

ISSN 0002-0087  
VOLUME XIV, NUMBERS 1 & 2, 1990



# AFRICAN NOTES

Journal of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan



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Journal of the Institute of African Studies  
University of Ibadan

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Volume XIV, Nos 1 & 2

1990

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## THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE AND ITS ASIDES: Dance Performances as Historical Indices in East and West Africa

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*For it is not true that the work of man is finished  
that we have nothing to do in the world  
that we are parasites in the world  
that we have only to accept the way of the world  
but the work of man has only just begun  
and it remains for man to conquer all repressions  
immobilized in the corners of his fervour  
and no race has a monopoly of beauty, intelligence, strength  
and there is room for all at the rendezvous of victory<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

DANCE, as a genre of the performing arts, is as old as the history of man itself. There are, however, highlights in the area of particulars: particulars in the historical context, cultural ambiance, or geographic milieu. In this paper we will examine the behavioural aspects of several representative dance performances in the colonial context in two centres of African civilization — West and East Africa — between 1820 and 1960. The content of performances, as well as the form of costume and the paraphernalia adopted by performers will be discussed. Dance as a mode of social behaviour will be used to interpret certain aspects of the cultural subconscious; revealing facts in ways least expected for a greater understanding of human values. This paper is particularly interested in instances of mutual inclusiveness between the nature of a performance and its attendant political as well as cultural context.

### Discussion

The choice of citing dance or any other popular artistic medium as an index of historical experience

derives from the fact that first, dance is an institutionalized form of social behaviour. Second, that these performances, at their most effective, imitate reality in an unexpected, ingenious, and sometimes startling manner, thus forcing on us the very reality which we might have taken for granted, or ignored. Third, that dance in Africa has been one aspect of the 'open', 'popular' medium, especially at festivals, through which mores are articulated, moral sanctions stated and models standardized.

The modular preferences of these dance events are hardly sophisticated. The audiences and performers are largely drawn from both the urban and rural poor — the underprivileged who are often not adequately covered by the mass media. These theatre forms survive through oral tradition. In the words of David Mayer:

Their dramas are not often preserved in written form; they are quite unlikely to be noticed and commended by the critics in the daily and learned presses. Their dramas survive whole or in part by word of mouth



tradition, in diaries, memoirs, anthropologists' notebooks, and censors' files.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Mayer's observation above is largely true of the East African Ngomas or group dances between 1890 and 1960<sup>3</sup> — that being the definitive period of colonial rule in East Africa. The history of group dances or competitive Ngomas is perhaps over a thousand years old.<sup>4</sup> In about 1899, however, at the inception of colonial rule in East Africa, the traditional Ngoma incorporated the style of the European brass band. It was then aptly referred to as the Beni or 'band' Ngoma. Further, it became the vogue for dance groups to copy the hierarchy and regimentation of the Royal Navy or the German infantry. They organized competitions along these lines. Ranger's interview with some leaders of the bands is pertinent here:

The whole concept of the Beni movement came to be an urge to imitate the regimentation of the Royal Navy. In each band small regiments were formed and each regiment imitated and copied the correct uniform as used by the Royal Navy. In both *Kingi* and *Scotchi* there existed *Mirini* (marine) corps. This group took to modelling wooden ships and flotillas for themselves. The different *Marini* corps in the two bands competed against each other in building these ships . . .

The queen played the same role as the King but in the women's section. She was very influential indeed and wielded more power among women than anybody else. At the parading competitions, both the King and the Queen would take the salute and then inspect a guard of honour. They would urge the regiments to display their *Vinyago* — ships, etc — and tow them around for the people to appreciate.<sup>5</sup>

(Note: *Kingi* here represented the British troops and *Scotchi* the Scottish.)

It is the view of this paper that the mode of artistic production in the circumstances tended, in a circuitous, almost frivolous manner, to articulate a way of life or sublimate a reaction to the environment. In another description of the phenomenon of the Beni Ngoma, we are able to observe that the band associations have become subtly structured into a welfare concern. A measure of military discipline is adopted and members enjoy mutual support in the face of hardship or misfortune. Thus, in annexing the form and nature of the European military hierarchy, they created the basis for an *esprit de corps* to rival the alien force. Whilst they had no institutional backing or recognition as an arm of the state hierarchy, nevertheless the Beni associations served as a kind of lobby to cope with the colonial system. In an earlier account mentioned in Ranger's book:

Beni is an organized society. Persons wishing to play Beni must first agree to enter the society and have their names inscribed in it. Every inscribed member must agree to follow the laws of the *Ngoma* and to obey all orders given by the heads thereof. Members must also agree to cooperate in helping members in trouble, whatsoever the trouble may be. Thus if a person is taken for a crime, he must be helped in paying any fine imposed . . . The society is a disciplined one. Officers are respected just as European army officers are . . .

The Beni players go around to different villages to play. If a member of Beni dies the others go to play in his honour. The cloth in which the body is wrapped is paid for by the society . . . If a member marries, the players go and dance in his or her honour.<sup>6</sup>

Ranger's interesting account also notes that there were instances when the dancers staged scenes of



confrontation between the British and the Germans, both colonial warlords in East Africa during the first half of this century. It was clear that the Beni mode would reveal in the texture and tendency of their art which of the two imperial nations they were better disposed towards, depending on how their activities impinged on the life of the indigenes.

Our discussion of the Beni mode necessarily implies that its scope is wide-ranging; that it is a social weapon that is not unilaterally deployed. On the contrary, it reflects the whole phenomenon of life and society in Eastern Africa because it includes lyrics, in which are reflected the chaos and processes of social upheaval that characterized that period of East African history. Records of songs are given, for instance, which recount the evils of social dislocation caused by the conscription of men into military labour, and women as camp followers.

Note the following songs, for instance:

- i. Tatu's mother, pray be quiet!  
Saidi wants you no more  
You go with Goans and Banyans  
You are summoned to  
headquarters at Tabora to be  
syringed.
- ii. Listen my loved ones! Sister  
She cried on marrying in  
Zanzibar. Listen men of Mkanda.  
I first conceived because of a  
soldier in the 7th K.A.R.  
That soldier came and deflowered  
me in Zanzibar.
- iii. Our clothes have been taken from  
us,  
give us sacks  
Sisters, stop laughing!  
It's the way of the world<sup>7</sup>.

The first two songs refer to the tragedy of women camp followers during the war. Many of them were raped by the soldiers. So the word *syringed* in the first song is an euphemism for rape, whilst the word

*conceived* in the second song is a synonym for pregnancy. For the men, the tragedy was no less; their civilian clothes were forcibly taken from them when they were conscripted into the army. So the *sacks* were the ill-fitting uniforms of soldiers and camp men. From these lyrics it is clear that Beni songs came to be used as an index for social comment and criticism. The songs, lightly tinged with humour, remained a tamed agony of a nostalgic bliss, noting a disrupted present while longing for the nearly forgotten past. We may wish to draw a comparison between these songs quoted by Ranger, and those documented by Mitchell.

That Watchtower were trying cunningly to  
convert me on Saturday.

That I should go to their meeting-place at two  
o'clock on Sunday.

We also have gospels — the drums,

We who dance *Kalela*

God hates nobody;

To Heaven we shall climb,

We shall go and live at Lucifer's place,

In his stockade

We shall go with our drums.

Even in Heaven you will hear them roaring<sup>8</sup>.

The above is one of the songs rendered by Luke Mulumba in 1951. As Clyde Mitchell himself observes, the setting of the songs is urban and references are often to recent, spontaneous phenomena. This is also largely responsible for the frivolous tone, somewhat jerky tempo. It is not unusual for Beni and *Kalela* to have a gay, *japay* mood and texture because the intent is recreational, even though its references are historical. It might be interesting to highlight another of Mulumba's verses where he ridicules greedy parents in marriage payments and reward.

Mulumba should have a job at the abattoir,  
So that he may steal the heads of slaughtered  
cattle,



So that the woman who loves the head of  
slaughtered cattle,  
May give him her daughter.  
It is nice to work in a butchery,  
You may be given a beautiful girl to marry  
Because of the love of meat.  
There are some who sell their daughters —  
What beautiful girls they marry to useless men;  
They are in a difficult position.  
He will give them a cow's head  
The daughter is just in prison  
The one that is suitable for Mulumba  
To take her to the city of Matipa  
To be the sister in the dance of the rattles.<sup>9</sup>

The topicality of the above song is unmistakable. Satire thrives on raw, immediate facts, invectives, wit and spontaneity. Even as the singer or dancer, Mulumba does not leave himself out of the satire — the songs and dances that cleanse society cleanse the dancer too, creating an unequivocal sense of balance. New verses are added to these songs and dances when the occasion merits it. They serve therefore, as a mirror through which society parodies itself.

It must, however, be affirmed that what is brought to the foreground is the eminent role of art, which in any of its numerous forms, is capable of expressing or determining the categories of social values in such a way as to make us understand them better. My view in this respect coincides with that of Georges Curvitch, when he writes that:

The theatre is a sublimation of certain social situations, whether it idealises them, parodies them, or calls for them to be transcended. The theatre is simultaneously a sort of escape-hatch from social conflicts and the embodiment of these conflicts. From this point of view it contains a paradoxical element, or rather a theatrical dialectic which is supremely a dialectic of ambiguity. The theatre is society or the

group looking at itself in various mirrors, the images reflected therein making the people concerned, the spectators, weep, laugh or come to some decision with increased resolution. The theatre offers transcendence and relaxation such that the theatre itself remains a completely integrated part of society, an expression of it, and occasionally, capable of guiding it.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, this fact escapes the analyses of Ranger's otherwise invaluable documentation. Rather, some of the far-reaching conclusions in the book fall into the errors of earlier commentators on the Beni phenomenon. In *Dance and Society in East Africa*, Ranger supposed that because Beni flourished under colonial rule and that the mode declined after political independence, then Beni was likely to be an adjustment to absolute power.<sup>11</sup> This is the same presumption of the book in theorizing that East African indigenes remembered their service in German military formations with nostalgia, and that they eventually came to terms with the defeat of Germany. Ranger concludes that Beni was an accommodation to power and that British colonialism was wont to be accepted as German colonialism was. In his words:

Yet, however much a member of *Marini* or *Arinoti* might remember his service under German command with pride, in the end he had to come to terms with Germany's defeat. The evidence suggests that for many members of Beni this did not present much difficulty. In so far as Beni was an accommodation to power, then British power was likely to be accepted just as German power had been.<sup>12</sup>

In this he takes the people concerned for granted, assuming that they have no will whatever to resist colonial subjugation, but must accept it. In the same vein in this rather patronizing cant:



The evidence on Beni during and just after the First World War in Eastern and Central Africa alike reveals above all the extraordinary resilience of Africans under colonialism. When we read of 'light comedies' being put on to illustrate black-white relations such a brief time after the ravages of the war, we may well deplore the lack of a developed political consciousness thereby displayed, or feel urban Africans had been culturally or intellectually emasculated under colonialism. But we can hardly deny admiration for the survival capacity of these young men of the towns.<sup>13</sup>

Certainly, there may have existed, and in abundance, an unsophisticated political consciousness among urban Africans, but the 'light comedies' of the Beni Ngoma represent the sublimation of a far more serious and fundamental syndrome in the resolution of power relationships under colonialism. Although these artistic renditions are not violent confrontations with the colonial rule, at the same time, neither are they an acceptance of the colonial political or social ethos. The Beni dances/songs tempered the rather ingrained, destructive effects of colonial subjugation. In fact, meaningful social commentaries of this kind occur in such West African dances and drama as the Kwagh-hir of the Tiv and the Agbegijo of the Yoruba, where serious socio-political issues have been rendered in such simplistic, ostensible forms as to make them appear harmless as mere entertainment.

It is interesting to note that from Ranger's own text and analyses, an array of information emerges, which undermines the thesis upheld in the book that the practice of Beni is 'an example of adjustment to absolute power' or an 'accommodation of absolute power.' Forms of dance contests and poetic battles have been long in existence and they merely incorporate issues of topical interest as dictated in contemporary experience. Ranger reports on the

experience of a German ethnologist, Baron Carl von der Decken who visited the Kenyan Coast in 1861. One evening, he and his colleagues were entertained by a local drama group who put up a war game, a kind of mock struggle in which one side identified themselves as Englishmen and the other as Frenchmen. The local players/dancers said they believed from accounts that 'there were no worse enemies than those two nations'.<sup>14</sup>

In this instance, a pre-colonial antecedent reveals that the idea of a war play, dance contest or any such adaptation is not a consequence of the colonial experience *per se* but has been an aspect of the people's aesthetic history. The later inclusion of European military dress and titles were topical adaptations in contemporary experience. This, contrary to the views inferred by Ranger's thesis, shows the practice of the dance band as an aesthetic derivative, rather than a passive acceptance of an overwhelming colonial experience.

It is worthwhile to illustrate — having done so with a precolonial example — with another example during the height of colonial subjugation. This example goes a longer way in refuting the thesis that the simulation of military power is an adjustment to absolute power or a state of intellectual emasculation. About the time of the First World War, the British were making inroads into East Africa and were gradually inching out the Germans who had gained a foothold, particularly in Tanganyika. A remarkable gentleman, Saleh bin Mkwawa, son of the great Hehe chief, became a leading figure in the ranks of Marini activity in East Africa. He had been brought up by German missionaries and acquired a German education. He had served as a school teacher and a local government official. In October 1917, however, this man was arrested by British forces and jailed as a prisoner of war in Nairobi. From the circumstances, it would appear that the British thought better of leaving a man with his education and ability behind bars. Saleh was eventually released. On the anniversary of his release an Ngoma was performed



in his honour by the Mirini band. A vivid scene of the prison was enacted with him in prison uniform. He had two armed guards. He was then released and the Honour Dance was performed<sup>15</sup>.

It seems to me that here is an example of what dance, even more than music and drama, does with regard to the definition and assertion of identity, especially in a colonial or anomalous situation. As noted by Anya Peterson Royce, dance is 'an excellent vehicle for communicating ideas about one's own identity as well as for parodying the identity of others.'<sup>16</sup> Ranger himself noted from one of his painstaking gleanings in a censor's report, which he found at the National Archives in Dar es Salaam, that for reasons of anti-British propaganda, Saleh bin Mkwawa and other leaders of the Ngoma were put under surveillance by the colonial authorities.<sup>17</sup> My contention, therefore, is that Ranger's report underestimates the import of Beni if, in spite of the activities of Saleh and others, he still posits that urban Africans were culturally or intellectually emasculated or that they lacked political consciousness at the time.

What have appeared to be Ranger's own conclusions on the Beni Ngoma phenomena are largely derived from psychoanalytic sources. Earlier in the book, he referred to behavioural adjustments of oppressed peoples in extreme circumstances, such as occurred in Nazi concentration camps. Brune Bettelheim had drawn a model in which he found that Jewish prisoners in German concentration camps copied the style of the uniform worn by Nazi soldiers or adopted the passionate German nationalism of their oppressors.<sup>18</sup> Bettelheim regarded these phenomena as part of the adjustment to absolute power, particularly the relationship between masters and their political subjects. Ranger also noted that the documentation of European ethnographers on the loyalty of colonial subjects to European military and naval patterns, as reflected in Beni costume and hierarchy appears as a mode of adjustment to absolute power.

The point that Ranger makes, however, must be taken with a pinch of salt. As we noted above, submission to burdensome orders in political circumstances will not likely be the same when rendered artistically. This is the basis of our point, as Anya Peterson Royce makes it, that the same dance that affirms the performers' identity parodies the identity of others, even more so in situations of uneven relationships such as under colonialism or dictatorships. The fact that children or other less sophisticated sub-groups in the political process adopt dance as a form of language without articulating a political point, indicates an awareness of the power of the mode itself. Similar instances of Nigerian dances in the nineteenth century provide areas of comparative approach. If we are to understand the process and the phenomenon of dance in East Africa as merely an adjustment to the absoluteness of European power, why did the British put Saleh bin Mkwawa under strict surveillance? After all, he had been freed as a prisoner of war.

The fact that the point of intellectual prejudice arises from the psychology of power warrants that we delve into the matter a bit more. What Ranger might have perceived to be an adjustment of colonial peoples to the absoluteness of the power of their masters is better illuminated if we examine the psychology of repression and resistance as a form of language that goes beyond aesthetics alone. We may contend that because Beni articulates a form of indexical, dramatic expression, it is a form of language in itself: a meta language. There are concepts signified and there are signifiers and modes of signification. The problem, however, as Jacques Lacan pointed out in his psychoanalytic theory, is that a concept signified does not always correspond to its signifiers, or whatever sign is used to represent it. What this amounts to is that in the real world, the correlation of objects with ideas is pretty arbitrary. He observes that different signifiers can apparently be applied to what is ostensibly the same sign, with a consequent difference in interpretation.<sup>19</sup>



Lacan illustrates this with the idea that if a door is labelled 'gentlemen,' for instance, we not only realise that the door stands for gentlemen or admits gentlemen alone, we might immediately visualize the images of actual gentlemen as well. In other words a distinction is not only made between a door that bears 'ladies' as opposed to 'gentlemen', there are the implied connotations as well.

This is a rather simplified explanation of one of Lacan's complex models, but the analogy, that perceptions or interpretations of phenomena often involve a basic notion of ambiguity still holds. We know that the unconscious often confronts reality in such a roundabout manner as deny flat, symmetrical connections between what an index seems to reveal, and what it is exactly. The concept of Beni which is often seen by an alien as a ridiculous charade about power or its lack of it, appears in fact to be the exact opposite. The constant repetition of a phenomenon merely invests the unconscious with a lost meaning.

One more modest example in the area of psychoanalytic criticism by Sigmund Freud will strengthen this argument. In a lecture titled 'Resistance and Repression'<sup>20</sup> Freud observed that a neurotic state exists whereby a patient may resist attempts to relieve him of the symptoms of his illness. This is illustrated with a simple analogy: a man who goes to the dentist because of an agonizing toothache nevertheless holds back the hand of the dentist as he approaches the bad tooth with a pair of forceps.

From this model we derive that persons under some physiological or social burden — in our case colonialism — react to their situation. The reaction may be such that they confront reality in a roundabout manner. They may realize that the process of direct confrontation is costly and that subtlety offers a more incisive means. A person, therefore 'in his efforts for opposition at any price, (he) may offer a complete picture of someone who is an emotional imbecile.'<sup>21</sup> I intend to prove in these words that the often simplistic, unserious nature of

some of the dance or dramatic sketches which Ranger and others consider as weak defences against colonialism may just be surface perceptions of more fundamental issues.

It seems to me that such protests as are found in Beni are not aspects of militant demonstrations. They are processed as converted phenomena reflected as art. Even Freud, in analysing this process of resistance wonders whether we are not underestimating intellectual criticism by referring to it as mere resistance.

Lest the adoption of this model be criticized as applying only to pathological matters, we must be quick to note that political repression is as much an aberration as is psychological repression. The former is a planned derivative, while the latter is an isolated symptom. There are areas of correspondence between them.

There are striking parallels between dance events and other metalinguistic means in colonial states, even when they are far apart. Just as the *Ngoma* or group dances of East Africa flourished through the adaptation of topical events, so did the dance art on the West African Coast, particularly in Nigeria.

Pantomimic dance events (i.e., masquerades) have been practiced on the West African Coast for nearly ten centuries before the advent of European colonialism. They were commented upon by early explorers, such as Hugh Clapperton, who described such a dance in 1826 whilst exploring the West African Coast:

The first act considered in dancing and tumbling in sacks . . . . The second act consisted in catching the boa constrictor . . . . The third act consisted of the white devil. The actors having retired to some distance in the background, one of them was left in the centre, whose sack falling gradually down, exposed a white head . . . exhibited the appearance of a human figure cast in white wax, of the middle size, miserably thin and starved with cold. It



frequently went through the motion of taking snuff, and rubbing its hands: when it walked, it was with the most awkward gait, treading as the most tender-footed white man would do in walking bare-footed for the first time, over new frozen ground.<sup>22</sup>

More than a century later, in 1964, similar performances were described by Ulli Beier in a different context. He noted in one of the scenes making a burlesque of the colonial master:

A highlight are the Oimbo — the European with enormous hooked noses and smooth black hair made from Colobos monkey skin. They shake hands, say 'how do you do' and perform a ridiculous ballroom dance.<sup>23</sup>

Ulli Beier's account, quite apart from such details of intrinsic protest against inimical moral influences and current vogue also noted that the societies of group dancers are like sectarian rivals. In other words, this reveals that the group may often become political antagonists in intent and stir dialogue or controversy. This is the point emphasized by Edith Enem's study of the Kwagh-hir dance and puppet theatre of the Tiv:

Historical awareness is shown in some puppets which represent events such as when the first motor bike was ridden in Gboko or the first police woman emerged or modern dress styles of European design gained local acceptance. The Tivs recall a time in the early political days when Kwagh-hir was prohibited as the satiric impulse of this theatre was exploited by opposing political factions to aggravate social strife.<sup>24</sup>

We have noted that the Beni Ngoma served similar functions. The main difference in the two regions is that in West Africa, the protest was/is rendered in more direct terms.

Captain Clapperton's account records that his alien presence, and by implication, the idea of colonial conquest was rendered by his Yoruba hosts in burlesque and ridiculous representation. The same mood is evident in Ulli Beier's account as quoted above. The difference between these accounts and that of Terence Ranger is that whilst those of Clapperton and Beier discern in the dance vignettes a critical evaluation of colonial activity, Ranger confuses the same phenomenon with colonial assimilation. The colonial enterprise was overwhelming. Not surprisingly, the dances exhibited certain excesses. These burlesque aspects can now be assessed as aspects of protest engendered by the colonial experience. Let us illustrate with two more examples from Ranger's own account.

The first is his own interpretation of the comments of a European traveller in Mombassa in the 1920s. The said traveller noted the degrading aspect of the costume worn by marchers and dancers in the streets. These consisted of tattered clothes of all kinds from khaki shorts and orange belts to bathing trunks and tennis rigs. The same account also noted that the indigenes showed their assertive loyalty to the British crown by climaxing the show with the British Anthem, 'God Save the King' and doffing their hats.<sup>25</sup> Surprisingly, neither that traveller nor Terence Ranger saw the satire or the burlesque in the event. This account of the event itself is certainly too simplistic: the dance could not be simply a straightforward assertion of loyalty to the crown. It is worthy of note, however, that Ranger himself realizes that there is a close connection between Beni (the group dance) and colonialism. 'But the problem', he says, 'is to define precisely what the connection was'.<sup>26</sup> It was to him, an honest puzzle.

If we cast our mind back to the model we adopted from Freud, then the matter becomes clearer. The symptoms of the colonial event affirm exactly what is thought to be its opposite. It is neither capitulation nor surrender, it is in itself a form of protest, ostensibly devious in its approach.



The occasional lavish feasting, the display of tawdry costumes and property, all go a long way to prove that Beni was not only a convenient pastime but also a social rite of exorcism, whereby social malaise was criticized and individual emotion purged of its destructive content.

The situation of colonialism is probably better understood when it is examined from the viewpoint of the outsider as well as from the perspective of the colonized. What an outside appraisal presents as the effect of subjugation might in fact be a reaction within the on-going dialectic.

### Conclusions

The paradox and ambiguity which Georges Curvitch perceives as an inherent element of theatrical performance appear to be two aspects of the same duplicity which Royce, Lacan and Freud have made reference to. Whilst Terence Ranger gave an excellent presentation of facts with regard to the dance, his conclusions would appear to have been affected by an error of analysis or judgement. And it would seem that Ranger himself had second thoughts about this when he observes that there is a close connection between Beni performances and colonialism. That problem has been partially resolved by another researcher in dance ethnography.

J. Clyde Mitchell, a Professor of African Studies and a former director of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute carried out a field study on the Kalela Dance in Northern Rhodesia in the 1950s. The Kalela is derived from the Beni and has taken on all the attributes of the Beni, which are the use of brass bands, uniforms, and the spirit of competitive 'gamesmanship'. Its other features also include songs, satires and burlesque. This is how Mitchell represents Kalela characteristics:

There are thus certain clear characteristics of the songs of the *Kalela* dancers. First there is the element of self-praise. The dancers are all young single men who have

given a good deal of attention to their personal appearance. Their songs are directed particularly towards the women and the dancers are not reticent in drawing the attention of the women to their own desirability.

A second feature of the songs is the clear recognition of the ethnic diversity of urban populations. This takes two forms. The first is that the dancers emphasize the beauty of their own land (or origin) and extol their own virtues. The second form is the obverse of this in that the distinctiveness of *other languages and customs are emphasized and lampooned.*

There are thus several features of *Kalela* which could well be the starting-point of a sociological analysis; but the most significant feature from my point of view, is that *Kalela* is essentially a *tribal* dance. . . . In other words, we are presented with an apparent paradox. The dance is clearly a tribal dance in which tribal differences are emphasized but the language and the idiom of the songs and the dress of the dancers are drawn from an urban existence which tends to submerge tribal differences.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, like Ranger and the other critics, Mitchell also clearly perceives of that inherent paradox, but he does not fall into the error that Ranger's analysis assumes as highlighted by the following remark:

The pantomime of the social structure in the *Mbeni*\* therefore represented the social structure *as the African saw it* . . .

It might be argued that the dance provided an excellent medium for the expression of hostility towards a ruling group through satire and that, in fact, this



was the main satisfaction in it for the participants and spectators.<sup>28</sup>

Quite at variance with Ranger's conclusion 'that Beni came to an abrupt end in the early 1960s with political independence' is our own conjecture here. Popular art forms do not die. They merely change their emphases or metamorphose with historical changes and developments. In this respect, Beni merely changed its emphases for various reasons.

First, the change in the nature of economic transactions and labour relations after independence stipulated new social schedules. Most agrarian economies were becoming monetized with an inherited capitalistic economy. Second is the increasing inability of people to cope with the high costs of living and the lavish demands of Beni dance. It must be borne in mind that the institution of the nuclear family and the nation state are bourgeois phenomena which undermine the communal nature and role of such popular or 'lineage' art. Art has often compromised its form and values to fit into the new social relations. Their emergent patterns then have to be re-studied and analysed by sociologists and art historians and critics.

#### End Notes

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2. David Mayer, Towards a Definition of Popular Theatre. In: *Western Popular Theatre*, David Mayer and Kenneth Richards, eds, Methuen, London, 1977: 263.
3. T.O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in East Africa 1890-1970: The Beni Ngoma*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1975. My discussion of East African dance is largely based on Ranger's authoritative book on the subject.
4. Khamisi Mustafa et. al. to Chairman, Municipal Board Mombassa, 25 November, 1932, file S/22, Municipal Archives, Mombassa, cited in T.O. Ranger, 22. See also Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen) *Out of Africa* Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1985: 119.
5. T.O. Ranger, 23-24.
6. Ibid., 69-70.
7. Ibid., 66-67.
8. J. Clyde Mitchell, *The Kalela Dance*, The Rhodes-Livingstone Papers number 27, U.P. Manchester, 1959: 5.
9. J. Clyde Mitchell, 6-7.
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11. T.O. Ranger, 23-24.
12. Ibid., 54.
13. Ibid., 76.
14. Quoted in Ranger, 20.
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25. T.O. Ranger, 9-10.
26. Ibid., 9.
27. Clyde Mitchell, 8-9.
28. Ibid., 12.