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DANCEHALL POLITICS: MOBILITY, SEXUALITY, AND SPECTACLES OF RACIAL RESPECTABILITY IN LATE COLONIAL TANGANYIKA, 1930s–1961*

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the relationship between understandings of youth sexuality and mobility, and racial nationalism in late colonial Tanganyika through a history of *dansi*: a dance mode first popularized by Tanganyikan youth in the 1930s. *Dansi*'s heterosocial choreography and cosmopolitan connotations provoked widespread anxieties among rural elders and urban elites over the mobility, economic autonomy, and sexual agency of youth. In urban commercial dancehalls in the 1950s, *dansi* staged emerging cultural solidarities among migrant youth, while also making visible social divisions based on class and gender. At the same time, nationalist intellectuals attempted to reform *dansi* according to an emerging political rhetoric of racial respectability.

KEY WORDS: Tanzania, leisure, popular culture, gender, sexuality, race, nationalism.

IN 1957, a man named Kapaya wrote a letter to the Tanganyikan newspaper *Mwangaza*, describing a scene he had witnessed in an urban dancehall. 'The people are doing dances that are entirely unacceptable', he argued.

> Since I first learned there was such as thing as *dansi*, I have never seen dancing as wild as this. People grab each other and shake their hips, and boast that they are doing *mnenguo*. If a man finds himself with no woman to dance with him, he does not hesitate to grab the body of one of his peers, get into a line and dance a traditional dance such as the *msoma,* and he will then call it *dansi*.

Dansi is the Swahili term for social dance in an international ballroom idiom, typically performed in mixed-sex couples. *Mnenguo* refers to a sensual hip-gyrating motion that is the core movement of many East African dances, especially female initiation dances, while *msoma* is a circle dance performed by Swahili women in sex-segregated social settings, such as weddings. Kapaya continued, 'We make an effort to learn *dansi* so that if foreign visitors from developed countries come, they will see that we are in the know and that we have progressed. If they see this, though, they will say that the people of

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Tanga have not progressed in the slightest'. 'This kind of dancing', he concluded, 'throws us backwards in shame.'[1]

Kapaya was writing during a time of unprecedented youth migration to the city. Various observers had a stake in the bodies, labors, sex lives, and consumer habits of this expanding population: colonial officials, as part of a policy of urban 'stabilization', struggled to control the flow of youth to the city and to foster the growth of a stable African urban middle class; merchants and entrepreneurs marketed products and services to this growing class of young consumers; parents and rural elders sought to maintain traditional claims on the labor, loyalty, and reproductive capacity of their younger relatives; and nationalist activists sought both to recruit youth into the anti-colonial movement and to choreograph spectacles of order in urban public spaces to legitimate their claims to modernity and political sovereignty. Given these various interests, *dansi* carried different meanings for different audiences. For some, *dansi* connoted aspirations to what was perceived as a universalizing modernity based on the ideals of heterosocial commercial leisure and cosmopolitan aesthetic affinities. For others, the sight of young urban Africans dancing together in this mode exacerbated anxieties about a perceived lack of societal control over youth. The attempts of *dansi*'s observers, participants, and critics to resolve these tensions manifested themselves in an outpouring of letters, essays, and etiquette advice columns addressing proper dancehall behavior and comportment in the Swahili press of the 1950s. These competing efforts to shape urban youth and to define African modernity became enmeshed in the very choreography of the dances.

This article tracks the history of *dansi* and its shifting meanings in order to investigate the relationship between understandings of youth mobility and sexuality, and the articulation of a racial political identity in 1950s Dar es Salaam. While *dansi* had incited controversy over matters of sexual propriety and control of youth among Tanganyikan observers since its popularization in the 1930s, by the 1950s *dansi* took on special significance as a site for competing visions of 'racial respectability', a term that historian Lynn Thomas defines as 'people's desires and efforts to claim positive recognition in contexts powerfully structured by racism, contexts in which respectability was framed through racial categories.'[2] Kapaya's letter, like many letters, poems, and advice columns that appeared in the Swahili press, framed a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate dancing in terms of what such dancing would communicate about black Tanganyikans to non-African spectators. Some observers, like Kapaya, saw in *dansi* the potential for collective racial uplift, which would be achieved by transgressing colonial racial boundaries and stereotypes through the cultivation of 'modern' African bodies in dance, dress, and comportment. On the other hand, for other nationalist intellectuals, collective African progress would be achieved through the rejection of foreign influences and the creation of authentic and

[1] 'Mchezo wa Dansi Usiofaa Huko Tanga', by I. O. Kapaya, *Mwangaza*, 4 Jan. 1957.

[2] L. M. Thomas, 'The modern girl and racial respectability in 1930s South Africa', *Journal of African History*, 47:3 (2006), 461–90.

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recognizably indigenous modern cultural forms. The latter view would become more prominent during the 1960s.

Despite the attempts of reformers to shape *dansi* as a spectacle of racial respectability, other meanings of *dansi* proliferated in the dancehalls. At the same time as *dansi* spectacles became the site of debates among racial nationalists of the 1950s over what kinds of bodies and appearances should represent modern African aspirations, internally, *dansi* staged struggles over pressing matters such as social inequality, the boundaries of urban belonging, female virtue, and male access to intimacy with women.

DANCE AND HISTORY

Julie Malnig, an historian of social dance in the United States, argues that dominant social narratives and ideals become embodied in the movements of dancers, making the dance floor a 'rehearsal ground' for negotiations over gender roles, racial boundaries, and class divisions. While bodily movement can reinforce hegemonic social norms and values, it can also sometimes stage experimentation or subversion.[3] In this way, controversies over social dance often index moments of profound historical change. Drawing on the analytic lens offered by dance historians, this article tracks the rise of *dansi* in order to examine the relationship between shifting notions of the body and debates about racial respectability, a relationship that became especially prominent in public political discourse in the 1950s.

From the outset, *dansi*'s practitioners cultivated an aesthetic that signified their participation in a universalizing cosmopolitanism – hence their use of the English cognate – yet the social significance of the dance was rooted in established linkages between dance and politics in East African history. As T. O. Ranger demonstrates in his classic work *Dance and Society in East Africa*, competitive dance has long been an arena for attaining and gaining public recognition for new kinds of prestige and authority. For example, Ranger shows that late-nineteenth century town dwellers in coastal East Africa, drawing on regional traditions of competitive dance, created *beni*: an eclectic dance mode that drew on the style of a military brass band, and was performed in public by rival groups in competition with one another.[4] *Beni* groups competed for prestige, which they often attained through their embodiment of 'foreign' or outside knowledge and style.[5] Given this longer history, *dansi*'s embrace of the foreign was one of its most traditional characteristics.

[3] J. Malnig, 'Apaches, tangos and other indecencies: women, dance and New York nightlife in the 1910s', in J. Malnig (ed.), *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake,* (Urbana, 2009), 85. For a particularly compelling analysis of dance as a site for contestations over race, labor, and the female body in post-abolition Atlanta, Georgia, see chap. 8 of T. Hunter, *To 'Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1997).

[4] T. O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa: The Beni Ngoma* (Berkeley, 1975), 5–7.

[5] Ranger, *Dance and Society*, 9–44; see also J. C. Mitchell, *The Kalela Dance: Aspects of Social Relationships among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia*, (Manchester, 1956).

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Also significant to historical meanings of *dansi* is the role of dance in histories of female initiation. Throughout East and Central Africa, female initiation into adulthood involves female teachers conveying to younger women knowledge about sex, hygiene, and comportment through dance.[6] At Swahili weddings, for example, women dance together in groups, moving their hips in ways that suggestively evoke this shared body of kinesthetic female knowledge. *Dansi,* by contrast, suggested to observers not just a new activity performed in a separate leisure sphere, but a radical new approach to the body, gender mixing, and sexuality in which the movements of the body were learned and practiced not among females with guidance of elders, but rather developed between young men and women in public spaces.[7] When *dansi*'s critics protested that the young participants were undisciplined, wild, and aimless, they likely had in mind a contrast with earlier practices of bodily cultivation and initiation through dance.

Dansi also drew on longstanding generational tensions between junior and senior men in East Africa. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century East Africa, generational relationships between men have been shaped by the ability of elder men to control youth access to resources and privileges, and ultimately, their paths to adulthood. Senior men had to work hard at this in order to maintain their claims on youth labor, economic capacity, and reproduction.[8] *Dansi,* like other forms of cultural capital that came with wider access to colonial and international circuits of style and wealth, represented new forms of knowledge and opportunities that were unavailable to earlier generations. Moreover, the wearing of Western fashions, purchased with wages, flaunted the increasing ability of youth to buy foreign commodities and access resources, often without the mediating authority of elders. Such overt performances of youth sexuality and economic autonomy likely contributed to growing intergenerational tensions.

By focusing on dance as the site of a contested politics of personhood, I both build on, and depart from, the work of historians and ethnomusicologists who have explored the politics of leisure and popular culture in late colonial Tanganyika. Those who have written about *dansi* have focused predominantly on the years following the Second World War, emphasizing the linkages between the anti-colonial movement and popular culture. Some have argued that what made *dansi* a source of national consciousness was that it was an urban activity in which participants transcended the ethnic

[6] L. Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890–1945* (Athens, OH, 2001), 103–8. On Makonde initiation dances, see K. Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (Chicago, 2002), 212–14.

[7] In addition to suggesting why *dansi* would have been controversial, this also raises the question: what kinds of knowledge or authority might have been rendered invisible with the rise of *dansi* as a youth spectacle? On this issue of kinesthetic knowledge, see S. Feierman, 'Colonizers, scholars and the creation of invisible histories', in L. Hunt (ed.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, 1999), 194–6.

[8] See G. T. Burgess and A. Burton, 'Introduction', in A. Burton and H. Charton-Bigot (eds.), *Generations Past: Youth in East African History* (Athens, OH, 2010), 6–13. For an analysis of struggles of elder men to maintain control over male youth, see J. Willis, *Potent Brews: A Social History of Alcohol in East Africa 1850–1999* (Oxford, 2002), 50–60.

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differences solidified by colonial indirect rule, and discovered a wider national sense of belonging in this urban leisure sphere.[9] Further, Tadasu Tsuruta, Werner Graebner, and Kelly Askew point out that the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), the political party that negotiated the end of colonial rule and went on to inherit the postcolonial state, used commercial dancehalls and private dancing clubs to spread underground political news, recruit new party members, and raise money in the late 1950s.[10] However, to interpret these attempts to use *dansi* spaces for political ends as an indication that *dansi* fostered a unified Tanzanian nationalist consciousness is to conflate the political aims of a victorious TANU with historical experiences and motivations that were far more complex. The overlap between some of those who participated in the *dansi* scene and those who organized for TANU does not mean that the majority of *dansi* enthusiasts were motivated by anti-colonial sentiment, nor that the most salient struggles over urban popular culture were between African nationalists and European colonizers.

While there is little evidence to suggest that *dansi* was an explicitly anti-colonial pursuit,[11] there is ample material that suggests other meanings. Colonial newspapers, archives, and oral recollections of former participants reveal numerous *dansi* songs about love, sexuality, and virtue; detailed dress and behavior codes which were enforced in dancehall spaces; and heated debates about bodily comportment and social ritual occurring both in print media and on the dance floor. In shifting the focus to these debates, I agree with previous scholars that *dansi* provoked discussion about race and nation. However, I argue that the connection between popular culture and nationalism in Tanganyika is based not on *dansi*'s place as a site of anti-colonial organizing, but rather on the fact that *dansi* staged critical debates about the body, race, and sexuality. The appearance, pleasures, and comportment of urban youth were a crucial site in the collective imagination of late colonial Tanganyikans and, as recent work demonstrates, young urban bodies continued to be a flashpoint for nationalist rhetoric and urban identity politics in postcolonial Tanzania.[12] Approached from this perspective, the kinds of consciousness expressed and experienced through *dansi* appear less

[9] Askew, *Performing the Nation*, 92. For a similar argument regarding Angola, see Marissa Moorman, *Intonations: A Social History of Music and Nation in Luanda, Angola from 1945 to Recent Times* (Athens, OH, 2008), 3.

[10] Askew, *Performing the Nation*, 94, citing L. Fair, 'Pastimes and politics: a social history of Zanzibar's Ng'ambo community, 1890–1950' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 1994), and W. Graebner, 'Music, politics and the media in East Africa', in *Musique, Histoire Democratie*, 1, Proceedings of the International Conference of Vibrations, July 1989. Graebner's statement about this is derived from an interview with Ally Sykes, a founding member of TANU and an active musician during the 1950s. See also T. Tsuruta, 'Popular music, sports and politics: a development of urban cultural movements in Dar es Salaam, 1930s–1960s', *African Study Monographs*, 24:3 (2003), 195–222.

[11] Tsuruta and Graebner each cite a song text with anti-colonial themes. They also draw on the recollections of TANU supporters.

[12] See especially A. Ivaska's *Cultured States: Youth, Gender and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam* (Durham, 2011).

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like anti-colonial consensus and more like a shared terrain of debate, with deeper historical roots.

DANSI, MOBILITY, AND TANGANYIKA'S NEW YOUTH

Tanganyikan youth began organizing *dansi* parties by at least the early 1930s. In the hilly north-eastern region between the coast and the Usambara Mountains, local youth would gather at an appointed time in a field or clearing, each carrying a kerosene lamp to light their way in the dark. The gathered revelers would include a guitar player and percussionist, sometimes a flute, pennywhistle or trumpet player, or an accordion. A local procurer of *tembo* (palm wine) would sometimes arrive as well, selling the sweet alcoholic drink to participants. The dancers would set out their kerosene lamps in a circle, creating an illuminated dancing ground, and dance together in couples in what was known as the 'European style', facing each other with their bodies close, with hands grasping hands, waists, and shoulders.[13] By the early 1940s, young people were getting together for 'European style' dancing across colonial Tanganyika, from the island of Zanzibar to the Great Lakes region, and from the northern border with Kenya to the southern borders with Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. Dances were held in open fields, in lean-to thatched shade huts on sisal plantations, in train station waiting rooms after hours, in private residences, in hotels and restaurants, in empty copra godowns and shipping containers, and on the grounds of beer markets.[14]

Popularized in the 1930s and 1940s, *dansi* was emblematic of the new forms of status associated with mobility, wage labor, and privileged access to international circuits of style. The cosmopolitan connotations of the dance mode is reflected in reports on the dances, submitted by readers in the 1930s and 1940s to the newspaper *Mambo Leo*:

> There was an excellent dance in our hometown Rungwe. Youth from all areas were invited to attend the festival of celebration. Guitar players were hired: the first was Mr. Andrew Mwambipile and the second was Mr. Nurson Mwambandile from Zanzibar. They are very skilled. The dance was like none other. My goodness, if you want a dance full of sweetness, hire these two youths. Andrew Mwambipile is a native of Johannesburg and I don't know where he met this Arab fellow, Nurson.[15]

These regular newspaper reports reveal the organizers' attempt to gain recognition for their dances. Particularly prestigious was the engagement of itinerant musicians from distant and glamorous places, such as Zanzibar or South Africa, as it associated the dance organizers with wider social networks.

Reactions to the new dance trend varied according to regional context. For example, in 1930s Muheza, the popularity of *dansi* among young

[13] For descriptions of this, see correspondences in *Central Africa,* 1931–4.

[14] These different dancehall locations are derived from various reports in the 'Habari za Miji' section of *Mambo Leo* in the 1930s through the 1950s, as well as from reports on dance permits in Tanzania National Archives, Dar es Salam (TNA) 26/57/3; TNA 61/782/1; TNA 26/228/11; and TNA 54/39/28. See also the Zanzibar National Archives, Zanzibar (ZNA) AK 14/10. For dancing on sisal plantations, interview with Hassan Ngoma, Tanga, 9 Apr. 2009.

[15] A. S. Mwakifuna, 'Furaha ya Dansi', *Mambo Leo*, Sept. 1947.

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Christians sparked debate within the Anglican community about their modernizing ambitions. In 1934, a European UMCA priest stationed in the region described the spread of the new youth craze with these words:

All the native dances were thrown overboard in the space of a few weeks and fox-trotting took their place. To the older people, this form of dancing was indecent in the extreme ... But they had no power to stop it. Their fears and horror, however, were not ungrounded. To begin with, it is against all rules of African etiquette for men and women to dance together in this fashion. This is what happened. Tragedy after tragedy. The priest-in-charge and those working with him were dismayed at the sudden outbreak of what can only be termed unbridled license. Homes were broken, fierce quarrels and fighting took place. Dancing was taking place all night, and even lorries full of young girls were coming here at midnight for the 'Dance'. The elders watched the debacle dismayed, but powerless.[16]

To make matters more complicated, African Christian teachers who ran UMCA schools and institutions were among the most avid organizers of the dance parties. The crisis over *dansi* provoked clergy members to distinguish 'virtuous' modernity, based on the family, the church, the home, and a wholesome desire for objects like tea kettles, books, and furniture; from 'delinquent' or immoral modernity, based on luxury consumerism, individualistic sexuality, and a reliance on urban wage labor.[17] While for many of the young UMCA Christians, dancing was a source of pleasure and social status, to church leaders, *dansi* challenged their role in distinguishing positive from negative foreign influence.

In other regions, *dansi* reflected tensions over mobility and migrant wage labor. Such was the case in the North Mara district in the north-west region of Tanganyika, near the Kenyan border east of Lake Victoria's shore, where the guitar and accordion dance parties of local youth irritated the elders of the Native Authority to the point that in 1944, they passed the European Dancing and Possession of Accordeons (sic) Order.[18] Dance parties had become a popular pastime of youths in North Mara, including the migrant young Luo men from colonial Kenya who came to the region in increasing numbers beginning in the 1930s, when gold mines were opened at Tarime and Geita.[19] The opening of the mines led to an influx both of male migrant laborers from throughout East and Central Africa, and of Luo farmers who migrated to the Tanganyika side of the border to farm and take advantage of the infrastructure and population growth to find new markets for their agricultural products.

[16] A., 'How can I? Except some man guide me?', *Central Africa*, 614 (1934).

[17] 'Club or night school', *Central Africa*, XLIX:579 (March 1931), 55; G. W. Bloomfield, 'European dances', *Central Africa*, LII:26 (June 1934), 621.

[18] The 1944 dancing rules were initially passed by the Luo chiefdoms of Kiseru, Girango, and Luo Imbo and were taken on by other regional authorities in the region in the late 1940s and early 1950s. They are reproduced in: TNA 554/L5/31, North Mara Dancing Rules, 1957.

[19] F. J. Kaijage, 'Labor conditions in the Tanzanian mining industry, 1930–1960', Working paper 83, African Studies Center, Boston University, 1983.

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The elders of the Native Authority blamed the newfound popularity of dance parties on 'strolling Luo guitar players' who they accused of coming over the border, enticing local girls into living with them on the mining compounds, and inciting local youth to rebelliousness and debauchery. The 'blood-heating' European dances brought by migrant youth, the elders argued, led to adultery, illicit sex, immoderate alcohol consumption, and violence in North Mara. Based on a set of laws that had been recently passed in the Biharamulo region of the western side of Lake Victoria, North Mara European Dancing Rules made it an offense, punishable by a 200 shilling fine and two months imprisonment, to be found in possession of an accordion or to participate in any party where accordions or guitars were played.[20]

What young dancers celebrated as a liberating worldliness appeared to rural elders and authority figures as aimlessness, cultural loss, and a spiritual homelessness, posing a threat to older forms of authority and social reproduction. *Dansi*'s heterosocial choreography in which men and women danced together in pairs threatened family control over youth sexuality, courtship, and marriage, while the new forms of knowledge and wealth the dancers displayed made them appear less reliant on relationships with elders. Anxieties about this youth population were expressed in popular caricatures, in which observers mocked them for their smoking, their tattered Western clothes, and their parroting of English phrases like 'halo bradha!' and 'my dia'.[21] *Dansi* youth were portrayed as arrogant, libidinous, wild, and lacking in self-control, integrity, and sexual morality.[22] Other observers portrayed them as superficial, taking part in a civilization that 'has no meaning' and was simply for show.[23] Sometimes, dance parties became scenes of confrontation between *dansi* youth and elders: for example, one nighttime accordion party near the north-eastern border with Kenya ended when elders arrived on the scene and shut it down, prompting the young organizer to express his annoyance in the territory newspaper.[24]

Meanwhile in the cities, youth migrants – many of them mission-educated – created dancing clubs in which member dues were used to hire musicians or instruments, secure a space, and print invitations. The aspirations of the members to identify as young and modern are evident in their club titles, such as The New Generation Dancing Club, The Tanga Young Comrades Club, Modern Africans, The Singing Cowboys, Honolulu, and Young Girls Fashion Club.[25] The organizers of the more exclusive dance parties would send out written invitations in advance, specifying the dress code for the event, sometimes including the colors of jackets and shirts to be worn by men, or the specific cut and color of the skirt for women.[26] Being able to dress up for *dansi* required a significant monetary investment, unavailable

[20] North Mara Dancing Rules, 1957.

[21] M. Ali, 'Fahari Ngomani', *Mambo Leo*, Oct. 1936; 'Ustaarabu Usiyo Maana', *Mambo Leo*, Feb. 1934.

[22] G. C. Kumwenda, 'Vijana Tunaharibika kwa Dansi', *Mambo Leo*, Jan. 1947.

[23] 'Ustaarabu Usiyo Maana', *Mambo Leo*, Feb. 1934, 21; L. Issa, 'Watu Weusi ni Wepesi Sana Kwa Kuiga Mambo Mapya', *Mambo Leo*, June 1936.

[24] J. A. I. Kiungu, 'Mchezo Gani Ufaao?', *Mambo Leo*, Jan. 1940.

[25] Examples of names of dancing clubs can be found in the regular feature 'Habari za Miji', in *Mambo Leo,* especially in 1940.

[26] O. A. Ameran, 'Maendeleo na Speech Katika Dansi', *Kwetu*, 3 May 1939.

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to most urban Africans at the time, and in setting this dress code, the organizers ensured that only men and women of means could participate. Responding to popular perceptions that dancing was for hooligans, drunks, and prostitutes, members of elite urban dance societies took great care to distinguish themselves as 'respectable', crafting by-laws and meticulous codes of conduct for their members.[27] In letters to the editor in the newspapers, club members stressed *dansi*'s exclusiveness, emphasizing the role of the bouncers in keeping out those who did not meet the dress code, or who had too much to drink, from entering. The dances held by these elite clubs became spectacles of privilege.

Urban migrants used dancing clubs as a way of claiming a kind of status to rival that of pre-existing urban elites, whose communal authority rested on their claims to a local lineage or land.[28] For example, Kleist Sykes, who James Brennan identifies as a leading figure among the urban newcomers of 1940s Dar es Salaam, upset Dar es Salaam's elite Islamic establishment when, in 1940, he cofounded a dancing club that he called the Tanganyika Islamic Jazz Club. The son of a woman from central Tanganyika and a father of Zulu origins, Sykes lacked the family connections that other Dar es Salaam notables could claim and sought to establish alternative sources of authority and status, through business and political affiliations, and by playing an active role in the *Jamiatul al-Islamiyya*, an organization charged with, among other things, overseeing Islamic education and religious festivals.[29] When he formed the Tanganyika Islamic Jazz Club, the town elders denounced the move as blasphemy, sending angry letters and petitions to the provincial commissioner arguing that, by associating Islam with jazz music, and especially with a dance style in which men and women danced together, Sykes was destroying the *heshima,* or respectability, of Dar es Salaam's Muslim population.[30] The ensuing controversy revealed competing forms of cultural authority.

Through *dansi*, Sykes sought both to create a kind of social status based on pan-urban cosmopolitan culture, and to link Muslim identity with emerging forms of prestige. Like other Muslims, Sykes may have feared that the Islamic urban establishment was slowly being marginalized as well-remunerated jobs increasingly went to mission-educated Christians. In one of his letters in defense of his dance club, Sykes listed the Roman Catholic Dance Club and the UMCA Dance Club as evidence that *dansi* was associated with modern aspirations and leisure, rather than with the religious aspects of identity.[31] Sensing the increasing power of a new generation of modern urban dwellers

[27] W. B. Saleh, 'Dansi za Kizungu', *Mambo Leo*, Nov. 1936.

[28] For a discussion of these distinctions, see J. Brennan, *Taifa: Africa, India and the Making of Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Athens, OH, forthcoming 2012), 80–6.

[29] Daisy Sykes Buruku, 'The townsman: Kleist Sykes', in J. Iliffe (ed.), *Modern Tanzanians: A Volume of Biographies* (Nairobi, 1973).

[30] TNA 61/701/1: Letter from Wazee wa Mji Dar es Salaam to District Commissioner, 15 Feb. 15, 1940; letter from President of the Tanganyika Muslim Jazz Band Club to District Commissioner, 7 Mar. 1940.

[31] TNA 61/701/1, Secretary of Tanganyika Muslim Jazz Band Club to Provincial Commissioner, Eastern Province, 3 Apr. 1940.

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with Western education, he sought, through modern social dancing, to establish a Muslim presence in the increasingly prestigious secular spaces of the city. However, his position put him at odds with pre-existing urban elites, and the controversy escalated until finally, an interlocutor from the colonial administration convinced Sykes and his collaborators to change their organization's name. The name they chose was the African Jazz Band Club, anticipating the growing importance of race as an identity in late colonial Dar es Salaam.[32]

Dansi was popularized across East and Central Africa by a cadre of increasingly mobile, and powerful youth who brought *dansi* with them as they moved throughout the territory in pursuit of education, work, and social opportunities. *Dansi* was the leisure activity of people who were, or sought to be, connected to a wider world either through their own mobility or through their access to circuits of commodities and styles. These young people included musicians, enthusiasts, and patrons who moved between rural and urban areas. It was in the 1950s city, however, that *dansi* also became a site of an emerging racial politics.

DANSI IN THE 1950S: RACE, CLASS, AND THE RISE OF COMMERCIAL DANCEHALLS

By the end of the 1940s, the inter-rural movement of youth between towns, villages, plantations, and mines gave way to an intensified flow of rural youth into the expanding urban centers.[33] As Frederick Cooper shows, this transformation was concurrent with a shift across colonial Africa towards a policy of 'stabilization' in which colonial governments attempted to replace a constantly migrating population of male laborers with a permanent urban African working class.[34] In an attempt to foster 'civic virtue' in this emerging African urban cadre, colonial officials and philanthropists built community centers, in what Andrew Burton calls an attempt at 'social engineering'.[35] Initially intended for demobilized soldiers who had fought for the British in the Second World War, the community centers offered classes in literacy and personal finances for men, and in assorted domestic skills such as sewing and childrearing for women. The community centers sustained themselves financially by holding dances in the evenings, selling entrance tickets and drinks to urban residents. To the continual dismay of colonial administrators, the weekend dances were consistently packed with enthusiastic participants,

[32] TNA 61/701/1, Letter from Tanganyika Muslim Jazz Band Club to Provincial Commissioner, Eastern Province, 3 Apr. 1940.

[33] R. H. Sabot, *Economic Development and Urban Migration, Tanzania, 1900–1970* (Oxford, 1979), 89–90.

[34] F. Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002), 34–5; L. Lindsay, 'Working with gender: the emergence of the "male breadwinner" in colonial southwestern Nigeria', in C. Cole, T. Manuh and S. Miescher (eds.), *Africa After Gender?* (Bloomington, 2007), 141–50.

[35] A. Burton, 'Townsmen in the making: social engineering and citizenship in Dar es Salaam, c. 1945–1960', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 36:2 (2003), 331–65.

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while the educational programs were poorly attended, betraying a gulf between state visions and popular urban aspirations.[36]

Meanwhile, African and Asian urban entrepreneurs opened commercial dancehalls, nightclubs, cinemas, and cafes in an attempt to profit from this growing urban consumer class. With the move of *dansi* from private dancing clubs into spaces of commercial leisure, participation was reframed based on one's ability to pay the entrance fee and wear the proper attire, rather than on membership in an exclusive club. In a limited sense, the rise of a commercial leisure sphere democratized *dansi*, allowing for cross-class interactions in urban spaces, yet at the same time, growing urban inequalities were increasingly visible both in dance practices and in the urban geography of leisure. These tensions played out in dancehalls through struggles over style, movement, and comportment.

By the late 1950s, businesses attempted to capitalize on *dansi's* modern connotations by using images of dancing couples to market elite consumer items. Advertisements in the newspapers showed African couples dancing, alongside slogans and vignettes urging them to avoid the embarrassment of looking old at the dancehall by purchasing painkilling joint cream; to use deodorizing powders so they could stay fresh while out on the town; or to drink the brand of beer associated with the hottest spaces of commercial leisure. In these advertisements, dancing and its related forms of consumerism were associated with physical fitness, heterosocial interaction, and upward mobility.

Meanwhile, urban migrants used dancehalls to fashion a sense of cultural sovereignty. In coming to the city, young men and women risked weakening their access to established paths to adulthood available in their rural communities. At the same time, once arrived in the city, colonial racism, pre-existing urban hierarchies, and economic hardship shut many of them out of opportunities to advance in urban society. Most urban migrant youth lived as dependants in the households of relatives, while those without relatives in town typically faced suspicion from landlords who were reluctant to rent to young bachelors.[37] In contrast with an urban setting in which migrant youth were often presumed by more established urban residents to be *wahuni*, or 'hooligans', dancehalls were spaces of conspicuous self-display where young urban men and women deployed fashion, dance moves, and an elaborate slang vocabulary based largely on foreign loan words from cinema and imported music as a way of claiming a new urban identity based on consumption, romantic courtship, and privileged access to cosmopolitan cultural knowledge.[38]

Dansi was highly open to the incorporation of new movements, like the twist, the foxtrot, the jive, and the tango, but the rumba in particular became

[36] Burton, 'Townsmen', 351; A. Ivaska, 'Negotiating "culture" in a cosmopolitan capital: urban style and the state in colonial and postcolonial Dar es Salaam' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2003), 70–2.

[37] On suspicions about bachelors in housing, see J. A. K. Leslie, *A Survey of Dar es Salaam* (London, 1963).

[38] R. H. Gower, 'Swahili Slang', *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 51 (Dec. 1958), 250–4; J. A. K. Leslie, 'Dick Whittington Comes to Dar es Salaam', *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 55 (Sept. 1960), 215–18; F. A. Reynolds, 'Lavu Huzungusha Dunia', *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 58 (Sept. 962), 203–6.

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emblematic of the era. The rumba's central hip-rotating movement shared much in common with popular street dances and particularly initiation dances, which was likely part of what made the rumba seem controversial and sexually explicit to some observers.[39] The rumba was popularized further by the widespread dissemination of the Cuban HMV records in East Africa in the 1940s.[40] As a dance mode, the rumba had both intimate and cosmopolitan connotations.

In towns, dance bands functioned as social networks, with musicians at the center. Close to their inner social circle were young men who became part of the band by performing tasks such as collecting money at the door at shows, setting up equipment, acting as bouncers, or walking through the streets of town with a megaphone, shouting the time and location of the dance and singing the praises of the band.[41] Patrons and fans were also part of these networks, and many, if not most, urban youth *dansi* enthusiasts identified as loyal to one particular band.[42] As in other modes of competitive dance in East Africa, the size of the crowd that attended the dances brought prestige on a band and its followers.[43] In addition to attracting the greatest number of people to their shows, it was important to attract a crowd that was well dressed, and bouncers often turned away or chastised improperly dressed people.[44]

Musicians, fitting neither the models of masculinity that had been available in their rural villages nor the new masculinity of the educated elites employed in salaried positions, established themselves as public intellectuals of East Africa's growing cities, drawing on a long Swahili tradition of *shairi* poetry performance, in which poets expressed moral commentary through verse.[45] By the late 1950s and early 1960s, urban musicians sang about the troubles of urban life; their ambivalence at having left behind their rural homes, the problems of unemployment and chronic poverty, and their love and fear of

[39] While audio recordings demonstrate a clear influence of Cuban rumba on Tanganyikan dance band music, a lack of video sources make it difficult to analyze the extent to which the way that Tanganyikans danced 'the rumba' resembled the way the rumba was danced elsewhere in the world. When I asked how they learned to dance the rumba, people cited a number of sources, including dance lessons offered by 'foreigners', Congolese stage dancers, sailors who came to the portside nightclubs, and films.

[40] On the Cuban music HMV GV series, see W. Graebner, 'The *Ngoma* impulse: from club to nightclub in Dar es Salaam', in J. Brennan, Y. Lawi and A. Burton (eds.), *Dar es Salaam: Histories from an Emerging African Metropolis* (Dar es Salaam, 2007), 183.

[41] Interview with Sagaya Hussein, Dar es Salaam, 19 Oct. 2008.

[42] W. Graebner, 'The *Ngoma* Impulse', 83. For a discussion of a town where rival bands were aligned with rival football teams, see P. Lienhardt's *The Medicine Man: Swifa ya Nguvumali* (Oxford, 1968), 16–18.

[43] TNA 31/35, Tanga Province to all District Officers, 2 Sept. 1940; interview with Hassan Ngoma.

[44] For an example of exclusion from dances based on the wearing of 'Islamic' dress in the late 1950s, see introduction to Lienhardt's *The Medicine Man*.

[45] Also part of this tradition was competitive poetry performance between rival poets. This tradition of competitive performance informed rivalries between dance bands, whose singers sometimes performed songs praising their band and putting down their rivals. On competitive dance and poetry traditions in East Africa, see (eds.), G. Barz and Gunderson (eds.), *Mashindano! Competitive Music Performance in East Africa* (Dar es Salaam, 2000), especially the chapter by W. Graebner, 'Ngoma ya Ukae: Competitive Social Structure in Tanzanian Dance Music Songs'.

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urban women. Dancehalls were face-to-face communities, and songwriters often wrote songs about particular members of the audience. Sometimes, the songs would take sides in a quarrel between friends, while at other times, songs would contain praises of a beautiful girl that a band member was hoping to impress. Often, these songs would become a public commentary on the behavior of specific people – especially young women – in the neighborhood.[46] This is likely the case with the song '*Unavunja Utu*', or 'You give away your humanity', written and recorded by Salum Abdallah and Cuban Marimba in the 1950s. Abdallah sings:

I have sadness, my lover
So much sadness in my heart,
Why am I being tossed aside now, my lover,
While you go crazy over European men?[47]

Here, Abdallah not only publicizes his disapproval of his, or a friend's, former lover's behavior, but also expresses a broader sense of injury that stemmed from African youths' frustrating experiences in a segregated colonial city, where sources of wealth and prestige seemed disproportionately in the hands of foreigners. Abdallah subtly links the struggles of young African men to attain social status and female companionship with the broader evil of racial inequality.

Indeed, the self-consciously cosmopolitan identification of *dansi* proved fertile ground for a growing urban racial politics in the 1950s. In 1952, Dar es Salaam businessman Ramadhani Mwinshehe advertised his famous nightclub and guesthouse, located in Ilala, a densely populated African neighborhood in Dar es Salaam, with these words:

We are spreading the news to all members of our African family from Zanzibar, Tanga, Mombasa, Kenya, Nairobi, Kampala, Uganda, Usumbura, and to family members both outside and within Tanganyika. We have opened an establishment at No. 16 Morogoro St, Ilala, Dar es Salaam. We have the right to welcome guests to eat and to sleep for a period of 1 month. We have made this a place for travelers, on leave or for leisurely travel for a day or a week . . . Welcome ladies and gentleman. No person should be afraid to arrive in Dar es Salaaam saying 'I have no brothers or family.' We Africans are ready to welcome all of our fellow Africans.[48]

Mwinshehe appealed to his clientele as a community connected, across colonial boundaries, by a shared racial identity. In telling his potential customers 'no person should be afraid' to arrive in the city, he evoked a shared experience of dislocation and fear, proposing racial solidarity in spaces of cosmopolitan urban leisure. By the mid-1950s, Mwinshehe's guesthouse had become one of Dar es Salaam's most famous nightclubs, featuring such

[46] For example, interviews with Muhiddin Gurumo, Dar es Salaam, 11 Nov. 2008; and with Steven Hiza, Tanga, 25 Jan. 2009. For criticism of the *dansi* practice of performing songs insulting specific women in attendance at least by 1945, see J. E. Mhina, 'Kuimbana Dansini Hakufai', *Mambo Leo*, Sept. 1945.

[47] Salum Abdallah, 'Unavunja Utu', *Ngoma Iko Huku: Vintage Tanzanian Dance Music, 1955–65*, Dizim Records 4701. Mohamed Said assisted with this translation.

[48] Advertisement for Ilala Restaurant and Guesthouse, *Afrika Kwetu*, Jan. 1952.

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illustrious acts as the Dar es Salaam Jazz Band and Salum Abdallah's Cuban Marimba Band.[49]

While part of *dansi's* appeal had to do with the fantasy of participation in a universalizing cosmopolitan modernity, the variety of establishments created in 1950s Dar es Salaam reflected a stratified urban geography. Dance band musicians carried their instruments and skills across social boundaries, moving from the hotel ballrooms of downtown, where elite couples wore tuxedos and gowns and danced the tango; to the nightclubs by the ports where foreign sailors mixed with local youth; to the neat and tidy poured concrete white-washed government community centers with corrugated iron roofs and a midnight curfew; to bars and nightclubs, like Mwinshehe's, in densely populated African working class neighborhoods.[50] Bakari Majengo, a musician who played in a wide range of Dar es Salaam establishments in the late 1950s, remembers some of the more upscale establishments as having strict dress codes and high entrance fees, catering to audiences that were wealthy and predominantly non-African. In contrast, Majengo told me that Mwinshehe's Ilala nightclub was a place for '*Waswahili tu*': that is, 'only *Waswahili*', deploying a contemporary usage of the term *waswahili* that refers to urban African lower classes.[51]

Sometimes, widening class divisions led to violent confrontations between young men within *dansi* spaces; for example, a letter to the editor published in *Mwangaza* describes a dance in the village of Kigongoi attended by young men from the prestigious Tanga school, who were home during their school break. According to the letter writer, the young women would only go with the Tanga School men. Spurned young local men responded by pelting their rivals with rocks. We get this story from the perspective of one of the attacked Tanga School students, C. Gebson, who ends his letter by chastising the young men: 'do the youth of Kigongoi want to develop, or to stay behind the times? How will our nation get praise from outsiders this way?'[52] Gebson simultaneously expresses scorn for men of lesser means while evoking an inclusive notion of racial uplift. This account captures one of the central contradictions of the *dansi* craze of the 1950s. On the one hand, dances staged intensifying inequalities among Tanganyikans. At the same time, a number of participants, like Gebson, saw *dansi* as a site for the articulation of collective African aspirations. Gebson, a student at an elite school whose graduates would go on to occupy some of the highest government positions in postcolonial Tanzania, was looking outward. Observers and participants like

[49] Advertisement in *Mwangaza,* 4 May 1957, 3.

[50] Interview with Hassan Ngoma. For a description of elaborate preparations to go out dancing at the prestigious Alexandra Hall, see E. A. M. Mang'enya, *Discipline and Tears: Reminiscences of an African Civil Servant on Colonial Tanganyika* (Dar es Salaam, 1984), 122–4.

[51] Interview with Bakari Majengo, Dar es Salaam, 11 Feb. 2009. A further example of this contemporary meaning is the term *uswahilini* or 'the place of the Swahili people', referring to the parts of town where poor and working class Africans live. Because Majengo was using the term *waswahili* to draw a contrast with the clientele of upscale European hotels, I interpret his usage to refer to this meaning, rather than an alternative usage of *waswahili*, as an ethnonym referring to the population indigenous to the East African coastal region.

[52] C. Gebson, 'Kutumia Fujo Ngomani', *Mwangaza*, 18 Feb. 1957.

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Gebson sought to gloss these internal tensions and viewed *dansi* as staging a unified African racial respectability.

GENDER, *DANSI* REFORMERS, AND SPECTACLES OF RACIAL RESPECTABILITY IN 1950S NIGHTLIFE

This article began with Kapaya's commentary: 'If they [foreigners] see this [dancing], they will say that the people of Tanga have not progressed in the slightest.'[53] Like Gebson, Kapaya, and other middle-class *dansi* reformers shared a common frame of reference, responding to the objectionable behavior of urban youth in dancehalls with the frequently repeated rebuke 'what will they [non-Africans] think about us [Africans]?' While members of exclusive dancing clubs in earlier days set themselves apart through membership requirements and stringent dress and behavioral codes, reformers like Gebson and Kapaya saw their own aspirations to modernity as linked to the broader political and social status of Tanganyikan Africans as a community defined along racial lines.[54] As such, they sought not only to embody racial respectability, but also to shape the behaviors and appearances of others in public and commercial urban spaces in order to meet this ideal. In this context, dancehalls became sites where middle-class nationalist *dansi* reformers sought to stage urban spectacles of racial respectability in order to make a broader case for African national sovereignty. In so doing, they implicitly defined their own lifestyles, physical habits, and aesthetic preferences as the epitome of progress.

The images of collective racial uplift produced by *dansi* reformers responded to negative stereotypes of urban youth, certain aspects of which were shared by colonial administrators, urban African elites, and rural elders and parents. Central to most stereotypes of urban youth was the idea of their threatening mobility, both across the territory and within the city. Critics described women's movements in the city as *ovyo-ovyo*, or purposeless and wasteful. Likewise, *mhuni*, the word for 'hooligan' that was typically used to describe young urban working class or unemployed men, can be reformulated as the verb *huni*, which is defined in colonial era dictionaries as 'to wander about for no good purpose'.[55] Stereotypes implied that these suggestible and aimless urban youth were ill-equipped to handle modern urban life, and by implication, were unfit for political sovereignty. Nationalist reformers took these stereotypes seriously and responded by cultivating an aesthetic of self-control and discipline. One writer named Kasembe expressed these aims bluntly when he emphasized, in his illustrated article distinguishing proper from improper dancehall dress, '*dansi* is a dance for respectable people: not *wahuni*'.[56]

[53] I. O. Kapaya, 'Mchezo wa Dansi Usiofaa Huko Tanga', *Mwangaza*, 4 Jan. 1957.

[54] Michael West identifies a similar middle-class political dynamic in his book *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898–1965* (Bloomington, 2002).

[55] Inter-Territorial Language Committee for the East African Dependencies, *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1939). For a more in-depth discussion of the term's use and etymology, see A. Burton, *African Underclass: Urbanisation, Crime and Colonial Order in Dar es Salaam* (Oxford, 2005), 4–6.

[56] P. P. Kasembe, 'Mavazi Kwenye Ngoma Zetu za Dansi', *Mambo Leo,* Aug. 1961.

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Expressions of racial respectability were highly gendered. The fact that many men went out alone or with friends to dance with unmarried women while their wives remained at home exacerbated the popular perception that *dansi* was a threat to respectable gender interactions. The Swahili press contributed to these stereotypes by featuring sensational tales and letters to the editor describing women who became so enamored with the earthly pleasures of the rumba that they would abandon their husbands and children to become dancing queens, preferring the thrill of alcohol and a rotating cast of dance partners to the bonds of marriage partnership and motherhood.[57] In commentary and in Swahili serial fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, female characters in dancehalls were often caricatured as prostitutes, spinsters, and pickpockets.[58]

Some *dansi* enthusiasts made a conscious effort to establish urban leisure as a source of modern feminine respectability. In response to claims that urban women were immoral and lazy, female dancers drew on emerging discourses about health and physical fitness, sewing long wide dresses that both covered the legs and allowed for a wide range of physical motion. The young writer Lewis Machame described this aesthetic in a romance story in which the heroine, Rosalind, meets her lover and future husband Julias in the dancehall. The author takes care to distinguish her movements through urban space as practical and purpose-driven, rather than as aimless pleasure-seeking, or as '*ovyo-ovyo*'. Rosalind rides her bicycle to work at the hospital each day, where she works as a nurse, and when her lover offers to hire a taxi to take them out to the dancehall – a mark of prestige – she responds that she prefers exercising her limbs by walking. Rosalind spends much of her leisure time practicing and perfecting dances like the tango and jive. Describing their romance in the dancehall, Machame writes, 'Julias was delighted by Rosalind's quick and efficient breathing. People were shocked by the synchronization of their dance steps, and the entire dancehall watched them.'[59] Machame's description of the dancing couple in the urban dancehall emphasizes physical training and precision, and lacks any suggestion of the raucous sensuality or improvisation that framed popular conceptions of dance prowess. Some women, especially those who were well-off, practiced and mastered international dance moves by paying to attend 'tango schools', dance classes offered in the homes of private instructors. In doing so, they purchased a valued kinesthetic knowledge that allowed them to claim participation in urban modernity, reframing popular dancing as an act of precise bodily cultivation, rather than as an unmoored mobility and undisciplined sexuality.[60]

Dansi reformers emphasized physical discipline and self-control as a sign of racial respectability, and they defined this bodily regime through Eurocentric aesthetic criteria. For example, a 1961 self-help article called '*Dada, Tucheze*

[57] An example of fears about the deleterious effects of dancing on female virtue is a poem by C. Ally, 'Dansi ni Ngoma Duni, Wajuao Kufikiri', *Mambo Leo*, Apr. 1953.

[58] For example, A. Milani, 'Wanawake madansini', *Mwangaza*, 7 Jan. 1957; 'Mambo Kangaja: Mwajuma Ajifunza Kucheza Dansi', *Mapenzi ya Mungu*, Oct. 1953. The latter article argues that *dansi* is contrary to Islamic morality.

[59] L. Machame, 'Kuwa Nawe ni Kuwa Peponi', *Mbiu*, Aug. 1955.

[60] Interviews with Fatuma Mdoe, Tanga, 27 Mar. 2009; and Ally Sykes, Dar es Salaam, 12 Feb. 2009. Also see advertisement 'Learn dancing the modern way at John's tango school of dancing', *Tanganyika Standard*, 4 Jan. 1962.

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Dansi!' or 'Sister, Let's Dance!' advised the female readership on bodily comportment in the dancehall, stating that all dance moves should be executed with the back completely straight, without pushing the stomach forward or the backside backwards. One should never bend at the knees, the author advises, and the whole body should glide together in an unbroken vertical line, rather than articulate the isolated movements of individual body parts.[61] These instructions for respectable dancing contained an implicit critique of many East African popular dances that were performed in the streets or in the homes on weekends, as most of these dances tended to activate the knees and rotate the hips.[62] The competitive dancing common to the working class dance clubs – often between groups of men arranged into circles or lines, or among women who would take turns hip-shaking and flipping their skirts sensuously in the middle of a circle of onlookers – is what gave the writer Kapaya offense during his foray into the Tanga dancehall in the episode presented in the beginning of this article. In this way, the dancing body became a site of contestation, as some dancers would work traditions of competitive and flirtatious dance into dancehall rituals, while others attempted to maintain strict boundaries between the choreography of 'modern' dancing in spaces of commercial leisure and popular dances performed in the streets and in homes.

For *dansi* reformers, making dancehalls respectable involved the staging of chaste monogamy as a spectacle of African modernity. Young male writers defended *dansi* against charges of illicit sexuality by recasting dancehalls as places for the pursuit of romantic love and companionate marriage, based on emotional bonds, attraction, and individual choice of partner.[63] Moreover, many participants, especially married women, argued that entrance be restricted to women with a pre-arranged male partner or husband. These attempts to link *dansi* with companionate marriage played out in dance choreography as well. Chausiku bint Salim, a self-professed *dansi* enthusiast from Morogoro, argued emphatically in a letter to her local paper against the common dancehall practices of women dancing with other women, men with other men, or groups dancing in circles and lines rather than in individual couples. Framing her argument in terms of racial respectability, she declared that such behavior would make Africans seem incompetent in the eyes of the world and transform the dancehall from a place of respectability, *heshima,* to a place of hooliganism, *uhuni*.[64] By casting the image of a heterosexual couple dancing together in a self-contained unit as a sign of respectability, such reformers linked narratives of racial uplift with companionate monogamous marriage and domesticity.

Dance-goers also used fashion to display their facility in an urban consumer culture increasingly influenced by European aesthetics. Showing that one had

[61] 'Dada Tucheze Dansi', *Mambo Leo*, June 1961.

[62] On urban dances held in the streets in colonial Tanganyika, see Ranger, *Dance and Society*; Tsuruta, 'Popular Music'; Askew, *Performing the Nation*; and Graebner, 'Ngoma Impulse'.

[63] L. Machame, 'Kuwa Nawe'; I. Salum, 'Aliacha Anasa Baada ya Kuona Anaangamia', *Mambo Leo*, Feb. 1957. For a discussion of romantic love as a source of generational difference, see L. Thomas and J. Cole, 'Introduction: thinking through love in Africa', in J. Cole and L. Thomas (eds.), *Love in Africa* (Chicago, 2009), 1–30.

[64] C. Salim, 'Dansi Morogoro', *Sauti ya Morogoro*, Jan. 1956.

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access to Western fashions was a prerequisite for participation even for those who could not afford to own their clothing, and it was a common practice for young groups of friends to combine their resources and collectively own a single 'up-to-date' outfit which they would take turns wearing out to the dancehall on different nights.[65]

Singled out for censure was the *buibui*: a popular garment worn by Muslim women covering the hair and body, and sometimes, held across the face. The *buibui* had, a few decades earlier, constituted the epitome of cosmopolitan sophistication in coastal Tanzania and Zanzibar, allowing women to associate themselves visually with the prestige of wealth, *purdah*, and exemption from manual labor that would have required less restrictive garments.[66] In the 1950s, some letter writers in Tanganyika's newspapers portrayed the *buibui* not only as an obstacle to emerging ideals of female physical and social mobility, but also as an outdated relic of Arab cultural hegemony. In contrast with the *buibui*, commentators linked the dancehall aesthetic of long A-line skirts, exposed hair and faces, and pearl necklaces with aspirations to African modernity, uplift, and respectability. Moralizing poetry and letters to the editor not only labeled women who wore *buibuis* in the dancehalls as backwards, but also held them responsible for holding back the collective image and social advancement of all Africans and inviting scorn and derisive laughter from non-African onlookers.[67]

Of course, these ideals of respectable dancehall attire were neither accessible, nor necessarily desirable, to all participants. In a passage from a survey of Dar es Salaam conducted in 1956 and 1957, sociologist J. A. K. Leslie described a visible contrast between women who wore expensive tailored dresses in the dancehalls, and those who wore *khanga*: colorful fabrics cut in a rectangular shape that were worn wrapped, draped, and tucked around the body:

> At dance halls . . . the lady in the long evening gown, with sequins, is rewarded by the look of still greener envy in the eye of her neighbor clothed like a country cousin in a khanga; moreover while the khanga is being held in place ever more awkwardly as the tempo of jive hots up, she of the sequins can devote her whole attention to her chosen part as queen of the halls.[68]

[65] Interview with Telson Mughogho, Tanga, 4 May 2009. See also a fictionalized account of this practice in F. H. H. Faraji, 'Nilipata Kisura Naizesheni Lakini Mwisho Nikanunua Pijo', *Mwafrika*, 26 Feb. 1964.

[66] For the most detailed discussion of this, see Fair, *Pastimes and Politics*, 85–96.

[67] For example: A. M. Mwenda, 'Mavazi na Mchezo Havipatani', *Mhola Ziswe*, May 1953; Kesi Mtopa Salimini, 'Dansi na mabuibui, hasa raha yake nini?' *Afrika Kwetu*, 14 July 1955; P. Mrisho Saidi, 'Baibui Kwenye Dansi', *Mwafrika*, 7 Dec. 1960. See also Lienhardt, *Medicine Man*, 16–18. For a parallel in music, see Askew's discussion of nationalist attitudes towards *taarab* music's linkages with Arab culture in *Perfoming the Nation,* 224–5. See also Corrie Decker's description of 'modern' girlhood attire as a sign of African modernity and the rejection of 'antiquated Arabcentric values' in 'Reading, writing and respectability: how schoolgirls developed modern literacies in colonial Zanzibar', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 43:1 (2010), 113–14.

[68] Leslie, 'Dick Whittington Comes to Dar es Salaam', 113.

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This image conveys how the attempt of *dansi* reformers to project an ideal of modern and respectable African femininity also became part of a physical performance of class privilege.

While the intention of some of *dansi*'s reformers and participants had been to choreograph spectacles of racial respectability in urban dancehalls, other nationalist intellectuals saw all *dansi* practices as an obstacle to collective progress. Dancing, drinking, and socializing with the opposite sex, *dansi*'s detractors argued, siphoned energy and attention away from more serious undertakings, like study, prayer, and homemaking, which were considered necessary to African advancement.[69] Still others criticized *dansi* as elitist and divisive, excluding poor and rural Africans. Dance and leisure was only beneficial to the race, some argued, if all could participate on equal footing. Others criticized *dansi* for having foreign origins, and therefore precluding the modernization of an indigenous African culture. This argument reflects the position of a growing number of nationalist public intellectuals who believed that the development of African society would come not from sharing in international styles and aesthetics, but from creating a singular African cultural canon that would unite all Africans as a distinct national culture, allowing their participation in a world of other equivalent national cultures.[70] Yet though the position of *dansi* detractors differed from that of *dansi* reformers, both sides shared an emerging perspective that urban leisure spaces were microcosms of the nation, along with its ambitions and ills, and therefore, were potential sites for political intervention.

CONCLUSION

The popularization of *dansi* across Tanganyika in the 1930s and 1940s provoked widespread concerns about sexual propriety and a perceived loss of control over youth. By the 1950s, the heyday of nationalist organizing in Dar es Salaam, middle-class nationalist reformers imbued these concerns with new meanings by envisioning urban youth bodies as the site of a shared collective racial destiny. In this way, the history of *dansi* contributes to histories of Tanzanian nationalism by illuminating how the articulation of African national identity contained within it longstanding debates about personhood and the body.

In late colonial and early postcolonial public discourse, dancing was so powerfully associated with politics that Tanzania's first president Julius Nyerere used dance as a metaphor for decolonization. In his 1962 inauguration speech, he said:

> Many of us have learnt to dance the 'rumba' or the 'chachacha' to 'rock and 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,

[69] C. Ally, 'Dansi ni Ngoma Duni, Wajuao Kufikiri', *Mambo Leo*, Apr. 1953.

[70] F. Nicholas, 'Tribal Dances as Opposed to Ballrooms Dances must be Maintained at All Costs', *Mambo Leo*, Mar. 1954. See also an article called '"Je, Ngoma za Kienyeji ni Ushenzi?" or "Are traditional dances barbaric?"' comparing Tanzanian 'traditional' dances with those from Nigeria and England, in *Baragumu,* 8 Mar. 1956.

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Nyang'umumi, Kiduo or Lelemama? … It is hard for any man to get much real excitement from dances and music which are not in his own blood.[71]

Here, Nyerere interpreted dance through the racial dichotomy that informed the logic of decolonization, implicitly juxtaposing a foreign culture, imposed from without, with a distinct and recoverable African heritage. Nyerere's interpretation of *dansi* was a political argument made in an attempt to articulate postcolonial national sovereignty and to convey his own cultural authenticity as Tanganyika's first black president. While Nyerere's speech did not acknowledge the ways in which *dansi* came to embody some of the various aspirations of urban Africans, it would be equally reductive to argue that dancehalls fostered the transcendence of difference and the creation of a shared national identity in the cities. Instead of defining a single conception of nationhood, 1950s dancehalls staged multiple and sometimes competing embodiments of, and rhetorical claims about community boundaries. Such claims, whether framed as a matter of respectability or authenticity, should be read in dialogue with the actions of dancers, who used movement to both entrench and disrupt prevailing ideas about respectable comportment and sexuality. Seen through the lens of *dansi,* 1950s racial nationalism appears less like a shared political commitment than a shared arena of experimentation and debate.

The interpretation of pleasure, leisure, and urban sexuality through the logic of race – a logic that came to dominate public discourses in the 1950s – continued to shape the politics of the postcolonial city, yet these ideas were transformed in new circumstances. If 1950s public debates about *dansi* were dominated by concerns for racial respectability and notions about advancement based on what were perceived to be universal criteria for progress, Nyerere's speech signals the increasing prominence of discourses of racial authenticity, based on the idea that one's perceived origins defined appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, politicians and activists cited African national identity as a rallying call to discipline urban youth, particularly women, by launching campaigns against what were perceived to be 'indecent' or foreign elements, using the rhetoric of a shared racial and national destiny as justification for policing urban leisure spaces and punishing what was defined as deviant behavior.[72] The frequent conflation of 'indecent' with 'foreign' in postcolonial political rhetoric is further suggestive of the ways in which concerns over comportment, sexuality, and movement of the body could animate nationalist thinking. Yet dance would continue to be an arena where young people, drawing creatively on material from home and abroad, used their bodies to perform, contest, and rework notions of gender, sexuality, and social prestige in the city, disrupting any attempts to articulate a singular model of national personhood.

[71] J. Nyerere, 'President's Inaugural Address', in *Freedom and Unity: a Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1952–65* (Dar es Salaam, 1966).

[72] For a study of the efforts of the TANU Youth League to enforce a dress code in Dar es Salaam, see Ivaska, *Cultured States*, 86–123.

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