a traditional identity and a specific focus on appearance, while they reserved sports and physical activity as primarily the domain of young African boys. Let me develop on this.

From the complex background of East African customs, practices, languages and modes of organization, European colonial politics created a totally new political geography. Flexible customs were transformed into concrete prescriptions<sup>15</sup>. According to Iliffe, one of these transformations of flexible customs was a transformation of the gender system<sup>16</sup>. The colonial politics led to a "practical breakdown" of many customary institutions regulating the relations between the sexes<sup>17</sup>. Women and girls were not encouraged to participate in sports the same way that men were. Netball, a ball game for women only, also played in England and Australia, was introduced to Tanzania in the 1940s and '50s. Compared to basketball, netball required less running and explosive power. Angelina and July told me that the

colonisers argued that netball suited the female shape and it was not too demanding to the African female physique. The ideal female shape when it came to African women, was *Bantu figure*, according to Angelina. *Bantu figure* was referring to an African woman with buttocks and breast and a slim waistline, and with a soft and “slow” body. On the contrary, a white woman’s figure was in popular street language, defined as *English figure*. This figure was slim and without big hips and white women’s bodies were also fast and hard (due to much exercise). These colonial ideas of different femininities codified not only differences between men and women, but also between white and black femininities. Let me develop on how the colonizers invention of the black African female body, not as a sporting body but as an African beauty.

While sports and physical education during the colonial period were mainly reserved for men and young boys, the female African body was shaped by discourses on beauty practices. In Zimbabwe in the 1940s, the transnational firm of Lever Brothers brought a complex apparatus for marketing and advertising to bear upon what they identified as the problem of the “African market” (which they aimed to soon replace with “the World market”), defined as “mysterious,” “dark” and shaped by unknown tastes and preferences. Toiletry manufacturers were spread through settler and state volunteer organisations via cinema vans, radio, women’s clubs, health lecturers, mission schools, beauty contests, and fashion shows<sup>18</sup>. In Tanganyika, the Sunlight Soap Company marketed soap<sup>19</sup>. Angelina talked about the daily washing of her body as a “necessity”. She also said that applying lotion to her body prevented her skin from cracking. Another woman, a bit older than Angelina, made a similar statement: “Since I was young, I have taken a bath every day, I rub my body with coconut oil, and I put on clothes and shoes.” Sarah, another neighbour, always rubbed her body with a piece of soap before going out, without using water. The application of soap and oil was, in other words, interpreted in various ways. Among women I met in Dar es Salaam, the kind of lotion, soap and cream one

used served to distinguish between different social classes; while poor women use “only oil” on their bodies, people with a higher income apply more expensive lotion and creams. Colonial ideals of oils, creams and black beauty were incorporated and reproduced through the everyday hygiene practices of Tanzanian women.

As argued by Dirks, colonial politics was all about codification of African custom as well as defining differences between ‘the modern world’ the Europeans thought they were creating, and ‘the traditional world’ of the so called savages they thought they were separating from<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, the colonisers’ attempt of recording African ‘tradition’, their invented custom was based on the descriptions from male informants. The male dominance in society, that is men’s control over religious beliefs and political organization, was expressed even more clearly in colonial invented custom than it had ever been before. The idea of ‘tradition’ was provided with a feminine identity, while ‘modern’ was a male domain<sup>21</sup>.

When discussing the effects of the colonial influence with Angelina, she claimed that it only went skin deep. She cited her grandfather, who had been a very brave and strong hunter. She said: “My grandfather claimed that the *Mzungu* (European) was an expert at ‘creating’ perfect human beings, but this human was an empty one: a human without any soul (*roho*). This human could not speak nor breathe”. The historian Chatterjee<sup>22</sup> uses the same idea of an ‘European outside’ and an ‘African inside’ in characterising a fundamental feature of anti-colonial nationalism in Africa and Asia. This nationalism, says Chatterjee, creates its own domain of sovereignty within the colonial society. It does so by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains; the material and the spiritual. He says: “The greater one’s success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, the greater need to preserve the distinctness of one’s spiritual culture”<sup>23</sup>. The colonial state is kept out of the ‘inner’ domain of national culture: yet this domain is not left unchanged, says Chatterjee. It is here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to

fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western. The similarities between Chatterjee's characteristics of postcolonial politics and Angelina's claim, demonstrates the way informants live accounts are informed and situated within a wider political discourse. Angelina's live tales are flexible and her interpretations of her own past are always informed by dominated discourses and dependent upon her (bodily) experiences of the present.

### **Traditional women of independence**

Angelina recalls the moment of independence in 1961 as follows: "At that time, I was still very young. I didn't even have breasts. However, I had knowledge (*akili*<sup>24</sup>)." She regretted that she never had the chance to pursue further education, but her father taught her to read and write. Her memories of independence were embodied and related to experiences of her body maturing and her mind developing. The politics of independence, as effectuated by the first Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere, in many ways built on and adapted the old colonial body politic. Just as the colonialists had done, the new, independent Tanzanians often depicted women as the bearers of Tanzanian tradition.

Angelina was a child of independence. She saw urban modern life style as demoralizing to Tanzanian youth, a point of view endorsed by Nyerere. After independence, she always wore *khanga* or *vitenge*, "traditional" pieces of clothing, not western skirt and blouse, as she had during the colonial period. Ready-made clothes symbolized to Angelina western influence. This was part of an africanization of politics in Tanzania after independence that revitalized Tanzanian traditional customs and criticized imperial clothing, such as miniskirts and trousers for women.<sup>25</sup> As a "traditional" poor Tanzanian woman, without formal schooling, Angelina did not take part in sport activities that became part of the nation building process during the years after independence. Nevertheless, she has

incorporated the politics of independence by representing a traditional Tanzanian woman. However, national development also necessitated assistance in the form of “foreign aid.” Sports aid has been, and still is, part of this assistance. It is interesting to note that Tanzanian women and children were from the beginning target groups for sports development projects from European countries, on the other hand Tanzanian women were also symbols of a Tanzanian tradition that was perceived as antithetical to “European” activities such as sports.

<sup>26</sup> Within this image of the authentic, traditional African woman, a “result” of colonial invention and the politics of independence, most Tanzanian women did not have many options beyond either representing the traditional wife with a *bantu figure* or, for those with running talent, becoming “natural athletes.” In an interview with one of a very few Tanzanian female long distance runners in 1992, Mwinga Mwanjala, she stated that sport popularity among women because most Tanzanian men desire women with Bantu figures. In other words, colonial preoccupation with female appearance (so clearly shown by Angelina’s memory of winning the “healthiest child” award because she was a fat baby) seems to have fused with post-colonial Africanization politics in which women are expected to be traditional and fat.

### **From nation building to bodybuilding**

In 1992, at the point when I left Tanzania after my first fieldwork, almost thirty years of one-party rule came to an end. In 1993, a multi-party system was introduced to Tanzania for the first time. Multipartyism in itself didn’t change much in Tanzania. But the political and economic liberalization of the late 1980s and early 1990s caused a virtual revolution. The number of daily and weekly newspapers exploded. In 1993, television broadcasting was introduced in Dar es Salaam. When I returned to Dar es Salaam in 1997, there seemed to be an explosion of new fashions, trends and body practices in Dar es Salaam. I was interested in

the apparently new models of femininity and masculinity that flourished in magazine advertisements: slim and often bleached blonde female models and muscular men were promoted as models of development, progress and individuality. On television, you could watch Jane Fonda's work-out program or American bodybuilders, weightlifting or boxing-matches, and dance videos were flourishing. However, politicians expressed a concern for the demoralizing effects of "stripped and undressed models" which they feared would lead to "westernization" and cultural loss.

Angelina had grown older, life was harder and her body was diminishing. However, she still walked to the market every day. When I asked her about her children, she proudly told me that her youngest son, Peter, won the national Mr. Tanzania bodybuilder competition in 1996. His victory provided him with a better paid job as a security officer in a casino in the city center, which also had been an economic advantage to Angelina for some years. "You know," she said, "Europeans now prefer muscular men to guard their houses." Although Angelina at first saw bodybuilding as 'imperialistic', the competition of Mr. Tanzania also reminded her about the completion she won when she was a young girl. For a working class man, a muscular body can be a means of social mobility. However, bodybuilding was definitely not desirable for a Tanzanian woman. July and Angelina agreed that it would make a woman's body hard and unattractive. A woman should have a soft body. This ideal of femininity was challenged to a certain extent, not by bodybuilding, but by fitness training. This time, the participants were not working class women as in 1989 on the Norwegian sport project, but Tanzanian middle class women, desperately trying to lose weight. One of them was Sheila.

## **Sheila**

Rhythmic sounds from heavy disco music fit the energetic steps of Eddie, the instructor. “One two three four.... Pay attention to your body!” he shouts, as he changes exercises from marching on the spot to standing still, bending and stretching the upper part of the body, “eight, nine, ten”. The hall is packed with people when I arrive, a few minutes late. I count fifty, mostly women, dressed in tights and training gear. They are lined up in rows. The training follows the same pattern as any aerobics class; the warm-up exercises are a combination of static stretch and rhythmic limbering exercises preparing the body for more vigorous exercises. First come the various kinds of endurance exercises, like running and jumping, followed by power exercises, and the class ends with exercises that loosen up the body and increase flexibility. Most of the exercising is performed on the spot, with a little bit of running forwards and backwards. I get into the back line. Sweat is pouring off the back of the woman in front of me, making her t-shirt wet. Her name is Sheila. “Lets’ sweat!” she shouts joyfully. “Come on, don’t stop”, shout the instructor, as some of the participants seem to slow down the speed; “You want to lose weight, don’t you?” The speed changes; sit ups, bending the back up and down towards the knees, up and down. “Now you get rid of your stomach”, Eddie shouts, as we count twenty sit ups. After fifteen minutes of power exercises it is up again, and we start running; lifting knees high, forward and backward, and jumping up and down. Towards the end of the session, it’s down on the floor again, stretching limbs. Sixty minutes pass; the cassette player is turned off. “You did well today,” Eddie says, “I think you have slimmed down, all of you.”

Sheila was in her early 40s in 1997. By then she had been a regular participant in the Young at Heart fitness group for three years. This group was a “survivor” from the ones initiated by the Norwegian sport project in the late 1980s. From 1992 to 1997, the number of participants, all female, jumped from 50 to 164. While the Sport for All program wasn’t

successful in keeping women such as Angelina, this group had turned into a middle class fitness cohort. Sheila was born in northern Tanzania, but had lived in Dar es Salaam the last 20 years. I do not know anything about her childhood; my intention is to focus on the ways she gives meaning to the fitness training.

Sheila was of medium height. Rather than strength and muscles like Angelina, her body was a bit plump and soft, with the typical Bantu figure: large buttocks and breasts and a slim waistline. She was married and with three children and lived with her family in a middle-class neighborhood of Dar es Salaam. Instead of a modest home like the one Angelina had in the squatter area, Sheila owned a brick house with a cow and a small garden. Her husband had his own driver. Sheila was often escorted to the daily fitness training by her husband or her husband's driver. In addition to being a housewife, looking after the house and a couple of cows, which she milked every day, she was a businesswoman: at the time, importing slimming products from South Africa and selling them to women on the black market.<sup>27</sup> A muslim, she always arrived for fitness training wearing a *buibui* and head-scarf. She had joined the group with her 20-year-old daughter, Amina after hearing about it from her husband's secretary, who was participating. She was living a couple of kilometers from the school, by the coast. Her husband or their private driver often picked her up from the class, but she was taking driving lessons. As her husband was often away at work, she explained, it would be nice to be able to drive her own car. In addition, she told me she often wanted to walk to the exercise class, but thought her husband might be jealous--not of her exercises, but of what might happen when people saw her walking along the road. It is noteworthy that while Angelina might walk because she couldn't afford public transportation, Sheila would walk because she wanted to become slim. "My husband has told me to lose weight for three years now," she complained. Her aim was to emulate European women's enthusiasm for sport and fitness. In her words:



*We admire you Europeans very much; you are slim and clothes fit you. Our husbands see you and they want their wives like that. And as it is not acceptable for a married person to have a girlfriend/boyfriend, the wife would rather slim down than have her husband find a girlfriend. If you get fat and stay home all the time, your husband will find himself a mistress who is younger and you will have only yourself to blame. So the training becomes a necessary activity.*

Sheila shrugged her shoulders and added, “You know, before, a woman was just a woman, now she is expected to be good looking.” She was talking not only about the woman’s face, but her figure as well. Ideally, she explained, a woman should not expose herself to other men on her way to the training session, and her husband should not take a mistress unless his wife did not lose weight. By walking in the street, a woman might arouse jealousy, as that exposes her to the gaze of other men. Sheila told me that her walking was different for her now. Before, she had gotten exhausted, but she had grown accustomed to it: “Before, I took the bus everywhere, to the market and into town. Now, if it’s possible, I try to walk instead of driving. It really makes me feel fresh.” On some occasions I met Sheila on her way to the class, walking from the bus stop a kilometre away. She said that now that she had gotten used to it, she really liked to walk, even though the exercises often wore her out. If it was all up to her, she would only be walking for exercise. She felt fit because she had started to walk a lot instead of taking the bus or car. Now it was her husband who wanted her to go to the training. However, he picked her up after training, as he was afraid other men might look at her while she was walking along the road. Sheila told me that her experience of walking changed from being something that made her tired and was painful to something that felt good. She said:

*I used to be so fat. I had pain everywhere; for example, in my arms. My legs rubbed against each other while walking, and I became so exhausted*

*by it. I had pain in my neck and in my head. I was sitting and just asking the children to fetch me this and that. You just don't want to move. And then I started to walk. I didn't have pain after that. And I wasn't exhausted.*

Sheila's changing experiences of walking, towards a positive movement, points at the creative possibilities within the field of bodily movements, undetected and innovative changes.

However, Sheila is also restricted by conventional ideals of how a woman should behave, for instance, a married woman should not walk about in the evening, and she accepts that her husband will pick her up after training. Sheila's experience of walking is influenced by her multiple roles as a housewife, a farmer, a worker and an aerobiciser.

### **Bodily movement, gender and sports**

Do the stories of Angelina and Sheila provide us with new knowledge about women and sports in Tanzania in particular and Africa in general? According to Saavedra<sup>28</sup> norms of female beauty in many parts of Africa do not match up with a fit, athletic body. She claims that while women in rural areas in for example Senegal, present a muscled, toiling, agrarian femininity, the more privileged urban women who do not need to labor physically are idealized through the images of either a non-muscular, young, slim and western-oriented woman or through the large, soft, round and economically established woman. However, I would argue that it is not necessarily the norms of female beauty and body shape that pose an obstacle to women's participation in sports. Besides political priorities and a lack of funding towards sports for women in Tanzania<sup>29</sup>, it is important to recognize that bodily movements are a slow changing cultural field. Let me exemplify by referring to the importance given to ways of moving among people in Dar es Salaam. In contrast to Europe, where bodily ideals,

such as being slim or muscular, are presented as static and detached from the moving body, people in Dar es Salaam talked about ideals of the moving body. Although people might still refer to slim white women as *English figure* and Tanzanian black women as *Bantu figure*, the crux of the matter is how you move. Angelina said: "You know, Anne, it is not really important to others whether you are fat or slim, but how you move, both when it comes to speed and style." Movement and movement style are tied to gender and identity. When I set out to collect all the words for walking styles that I could find among people in Dar es Salaam, I discovered that there are around 20 different words for different styles of walking.<sup>30</sup> The youth continuously invent words for new ideals of beauty, and the terms are incorporated into already known practices, such as walking. 'Walking like a beauty queen', is a style that implies an imitation of a European woman but also a continuity of previous walking patterns. The power of imitation, is crucial in explaining the character of moving women as social actors and cultural producers. The fact that people continuously imitate the walking style of others is linked to the point that people also continuously reproduce history and continuity through walking. An important discovery of my research from Tanzania is that walking has to do with continuity, not only organically but also in the sense of reproducing lived experience, time and history. Angelina claims that walking is part of her. Although social and economic class differences are crucial factors which might force some women to walk while others can afford their own car, Angelina does not walk purely out of necessity. It provides her with a sense of belonging. So what about the women in the fitness training class? One day while walking from the Young Keep Fit exercises with Sheila, she told me she had heard that walking was very good exercise: "Just look at our friends, the Europeans, they walk a lot; now we have started to do the same." She pointed at some white people on the other side of the street, walking fast. "They do walking exercises," said Sheila. In the following days, several of the participants from the exercise group joined us, walking part of the way home

from the class. However, our slow movement towards the main road didn't remind me of exercise at all. Waiting a bit for Sheila, I burst out: "I thought we were walking for exercise!" In my imagination, walking for exercise was not something to do slowly, but rather required efficiency and speed. Sheila laughed, moving her waist slowly while taking one step forward, shaking her right hand. "We prefer to walk like this," she said. "You know, Anne, it is not appropriate for a woman to walk fast!" We continued to walk together from the training from time to time, in a slow fashion that the women nonetheless called "exercise."

### **Conclusion**

I suggest that body practices both reflect and subtly shape the political contexts and purposes within which they occur. While governments may have political interest in paying attention to what kind of body practices that are 'suitable' for women, they can never readily control the complexity and ambiguity that are generated by the performing bodies of social actors, in this case Tanzanian women. The article argues that in order to broaden our understanding of women and sport in Africa, we should expand the scope of our inquiry to include women's experiences of moving which implies taking into account everyday movements, and explore the ways that athletic activities form part of a broader context of moving in time and space. In order to develop our knowledge of women and sports in Africa, we would do well to deepen our understanding of how bodily movements are gendered, reproduced and transformed. As Sheila and Angelinas' stories show in different ways, walking represents a crucial part of Tanzanian women's embodied history and lived experience. Through walking women continuously negotiate between different femininities, differentiated again by class and nationality. Within bodily practices such as walking representing processes of continuity, there is a space of cultural creativity which women might apply in order to challenge conventional and political categorical definitions of weak and soft femininities.

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<sup>1</sup> Nauright, John, 'Towards histories and contemporary analyses of African women and sport: where from? Where are we now? And where to from here?' (paper presented at Women's sport in Africa conference, Oxford, UK, March 7, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Se, for example, Mohanty, Chandra, 'Under western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses', *Feminist Review*, no.30 (1988):61-8, Ali Mazrui, 'Africa's Triple Heritage of Play: Reflections on the gender gap', in *Sport in Africa*, ed. William Bake and James Mangan (London: Africana publishing company, 1987)

<sup>3</sup> Hartmann-Tews, Ilse and Pfister, Gertrude, *Sport and women, Sosial issues in international perspective*, ed. (London: Routledge, 2003)

<sup>4</sup> Nauright, John, 'Towards histories and contemporary analyses of African women and sport: where from? Where are we now? And where to from here?' (paper presented at Women's sport in Africa conference, Oxford, UK, March 7, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> The chapter draws on anthropological research in Dar es Salam between 1992 and 1997, with a follow up in 2003, as well as a preliminary visit in 1988-89. See A. B. Leseth, 'Culture of movement. Walkers, workers and fitness performers in Dar es Salaam', (Dissertation, The Norwegian University of sport and physical education, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Csordas, Thomas. (ed). *Embodiment and experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994

<sup>7</sup> Comaroff, Jean & John, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, USA: Westview Press, p. 79)

<sup>8</sup> Connerton, Paul, *How Societies remember*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Connerton, Paul, *How modernity forgets*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010). In his last book, Connerton claims that the memory of habitual skills is devalued in late twentieth-century as we develop technologies in order to store information.

<sup>9</sup> The word 'sport' includes a wide field of practice; sport might refer to top-level sport, fitness, cultural activities, physical education or informal games and play. The Swahili word *michezo*, include competitive sport, yet also several activities that are not included in the English word sports, such as cinema, dancing, walking and playing cards. For a broader discussion of the concept, see Leseth, Anne, *Michezo: Dance, Sport and Politics in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania*, in Archetti & Dyck, ed. *Sport, dance and embodied identities*, London: Berg 2003

<sup>10</sup> Leseth, Anne, *Culture of movement. Walkers, workers and fitness performers in Dar es Salaam*, (Dissertation, The Norwegian University of sport and physical education, 2004)

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, William, 'Sports and physical education in Tanzania', in *Physical education around the world*, ed. William Johnson (Illinois: Stipes Publishing Company, 1980), John Bale and Joe Sang, *Kenyan Running* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), T. S. Tenga, 'Globalization and Olympic sports in Tanzania' (Dissertation, The Norwegian University of sport and physical education, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Ndee, Haman, 'Sports, Culture and Society from an African Perspective: A Study in Historical Revisionism', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 13 (1996), no.2:192-202, J. M. Nkongo, 'Factors influencing the development of physical education in Tanzania as compared with other African countries', (Master in Education, University of Manchester, 1979)

<sup>13</sup> Comaroff, Jean, 'Fashioning the colonial subject', in *Of Revelation and revolution*. Ed. Jean and John Comaroff (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press), Richard Holt, *Sport and the British. A modern history*, (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1997)

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<sup>14</sup> Henderickson, Hildi, *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), Peter Burke, 'Sunlight Soap has changed my life', *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa*, ed. Hildi Henderickson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 189-213, John Iliffe, *A modern history of Tanganyika*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), John Mangan, *The games ethic and imperialism*, (Harmonds: Penguin Books, 1986), Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and revolution. The dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier*, Chichago: The University of Chicago Press, Vol. 2, 1997), Richard Holt, *Sport and the British. A Modern History*, (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> See for example Ranger, Terrence, *Dance and society in eastern Africa 1890-1970*, (1975, London:Heinemann), Terrence Ranger, 'The invention of tradition in colonial Africa', in The '*Invention of tradition*', ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 211 -262, John Iliffe, *A modern history of Tanganyika*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), Terrence Ranger, *Dance and society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970*, London: Heinemann, 1975), 324

<sup>16</sup> Iliffe, John, *A modern history of Tanganyika*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), Terrence Ranger, *Dance and society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970*, London: Heinemann, 1975),324

<sup>17</sup> Paulme, Denise, *Women of Tropical Africa*, ed.(London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1963). See also Gahel Graham, 'Exercising control: sports and physical education in American protestant mission schools in Cchina, 1880-1930', *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and society*, 2(3) (1994): 485-498. Graham discusses how the missionaries in Chinese mission schools tried to change the traditional Chinese gender conventions, by including western dress and postures in their sporting mission.

<sup>18</sup> Burke, Peter, 'Sunlight Soap has changed my life', *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa*, ed. Hildi Henderickson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 122

<sup>19</sup> This company also spent a substantial amount of money in the promotion of competitive sports. . In 1932, the firm built the first football stadium in Dar es Salaam. See J. M. Nkongo, 'Factors influencing the development of physical education in Tanzania as compared with other African countries', (Master in Education: University of Manchester, 1979)

<sup>20</sup> Dirks, Nicholas, 'Introduction: Colonialism and culture', in *Colonialism and culture*, ed. Nicholas Dirks (Ann arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992) 1-25

<sup>21</sup> Ranger, Terrence, *Dance and society in eastern Africa 1890-1970*, (1975, London:Heinemann),, Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and alterity. A particular history of the senses*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 177

<sup>22</sup> Chatterjee, Partha, *Whose imagined community?*, in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Balakrishnan (London: Verso)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.1996:217

<sup>24</sup> Some people believe that men are endowed with more *akili* (knowledge of the brain) than women. I often heard this argument used in political discussions of matters such as whether higher education should be pursued by both girls and boys.

<sup>25</sup> Mazrui, Ali, 'The robes of rebellion: Sex, dress and politics in Africa', in *Social Aspects of the human body*, ed. Ted Polhemus (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), 196-217

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<sup>26</sup> As suggested by Taussig, many Third and Fourth World women fulfill the role as bearers of the appearance of tradition and as the embodiment of the Nation. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and alterity. A particular history of the senses*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 177

<sup>27</sup> For more on formal and informal economy in Tanzania, see Tripp, Ali, *Changing the Rules. The Politics of Liberalization and the Urban Informal Economy in Tanzania* (London: University of California Press, 1997)

<sup>28</sup> Saavedra, Martha, 'Women, gender, sports and the female body: Sub-Saharan Africa', *The Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, Vol. 3, Brill Academic Publishers

<sup>29</sup> Massao, Prisca and Fasting, Kari 'Women and sport in Tanzania', in Ilse Hartmann-Tews and Gertrude Pfister, *Sport and women, Social issues in international perspective*, ed.(xxx

<sup>30</sup> Leseth, Anne. 'Michezo: Dance, sport and politics in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania', in *Sport, dance and embodied identities*, ed. Noel Dyck and Eduardo Archetti (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 231-248