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EDITOR’S NOTE

Belgrade Centre for Music and Dance (BCMD) is a founder and publisher of *Accelerando: Belgrade Journal of Music and Dance*. BCMD is founded to establish cooperation and communication between local artistic and scholarly scene and the world’s. In order to achieve that goal BCMD launched *Accelerando: Belgrade Journal of Music and Dance* as an open access, double-peer-reviewed online journal. This journal allows Serbian scholars, artists, and educators to have permanent scholarly communication and interchanging of knowledge and information with the world’s renown artists, scholars, schools and universities.

Since knowledge is fluid and dynamic in nature, and transmitted through discourse, it is important for those who have a stake in advancing the knowledge base to participate in the discourse. Writing, as a form of communication, and publishing are ways of participating in the discourse. Research article is the end product of an investigation that has focused on a specific set of research questions. Research must be carefully planned, conceptually grounded, and methodologically sound, and must provide answers or possible answers and implications for further investigations.

Accordingly, the effort of editorial board members and reviewers of *Accelerando: BJMD* is dedicated to help authors reach the goal and craft the articles in a way that successfully, effectively and persuasively communicates the importance of the study. Through this mutual effort, work, and cooperation we hope that our journal promote values, expanding the base of knowledge and contribute to the discourse.

*With best regards,*

*Maja Marijan, Editor in Chief*
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Received: April 18, 2016.
Reviewed: June 1, 2016.
Accepted: June 30, 2016.


Abstract

Obesity is a growing health issue in South Africa that carries health risk detrimental to those living in Black townships. The author will argue that the use of South African traditional urban dances may be permissible option for replacing aerobics to help prevent and combat obesity. Christian missionaries, colonizers, Western education, urbanization, and apartheid have had negative impacts on South African traditional rural dances; however, South Africans who migrated to urban environments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries transformed traditions under spatial and ideological constraints and created new South African traditional urban social dances. South African traditional urban social dances were created in urban environments, in slum yards and townships, and do not reach the same level of sacred ritual that South African traditional rural social dances do; thus, their use in Black townships to help fight obesity is a possibility that must be further researched. The use of South African traditional urban social dances may not only help prevent and reduce obesity, but also help build community, teach history, facilitate self-exploration in a holistic manner, and open doors for the youth of today to continue to transform traditional urban social dances to reflect the current realities they are experiencing in Black townships.

Keywords: South African social dance, obesity, urbanization, transformation
Introduction

In the past few decades, South Africa has witnessed an increase in obesity (Goedecke et al. 2006). It occurred from young to old, female to male, black to white and urban to rural—no group of people has been exempt from this phenomenon. Trends cannot be pinpointed to any single cause, although the effects of this health condition are serious and diverse. Research indicates that obesity is preventable, with several ways to combat and reduce its development. One of the most effective ways to reduce the onset of obesity is through regular exercises. One suggested activity for black South Africans is to participate in dance, particularly traditional, black South African social dances, which could be offered to the public in a studio setting or community halls as an aerobic activity geared to fighting and diminishing obesity.

This paper begins with an exploration of what ‘traditional, black South African social dance’ actually is, and whether its very nature precludes it from use as aerobics exercises. The author then proceed to de-problematise South African traditional dance in a South African context by differentiating between ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ black South African dance forms, the position of dance in each context and questioning the use of either in an exercise regime. Lastly, he examines obesity-related health disorders in urban areas and offer solutions and interventions in this regard.

The question of whether South African social traditional dances should be used as aerobics by black South Africans is a complicated one that elicits many emotional responses. Welsh-Asante explains social traditional dance in a manner we can all understand. She states: "Social traditional dances generally explicitly imply a consistency that has its own boundaries and parameters. Implied in the definition of social tradition are the requisite confines of the rules and norms of that society that the art form manifests" (Welsh-Asante 1996, 178). Many ‘purist’ or should one say conservative people—believe strongly that the use of traditional, black, South African social dance as aerobics would be disrespectful and demeaning and would negate the significance of these dances which represent different cultures. Purist society feels threatened because the trivialization of dance is happening "again": first it was for the purpose of "entertainment on a Western stage" and now for the reason of "fitness".

The author uses the word *culture* in a sense of "inhabit, cultivate, protect, and honor with worship" (Williams 1983, 87). The word is one of the most complicated in the English language. "This is so partly because of its intricate historical development in several European languages, but
mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thoughts" (Ibid.).

Another viewpoint is that limiting the use of traditional, black, South African social dance would separate it from the people and restrict its growth. Thus, within the dance community at least the issues of authenticity, preservation and trivialization are still relevant and it remains imperative to consider all sides of the debate before exploring the possibility of using traditional social dances in the domain of aerobics. Purists argue that there is more to traditional dance than exercise. Discussions on traditional South African social dance occur within a framework where the concept of African-ness is still being evaluated. In the present, post- and neo-colonial era, negotiations of African cultural identities are often informed by the summoning of the pre-colonial past. Bhavnani and Phoenix explain identity: "any individual can identify themselves on a myriad of levels: in a personal sense, a social sense, on an ethnic, cultural, spiritual or religious basis and by way of their moral values. As a consequence, identities can be seen as flexible or even conflicting" (1994).

Many South African government agencies have made great efforts in forging a national cultural revival. This "revival" of traditional dance forms is taken quite seriously as conducive to the process of psychological decolonization, for example the institution of "Heritage Day" annually celebrated on 24 September. It is a moot point that the historical contextualization of traditional, black, South African social dance usually serves the intentional or unintentional politicization of the art form today. This is to be explained in the following sections of the paper.

Obesity has already been identified as a problem that can be solved by promoting a healthier lifestyle, including proper diet and exercise such as dance. The latter poses another major concern regarding the possible trivialization of a culture that has suffered the indignity of subjugation and disrespect under colonial rule. However, the fact that traditional South African social dance forms have a history of functionality arguably bears upon the implications of limiting its use in a present urban context. This research will examine the possible causes and health risks of obesity within a South African context with an emphasis on Black townships. This research will analyze why the use of South African traditional urban social dances to help combat obesity may be permissible, why the use of dance may matter, and how they may provide a benefit to people living in Black townships.
Setting the stage or the ‘gym’: African dance (history)

Scholars have grappled with the notion of a "primitive" aspect to South African life as perceived in our social traditional dance discipline for the greater part of the 20th century. It has become increasingly important to understand what ‘traditional, black, South African social dance’ means in an age of global modernity where cultures, traditions, art forms, values and information are constantly exchanged through the media and other lines of communication across the world. First theories in the discourse were created with the scholarship of European and Euro-American historians in contact with what they termed the "primitive dance[s]" of pre-colonial 'Africans' (Castaldi 2006, 35). According to Hanna, in Africa’s New Traditional Dance "primitive" was based on fear of the unknown by Westerners under the dictatorship of a Eurocentric mind-set that saw African dance as uninhibited, sexual and therefore vulgar.

The author places 'Africans' in inverted commas because the term 'African' denoting an individual living on the continent known today, as Africa is a construct Europeans applied that to black people on the continent. There are different scholarly discourses around the use of the term 'African'. Although there is the notion of Sub-Saharan Africa, the author is in favour of utilizing 'African', because of the popularity of the word and its ancient usage. According to Fanon, "The Sub-Saharan is rooted in racism, which in part assumes that a little sand is an obstacle for African people. This barrier of sand hence confines the notion of some invisible border which divides the North of Africa from the South. This barrier of sand hence confines/confined Africans to the bottom of this make-believe location, which exists neither politically or physically" (Fanon 2005, 29). Owen Alik Shahadah agrees with Fanon by saying that Sub-Saharan Africa is the term used to describe those countries of the African continent that are not considered part of North Africa. In 19th century Europe and the Western World, the area was sometimes referred to as "Black Africa". "Africa as a whole was commonly known as 'the dark continent' a term that was usually intended to refer to the Sub-Saharan region” (Brijnath 2007, 371). This was partly due to the skin colour of its inhabitants and partly because much of it had not been fully explored or mapped by Westerners. According to these scholars these terms are now obsolete and often considered to be pejorative.

In the eyes of many predominantly white anthropologists and ethnologists theorizing on South African traditional social dance during the colonial era, "the ability to dance [became] a kind of litmus test about a people’s revolutionary development" (Castaldi 2006, 35). According to the writings of these ‘analysts’ and the testimonies of missionaries and colonial officers, "dance
establishes the animality of the primitive because dance itself is interpreted as an instinctual reaction, springing from the body and by-passing the mind" (Ibid.). In Curt Sachs’ *World History of the Dance* (1937), the "mastery" of "pygmoid San men" in the field of dance not only justified their conquering by the white man; their entrancement is the cause of their inability to defend themselves and a testament to their low evolutionary status" (Castaldi 2006, 39). Clearly early South African traditional dance theories were entrenched in a white, colonial paradigm that claimed the superiority of Western culture and intelligence over the savage, primordial 'African' and reducing dance to mere "motor reflex… uncontrollable hopping and hand gestures" (Ibid.).

Interestingly, if most people perceive South African traditional dance as a collection of random muscular movements requiring no prior thought or astuteness, it is quite obvious that its use as aerobics exercise is acceptable. According to the *Oxford Dictionary* aerobics is defined as a method of "physical exercise for producing beneficial changes in the respiratory and circulatory system by activities which require only a modest increase in oxygen intake and so can be maintained" (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Accessed February 8. 2011). However, this biased perspective changed with the increased awareness that South African social traditional dance is more than ‘primitive dance’ as defined by the colonials and the realization that the multitude of dance styles from ethnic groups and countries across the continent comprise particular disciplines. Ethnicity refers to a collection or nation of people who are more than a mere collective group but an aggregate consciously related by common origins and shared experiences. Incorporated into a group’s ethnicity is a distinct language, religious beliefs and political institutions which are passed down to following generations (Cashmore 1984).

In addition, according to Jackson and Cothran (2003), Pearl Primus in *Africa traditional dance: An Artistic, Historical and Philosophical Inquiry* (1963) explains on the same breath that Dance in Africa is not a separate art, but a part of the whole complex of living, and dance is only a part of the whole ceremony and is filled with supernatural powers. That means that South African traditional social dance is not merely a collection of physical movements, but life expressed in dramatic terms. Opuku (1967, 11-34) and Owusu-Frempong (2005) explain such claims on a deeper context. The dance is not simply a fictional performance removed from the audience as one would find in Western theatrical convention, but it is a living, breathing expression of social communication and ritualistic ceremony.

In many African cultures, dance is seen as a gift from ancestors. Dance scholar Robert Thompson writes that South African traditional dance—and art—can be defined as "social acts of
filiations, extending human consciousness into the past and the time of the founding fathers. It is essentially a timeless tradition, shaping ultimate values" (Thompson 1974, 28). Jackson and Cothran (2003) comment on the same context that traditional dance is about shaping the ultimate values and thus dance—or history—should be treated with the utmost respect. There is an element of formalized religion in South African traditional social dance that commands reverence and the understanding that, as one participates in or engages with different forms of dance, one is involved with a greater "dynamic", "harmonious" and even supernatural form of ritualistic social interaction (Primus 1963, 5). The latest interpretation of Jackson and Cothran (2003) is that there is a form of spirituality that takes place and dynamics that go with required co-ordination. In the poetry of Primus’ writing she describes the spirituality of Africa traditional dance as follows: "The dance is strong magic. The dance is spirit. It turns the body to liquid steel. It makes it vibrate like a guitar. The body can fly without wings. It can sing without voice and dance is strong magic and life" (Primus 1963, 5). Apter (2002, 242) explains similarly (but within a Haitian aspect) that African dance is harmonious, graceful and it embraces the spiritual being.

South African traditional social dance is also deeply representative, with many dances choreographed with the specific intent of communicating a particular idea or depicting an element of social or religious life. In his essay African traditional dance: Bridges to humanity (2004), Tracy D. Snipe states that although "South African traditional dance may be entertaining, it functions primarily as a cultural and artistic expression of the community; in Africa the notion of art for the sake of art is a foreign concept" (2004, 63). Each movement of the dance is not simply say a rotation of the limbs, but becomes a symbolic representation or mimicry of customary activity. Doris Green gives a descriptive example of how dances are inspired by daily existence as in the fishermen’s dance, the "Rawar Masunta" from the Birnin Kebbi of the Sokoto State of Nigeria. Fishing and farming are the primary means of making a living in this area and thus many of their dances concern fishing and farming. Green notes:

In the fishermen's dance 'Rawar Masuta', women who claim descendancy from fishing families perform this dance. The women hold cloth in their hands; this cloth represents the fishing net, which is cast into the water. In order to cast the net successfully, a certain stance is developed which is the stance used in the dance. The body is carried in a forward high position and the hands imitate the collecting of fish. The hands are thrust into the water, forward low position of the arms, and slow drawn to the waist, trapping the fish between the hands and body as they are gathered. (Green 2004, 17).
The author has thus far established that South African traditional dance carries important ritualistic and communicative significance, which completely negates its purpose when lost or ignored. It is also important to understand that the way in which South African traditional dances are practiced is integral to the communication of their meaning. This includes the setting, costumes, music and language. Primus asserts that one "cannot really speak of African traditional dance without at least a few words about costume, because it show cases the aesthetic part of dance, it show cases the timbre and add to the feel of the movement" (Primus 1963, 8-9). Additionally, Apter (2002, 234) and Owusu-Frempong (2005, 87) explain that music and language are also integral to the performance of South African traditional dance. Green posits that "African traditional dance is not like any other form of dance. Its relationship to music, thereby language, is what chiefly distinguishes it from any other art form" (Green 2004: 18).

It would be difficult, and far beyond the requirements of an exercise regimen, to translate this all-encompassing notion of dance performance into an aerobics context. Obviously the very nature of South African traditional dances require they occur within specific contexts, with specific purposes conveying specific meanings, with specific accoutrements utilized to ensure that the practice is as precise as possible. Some dances are so sacred that only certain members of ethnic groups who created the dances have witnessed them, particularly the ritualistic ones. Thus, one can hardly expect these to translate into a gym context. To remove essential meaning from the movement one would reduce millennium-long traditions of art, development and social behavior to a mere flexing of muscles. Without the music, the correct language, the proper costume and setting and, most importantly, the ritualistic and symbolic significance at the forefront of the performance of South African traditional dance it ceases to be the very thing it purports to be.

**Transformation of urbanized dance and township**

The author has not yet examined the complexities of urban and rural South Africa social traditional dance. The next part of this paper will explore specifically the significance of dance in urban ‘black’ South Africa. Much of the previous discussion still stands when one speaks of the significance of traditional social dance in most of the rural areas in South Africa. Emphasis of the significance and deeply-rooted social, religious and cultural implications of dance performance is a feature of traditional dance in the rural areas of South Africa as well as most other cultures across the
continent. Rural areas, also referred to as ‘the country’ or ‘the country side,’ are sparsely settled places away from the influence of large cities. According to Blakely (1984), major features previously used to define rural include simple life, agriculture, smallness, homogeneity, and dullness. Such areas may be distinguished from more intensively settled urban and suburban areas, and unsettled lands such as the outback or wilderness. People in rural areas live in towns, villages, on farms and in other isolated areas. The rural can also be determined by population density; rural areas have an agricultural character, remote communities, and limited or absent public transport, usually requiring people to use their own cars, but if this is impractical they may walk, cycle, or ride a horse or a donkey.

It is important not to fall into the trap of believing that traditional social dances have been in a state of inertia since some romanticized, primitive age of antiquity. Instead, as Sarah Rubidge states, "The forms of expression through which cultural mores and perspectives are articulated are fluid and not static; social traditional dances are always developing" (Rubidge 1998, 3). The significance of South African social traditional dance in urban areas is of course no less important than in the rural areas. However, dance does inhabit a different space in the progression of quotidian existence due (largely) to the interactions of different cultures and the residual political, socio-economic and psychological effects of colonialism. South Africa is "the most urbanized and industrialized state of the continent and…has had the most consistent governmental control of its development" (Bloom 1964, 347). Pick and Cooper (1997, 27) explain by mentioning the fact that since the discovery of gold in South Africa in 1872 and 1886, its townships.

The allure of a better lifestyle is often romanticized, as living conditions are very poor: migrant workers have been forced into exemplified horrible living conditions and so-called 'housing' frequently consists of structures improvised from old pieces of iron, sacking, wooden poles, mud, and anything else that comes to hand. They have been host to scores of migrant workers not only from the hinterland of the country, but from as far as the Congo, in search of work in the city. During the last decades of the 20th century, ‘black’ South Africans have been drawn to urban areas, commonly referred to as townships, by the promise of higher general standards of education, better housing and employment opportunities, the possibility of piped water and decent sanitation services, and food subsidies (Louw 2004, 110). Urbanisation in a South African context is seen as the movement of people from rural to so-called ‘developed’ cities. The rapid expansion of this process in the 19th century was due to the development of the mining industry, railways and national economy.
The apartheid government followed the trend of many colonial governments in attempting to "contain and retard urbanization for ideological and political reasons" (Bloom 1964, 347). Apartheid was a social and political policy of racial segregation and discrimination enforced by a white minority government in South Africa from 1948 until 1994. The term derives from the Afrikaans word denoting 'apartness'. Bear in mind that not all white South Africans supported the apartheid government. The stability of the apartheid regime relied on the ability of the government to restrict the formation of a substantial ‘urban proletarian’, but despite "intensive pressure, urbanization has spread consistently in extent and influence" (Bloom 1964, 348).

The result of this urbanization has been the increasing presence of extremely diverse populations from across the country and in the townships this multicultural explosion has led to the creation of ‘urban dance culture’ unique to the landscape of urban South Africa. The dynamic interactions of these different cultures have given rise to many dances synonymous with contemporary South African culture, such as the Gumboot dance, the Pantsula and neo-traditional dances that include many movements that come from the domestication of other ethnic groups.

Another offshoot of multicultural exchange in a South African urban context is the melding of foreign musical conventions and instruments with South African traditional dances, such as the use of the djembe, a multi-tonal drum from Mali/Senegal, in dances that are supposed to use traditional drums of particular ethnic groups. Likewise, the original meaning and precision of (rural) dances are altered when re-performed with specific purposes in mind, such as say political protest. This is largely due to changes in lifestyle and the complex interaction and subjugation of cultures that makes up modernity. The changing of seasons or the rotation of crops no longer marks the rhythms of life; instead they are marked by the arrival of a monthly paycheck or the hooting horns of the commuter omnibus each morning.

The subject matter of dance has transformed with the context and thus the nature and significance of dance in daily life must adapt accordingly. One must also consider that with an increasing black, urban middle class embracing the social constructs of colonialism, the reception of social traditional dance is altered. "If the cause of urbanization was need for expansion, growth, and production, the end result was the destruction, reconstruction, and adaptation of social traditions" (Crenshaw 1991, 45). In comparison to the Ugandan matter Rubidge’s article verifies that many upper middle class, urban, black Africans have had "little exposure to their indigenous cultural practices which [have been] gradually abandoned in favour of the culture and arts of the colonizers" (Rubidge 1998, 2). In addition, dance can be seen as the medium to re-appropriate one’s culture.
Contoured along the lines of class, personal sensitivities and cultural associations the concept of urban black South African traditional social dance is a complex one. Arguably, it would be more realistic to utilize urban dance styles to create exercise programmes for those living in the inner city and surrounding townships and who suffer from obesity. Pantsula, gumboot and kwaiito dances can easily expand studio weight losing programmes: they suit urban society and derive from township urban settlement. Furthermore, despite their formation within a historical context of rich cultural exchange, many urban dances do not have the same level of sacredness and exclusivity that inform traditional rural dances. They are in many ways more accessible, because they often present mixtures or hybrid forms of traditional rural dance transformed through interaction with other cultures via personal exchange or the media.

Why dance matters

The World Health Organization defines obesity as a body mass index (BMI) of more than 30 kg/m2, and has recently identified it as chronic disease (Goedecke et al. 2006; Van der Merwe and Pepper 2006). Increased body fat mass—a characteristic of obesity—leads to changes in metabolic functions that lead to diseases such as hypertension and type 2 diabetes (Van der Merwe and Pepper 2006). Affecting over 1.3 billion worldwide, obesity has for a long time been associated with wealthy, developed countries such as the United States of America, Great Britain and European countries. However, "obesity is becoming more and more of an issue in developing nations, including South Africa" (Goedecke et al. 2006). Obesity leads to ankle, knee and hip replacements due to increased weight pressure. More than 29% of men and 56% of women in South Africa are classified as suffering from the condition. Out of these, the group at most risk is black women: 58.5% of black South African women above the age of fifteen are considered obese.

There is a growing concern that young people, especially girls and young women, are also at risk: "10% of young South African women aged 15-24 are considered to be obese, and some studies suggest that in the near future, the rate for 18 year olds will be as high as 37%" (Goedecke et al. 2006). In addition to hypertension and type 2 diabetes, "Obesity can lead to osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, coronary heart disease, psychological problems and even some form of cancer" (ibid.). Attendant psychological issues may seem obvious, such as body image issues in individuals — "specifically women, who had been overweight in their youth, have lower incomes and a higher
household poverty rate as adults than their peers who were a ‘normal’ weight as adolescents" (ibid.). However, body image issues may not prove overly burdensome for overweight black South African women, since the connotation of a larger body type is much more positive among black South Africans than among whites of the same nationality. According to Goedecke et al. (2006), an overweight body type "symbolises[es] happiness, beauty, affluence, health and a negative HIV/AIDS status" as the disease’s victims often suffer significant progressive weight loss. An obese individual’s attempt to diet with a view to attaining healthy body weight could perhaps, they fear, be interpreted as the onset of AIDS.

Furthermore, ‘South Africa’s black population was misinformed for decades with the notion of ‘benign’ or ‘healthy’ obesity ‘(Van der Merwe and Pepper 2006, 316). There are many diseases to which obesity can lead, such as "dislipidaemia and ischaemic heart disease (IHD) that affect the black population at a drastically lower rate than other ethnic groups" (ibid.). By extension, it was assumed that obesity had few to no adverse circumstances for blacks, and therefore need no concern. However, "studies within the past ten years make it clear that obesity among black people still leads to hypertension, diabetes and glucose intolerance, and that further, IHD is on the rise among black urban dwellers" (317).

Yet, when considering obesity, the distinction between rural and urban black South Africans is an important one. Urban-dwelling individuals, in particular women, have significantly high BMI’s and therefore higher rates of obesity than those who live in rural areas. With the shift from a rural to an urban setting come changes in diet, physical activity levels and types of leisure activities. "The higher fat content and lower carbohydrates and fiber level of a Westernized urban diet are much more conducive to the development of obesity than a more traditional rural diet" (Goedecke et al. 2006, 56). In addition, "the stress of urbanization could also be a factor in the development of chronic disease such as obesity" (De Ridder Underhay et al. 2005). It is therefore reasonable to state that rural and urban social set ups, have different contexts that create different needs.

The above-mentioned diseases are treatable, but medication is not easy to come by, and certainly not inexpensive. It is important to acknowledge that ‘healthy’ food is more expensive than greasy food that is detrimental to one’s physical wellbeing, and that small-scale agriculture is limited due to space in the city. "There is a shortage of healthy, low-fat food and fresh fruit and vegetables in the townships. The majority of the local shops sell cheap fatty foods; street vendors’ stalls sell fatty meat and sausages." This is the response from one of the interviewees from Khayelitsha in Cape town to an inquiry conducted by Kruger as Obesity in South Africa: challenges
for government and health professionals (Kruger et al. 2005). Thus it may be helpful to find ways of making nutritious and filling food available to the majority of the population who may not be able to afford it. This verifies the fact that healthy food is scarce (local shops do not stock it) and the majority of the people are not accustomed to ‘popular township cuisine’, mostly uninformed of the dangers around fatty and junk food. Notwithstanding the facts that available healthy food might be viewed as foreign and the shops not profit as expected, it seems imperative that education drives about township dwellers’ food life style be initiated.

**The benefits of dance**

Unless our natural responses are deadened by a restricted upbringing or some other circumstance, we would all like to dance in some way. We all move differently when happy or elated, and we all celebrate social events with music and dance. Even the smallest children, before they can walk properly, bounce and sway to music. Dance exercises the whole being and it helps one to feel comfortable in and with one’s body: to be aware of it, even to ‘be friends’ with it as one was during childhood. More than this, dance develops inner discipline, sensitivity to others, and awareness of one’s own feelings — all valuable strengths in negotiating daily life. Best of all, "as a way of executing exercises it is fun — it involves a release of energy which allows you to dance just for the joy of living" (Schrader 2005, 10).

To start with, one will gain physical strength from doing dance exercises regularly, but it will be strength in keeping with your own body proportion. Robert Cohan explains: "You should not develop large thigh or big arm muscles from dance work, but rather strengthen your whole body the way it is" (Cohan 1986, 12). This doesn’t mean one won’t change the physical shape: one certainly can change his/her shape radically through dance exercises, but one will have to do the workout every day. Even if you only "work three times a week, however, you should soon begin to notice an improvement in your physical stamina" (Ibid.). Most of the people lead lives that are too sedentary for their own good health. The human body is designed to move, and if forced to stay in one position over a long period the need to move or to stretch becomes overwhelming. It matches the need we have for water, food and breath. A great part of the circulatory system of the body is achieved by muscular movement: "The contraction of the muscles helps pump the blood back to the heart, as well as moving the lymph around our bodies" (Ibid.). At the end of a dance workout, while
you may be tired physically, you will at the same time feel much brighter, lighter and clearer, think more lucidly, be calmer and feel more focused than before. Cohan adds up by saying that "The type of workout that dances give you is arguably better for most people than aerobics or jogging" (*Ibid.*).

It is nowadays clear that, for some people, jogging puts too much sudden stress on the heart, while aerobics, for all its good points, results in excessive wear and tear on some of the leg tendons and joints. Cohan agrees that:

*Dance exercises will build slowly through the class, so that you will not wear one part of yourself first and the kinds of movement that are involved in dance are those that build muscular stamina, while strengthening the heart and lungs slowly and carefully.* (Cohan 1986, 12)

A dance workout will give one an opportunity to work on themselves in very specific ways. Concentrating on particular movements and *muscular coordination*, you finally accomplish them and the sense of achievement will give one enormous satisfaction. As one stay with the training, the effects will show ones daily life. One will be more *aware of himself/herself*, walk with *more grace* and stand with *more poise*. When a person start using and interpreting the dance movements as a means of self-expression, more dramatic changes will occur, for one will become more aware of other people's feelings and how to communicate them. Cohan explains it by saying that "regular dancing will put you in touch with yourself — with your body, your emotions, and your powers of concentration, memory and logic" (*Ibid.*, 14). Basically, you will rediscover your body and analyze its working, figure out why it's not working well enough, and how one can change bad physical habits or habitual ways of moving.

A person may want to strengthen and stretch him or herself, change the way the body feels to them, and make it more responsive and sensitive to their demands. As one tries to improve his/her bodies movements, one will collide head-on with their fitness which at this stage will be determined by the tonality of the body which, in turn, will reveal how much one have lost in terms of fat. A person will at all times have to remember all that they do, and why. Dance movement cannot be done with only a part of your attention, because everything eventually depends on how individually do it. Dance offers an enormous variety of cardio elements such as loss of water through perspiration and balancing the immune system through repeated exercise regimens. A person will find him or herself with a light body mass, loss of unnecessary fat, sufficient breath,
self-confidence and physical and mental centeredness. In addition, one will improve their understanding of their own emotions and psychological abilities.

**Conclusion**

The question of whether African traditional social dance should serve as aerobics in community centers for urban South Africans who suffer from obesity, the conclusion is clear: certain dances should not be used. Dances that are sacred and designated to specific ethnic groups and purposes should not be tampered with. The author's initial gut-feel is the same as that of many people he interviewed: a resounding ‘No!’ When the author asked some of the women in Zolani Community Centre in Nyanga about this idea, they approved it happily, and offered the following explanation: "We don’t fit in when we go to ‘white’ gyms: they are expensive and we have to drive or take a taxi. We don’t feel comfortable there because most of the women who attend these ‘white’ gyms are skinny already". (The name Nyanga originated from the Xhosa word nyanga, which means the ‘moon’. Not only does Nyanga have a specific meaning in the Xhosa language, but it is also the name for the second largest township, or black urbanised area, in the Western Cape province of South Africa. It was established in the 1960s after Langa – langa is the isi-Xhosa word for ‘sun’-- the oldest black urbanised area. Nyanga was established, in part, due to the migrant labour system.)

These opinions were confirmed by female members who are active in cultural societies of the township such as Zolani Community Centre. However, since a major characteristic of African art is its utility within society, it would seem pretentious and repressive to divorce South African traditional social dance from the needs of the people. Still, one must take into account the history of oppression and subjugation that African culture as a whole has been subjected to. Within this framework, one must maintain a sensitivity towards the ease with which survives in the modified version of Western discourse. The adaptation of traditional social dances in urban areas requires much thought and analysis. A delicate balance must be achieved in allowing the dance to develop and change in accordance with the people’s (changing) needs while securing an acceptable union of utility and form.

It is the author's view that the suggested conversion of South African traditional social dances into aerobics exercises should present a totally new reflection of contemporary life, while borrowing from the modern vocabulary of urban tradition as for instance found in resistance forms.
Reflecting a South African national identity formed and reformed within one’s own culture — and there is only one way to do that and that is through dance — could foster an altogether healthier lifestyle among South Africa’s urban population, while promoting a sense of national pride. One cannot deny the inevitable loss of certain cultural values through the increasingly global exchange of art and ideas. As Rubidge states, one must find a way to mediate between "the desire to retain the integrity of indigenous cultural traditions and the desire to address, through dance, the intricacies of the contradictions embedded in a post-colonial (modern) identity" (Rubidge 1998, 3).

In South Africa the fusion of different cultures and ideas is exciting in the midst of diversity and the embracement of multiculturalism where different ethnic identities share common geographical space as in urban settlements. The author believes that to equate South African urban dances in a form of exercises that promote weight loss is a brilliant idea, because it will aid the current national obesity dilemma. Considering the sensitivity of rural African traditional dance functions, it seems evidently safer and more convenient to use South African urban dances to this effect: they depict attractive African qualities within a modern urban context and their functional codification will provide a living testimony to national health with a touch of Afrocentrism. To apply such aid to the obese community we will be saving lives and helping to create a healthier environment.

References


