

Capturing ‘The African’ Body? Visual Images and ‘Imaginative Sports’

by John Bale

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KEELE UNIVERSITY, U.K.

Introduction

It has been noted by the Australian sports historian Richard Cashman that histories of sport “have been slow to make use of visual sources.” Photographs, cartoons and drawings, he argues, “have been used to enhance and add to written monographs [rather than] as source[s] in their own right.”¹ All too often, it appears, photographs are included in sports history texts almost gratuitously, apparently bearing no relation to the written word and bundled together at the center of a book for what seems to be purposes of light relief. Yet photographs can act as a source of historical information about sports. Clues about the nature of the sports milieu, sports clothing, and even social class can be found in photographic images.

There can be no doubting the place of the photograph in the history of sport. Its significance in communicating images of sports events was part of the broader explosion in sports publishing during the early years of this century. Photography has also been important in certain technical aspects of sports. That the pioneering “technical” photography by Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne Marey did much to aid the analysis of sports technique is well recorded.² Certainly the invention of the photo-finish camera aided the judgment of officials in sports such as track and field, swimming, cycling, and horse racing.³ It remains the case, however, that the main method of analysis in the academic use of photographs in sports history is through the application of content analysis. This often involves the use of quantitative analyses of the characteristics of photographs over time. I suggest that there is considerable room for the development of other forms of visual analysis based around ideas from cultural studies that are founded on the notion of representation.

In anthropology, literary studies, and geography, it has been recognized that there is a “crisis of representation,” suggesting that both the written word and the photograph should be read as ambiguous “texts” rather than as accurate records

of "the truth."⁴ In other words, there is always a gap between reality and its representation. A photograph is a highly mediated representation; it is pointed at a particular space and framed by its cropped edges. It is inevitably a partial record, sometimes produced with explicit motives in mind. Alternatively, the subconscious intentions of the photographer can be interpreted by careful readings of the photographic image. Hence, a photograph or other form of visual representation may serve to not only *denote* a sports event or an individual athlete; it may also possess many *connotations*.

Photography resonates strongly with history. It has been observed that "cameras are boxes for transporting appearances."⁵ The photograph is a means of communication that transports an image from one time period to another. Photography fitted perfectly into the ethos of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century travelers, who journeyed to the world's remaining *terrae incognitae*. The instant record provided by the "truth-telling eye of the camera" seemed to be the ideal medium for recording the life styles of peoples who would shortly disappear forever.⁶ Painting, prints, and, of course, writing had long provided European armchair travelers with images of Africa and "the African." Indeed, some of these paintings of distant lands were "held to be dauntingly objective and scientific," as in the case of the work of the French orientalist painter Jean-Leon Gérôme.⁷ Yet paintings were obviously hand-crafted images. Photographs, on the other hand, belied the status of paintings as representations of the world "and seemed instead to be truthful, uninflected restatements of that world."⁸ The photograph, along with a number of other panoptical Victorian innovations, involved collection, display and discipline, from which "objectively sound 'factual knowledge' could be obtained." Photographs could be used as a summary of a culture and as a source for categorization and classification. But the apparent authority of the photographs brought back from Africa and published in the commercial world of travel writing was not without contradiction and ambiguity. Today such photographs exemplify various "ways of seeing" the world and its peoples. As John Berger noted, "The way we see things is affected by what we know and believe." For example, the European gaze that fell upon the Masaai of Kenya in the nineteenth century meant something different from what it might mean today.

This essay is rooted in the multidisciplinary field of postcolonial studies, drawing in large part on the work of Edward Said and his canonical *Orientalism*.⁹ Said all but ignored the visual arts, but there seems little doubt that photographs played a major part in the construction of those "imaginative geographies" in which distant facts were often transformed into western fictions. As Linda Nochlin has stressed, the photograph "is hardly immune from the blandishments of orientalism"¹⁰ and the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the increasingly popular recording of Africa and "the African" by means of the camera and cinematography. Within Said's "imaginative geographies" can be found "imaginative sport," one of which forms the main subject of this paper. My specific aim is the exploration of some visual representations of one body cultural practice of the Tutsi of Rwanda during the first half of the present century.

Tutsi *Gusimbuka Urukiramende*

European and North American travelers who visited Rwanda during the first half of the twentieth century often obtained a photographic record of *gusimbuka urukiramende*. For convenience I have abbreviated this to *gusimbuka* throughout this essay. This was usually translated into English as “high jumping” and was practiced by an elite corps of boys and young men (*intore*) who were recruited to the court of the *mwami* (king). Together with spear throwing and dancing, *gusimbuka* was also provided as a kind of entertainment for the *mwami* and other chiefs on various festivals and other special occasions throughout the year.

The final decade of the nineteenth century witnessed the production of the first photographic records of Rwanda and Burundi. Between the late 1890s and the early 1950s, travel photography that recorded these two small kingdoms placed considerable emphasis on the corporeality (physical or bodily qualities) of the ruling Tutsi. As with written texts, photographic representations of the physicality and athleticism of the Tutsi were presented as “different” but also as something that could be readily domesticated and turned into western forms of athletic sport via such rhetorical modes as appropriation and surveillance. Alongside these, the tropes of idealization and naturalization can also be clearly seen.¹¹ At this time, the internal politics of Rwanda were characterized by Hutu-Tutsi tensions and a rapidly growing “Tutsification” of the country. There was an increasing class rigidity that, sometimes quite arbitrarily, designated people as “Hutu” or “Tutsi.” Various “invented traditions” emerged to bolster the power of the minority Tutsi that also served to racialize the economic and social differences between them. What Liisa Malkki calls “mythico-histories” proclaimed the Tutsi as innately superior, in both intellectual and corporeal terms.¹²

A recurring theme in the colonial representation of “Africa” and “the African” has been its ambivalence and contradiction. Such instability in Africanist representation is reflected in the images of the idle native on the one hand and of the noble savage on the other. In terms of visual records of “African corporeality,” the representation of the Tutsi can be used to illustrate not only the variety and the instability of the images being represented but also the different “ways of seeing” the apparently innocent image of a man jumping over a rope or bar. In many photographs of *gusimbuka*, it seems that the object was to record, as unambiguously as possible, an indigenous African form of body culture. Such a view reflected a realist tradition. In other photographs, however, the presence of a European not only deflected attention from the African but also raised questions about authenticity. When captured by “scientific” modes of representation, such as diagrams, the Tutsi *gusimbuka* can be interpreted in other ways.

I argue that there are three primary modes of analyzing *gusimbuka* representation. It is implied in the writings of many travelers that the aim of their visits, armed with a camera, was to record the “real” Africa. After all, given the shortcomings of linguistic representation, what better way to achieve mimesis than by capturing it visually—the European would see the event just as the explorer saw it in Africa.¹³ As Birnbaum put it, his photograph provided “proof” of the Tutsi’s high jumping skills.¹⁴ If T. Alexander Barns was in any way representative,



Figure 1. (Source: Roome, *Tramping through Africa*)

the objective of the travel writer and photographer who explored Africa in the 1920s was "to place before his public the beauties of this African Wonderland which still lie hidden from so many."¹⁵ The American explorer Attilio Gatti sought "the routing of disbelief, for the conquest of new bits of information, for triumph over age-long mysteries."¹⁶ In seeking to reproduce an accurate image of the more mysterious and "remote" parts of the world, the photographer would, through the traditions of realism, strive "to preserve the purity of the cultural other that he represents."¹⁷ In such representations

there was no room for connotations.¹⁸

Most—but by no means all—of the Tutsi high jump photographs that I have seen excluded any obvious evidence of a European presence. In most, Europeans were hidden from the camera. Such photographs stressed the orderliness of the high jump occasion, as in the scene shown in Figure 1, which was initially published in a book by William Roome in 1930.¹⁹ This rather naturalistic view may be worthy of comment because *gusimbuka* was generally associated with the courtly exhibitions of the king's pages, the *intore*. The representation of the Tutsi high jumper, as captured in Figure 1, can be read at several levels. It certainly *denotes* an African clearing a bar more than 7 feet above the ground. But what does it *connote*? There is no one meaning. The fact that a European *took* or *shot* a photograph symbolizes a power relationship, and, certainly, the objects of the camera's gaze can be substituted for the objects of a Foucauldian "discipline."²⁰ Based on the work of Michel Foucault, this is summarized succinctly by Simon Ryan, who notes that a "dissociation of the see/being seen dyad . . . represents the visual desire of the explorer to reduce the threatening complexity of interactive observation by distancing the observer from the observed, and to construct observing moments as a 'small theatre' and the indigene as an 'object of information,' never a subject of communication."²¹ The camera's disciplinary power can capture the observed objects without the source of the gaze being seen, a modern analogue of Foucault's "panopticon."²² But although the "scene" in the



Figure 2. (Source: Gatti, *South of the Sahara*)

“theatrical space” could be read in different ways, in this case it also seems to be photographing an example of “discipline.” By appearing somewhat distant from an aristocratic spectacle, such images may be trying to represent a “natural” body in a more “natural” landscape and imply a more widespread practice of *gusimbuka* than may have, in fact, been the case. Here we see man and nature as one, an aesthetic that creates a sense of innocence. The image’s meaning is highly ambiguous, and there are many acceptable meanings that could be taken from it. Is it an image of an African corporeal triumph or of a European visual trophy—or both?

Figure 2, however, is a low angle shot with the athlete’s body seen against the sky, which has enabled the photographer to place an emphasis on height, power

and achievement. The verticality of the performance is emphasized, and the dress of the page boy on the left connotes an aristocratic ambience. Such contrasting views demonstrate the flexibility of colonial representation in its ability to show the high jump as both an idealized form of innocent, childlike playfulness and as an African athletic spectacle.

To what extent could the events photographed have been choreographed by the photographer? The fact that it was taken by a European makes it, of course, a colonial rather than a Tutsi event. Indeed, power and the orchestration of the event are reflected in the photographic record of the micro-geography of the sites. They present images of order; the African corporeality is confined to a cleared space. There is ample room for the event, and it takes place in an atmosphere of structure and possibly rehearsal. The audience is orderly and well controlled. The Africans are identified by their seminudity and their exotic activity, but they are domesticated by the photographic capture and the European-imposed order.²³ I cannot deny, however, that the photographs also idealize the Tutsi.

They project corporeal achievement. For the athlete, the camera's gaze does not record the savagery of native dancing. Instead, it is grace and corporeal power that is being communicated here. Because Roome recorded that the athlete was jumping over seven feet, it also posed a threat to European sporting hegemony—if it was read as a "sport," which it invariably was.²⁴ The point I am making from these two examples is that there are various "ways of seeing" body cultural practices. Each can be read as something more than simply a man jumping over a bar.

Scratches on the Negative?

Among the 5,000 photographs taken on the expedition of the Duke of Mecklenburg in 1907-8 (at least) three were of one display of Tutsi *gusimbuka*. Two of them were included in the duke's book, *In the Heart of Africa*, published in English in 1910. His chapter on Rwanda and Burundi—including these two photographs—was reprinted in *The National Geographic Magazine* two years later. A third picture is clearly recognizable as having been taken at the same event and was first published in 1911.²⁵ Undoubtedly the



Figure 3. (Source: Mecklenburg, *In the Heart of Africa*)

most well-known of the Mecklenburg photographs, and by far the most frequently reproduced of any of the Tutsi high jump, is the one showing the duke and his adjutant, von Weise, standing between the two high jump uprights with a Tutsi high jumper passing over their heads to clear, according to Mecklenburg, a height of 2.50 meters (Figure 3). Mecklenburg's two other photographs of the high jump event did not contain any Europeans, and this may be one of the reasons why they have not been reproduced so often, despite being somewhat more pure (though as I shall show, far from "accurate") "anthropological" records. *The National Geographic Magazine* carried this

photograph twice in seven years.²⁶ It continued to be widely reproduced in subsequent decades in a variety of popular and academic publications. In the 1990s alone these ranged from (yet again) *The National Geographic* to the cover of a book on German foreign policy in Rwanda in the early twentieth century, from Allen Guttman's *Games and Empires* to a copy of *The Times* (London) newspaper.²⁷ It can be read as a western icon of African athleticism. It can also be seen as a work that has shaped subsequent representations and that connects with the question of representation. The athlete is performing or "representing" with his body the characteristics of one form of Tutsi body culture and the evidence of his athleticism. But these characteristics are also being "re-presented" to the western world in the very different language of sport, a language which appropriates the Tutsi body culture in western terms.

To include a European traveler as an unfortunate trace in an otherwise "accurate" representation of African places or people could, according to some observers, be a means of disturbing the effectiveness of the photograph as an anthropological record or "an image of uncontaminated difference."²⁸ The presence of a westerner would be "a sort of scratch on the negative, a blemish that betrays the presence of the photographer and his culture." Re-production and not production should be stressed.²⁹ Photography longed for the invisibility of its producer—a dream of purity of image "in the quest for an unblemished primitivism."³⁰ The photograph would provide "total visibility and knowledge of 'the other.'"³¹ Yet, in the case of *gusimbuka*, Europeans *were* central to many of the photographs. It is this apparent contradiction that raises a number of questions of representation.

Some people, when viewing the photograph in Figure 3, believe it to be a forgery.³² However, the speculation of forgery is not central to my present discussion. What is important is that the photograph not only follows the trope of colonialism and has been set up for the camera (a metaphorical montage if not a literal one), but also that it appears to have set a precedent for several subsequent representations, i.e., the European being included with the Tutsi jumper as part of the overall image.

How may this classic image be read? The clear demarcation of the Africans and the Europeans suggest an emphasis on "difference"; it emphasizes the binary opposites of white and black, European and African. It connotes a feeling of power. The African objects of the gaze are captured, to be sure, and the overdressed Duke of Mecklenburg and his militarily uniformed adjutant, von Weisse, are shown standing under the Tutsi jumper as he clears the rope between the two uprights. European power is contained centrally within the image. Even though the positioning of the camera enables the jumper to be outlined against the sky, hence (literally) heightening the dramatic effects of the jump, it cannot be said unequivocally that the high jumper is given "visual primacy" over the German visitors. Although the high jump performance is regarded as the subject of the photograph in most of its captions, the Europeans' centrality, upright posture, and military uniform carry messages of power and control—the condition of

European hegemony over Africa. It is not clear who the photographer wished to privilege. Hence, it is unclear what the "preferred meaning" is.

This kind of scene was perfect for reproduction in *The National Geographic*, which was fond of showing not only the juxtaposition of the binary opposites of "black" and "white" and "civilized" and "primitive" but also the control that white domination bestowed on the tropics.³³ The Europeans command the center even if they are not the subject of the photograph. The man next to the upright (seemingly questioning the entire episode) appears to be some kind of "assistant" (to the Germans or the jumper is not clear). He is certainly not in charge: he knows his place. But this "assistant" could be read as being part of a cultural—even racial—hierarchy. The jumper may have represented a stereotypical, dominant and powerful Tutsi and the passive attendant a stereotypical Hutu.

Other important questions are raised by Mecklenburg's powerful image. Was the high jump event a Tutsi-initiated performance or was it set up by the European "visitors"? Although the photograph itself makes the event a European production, it could be read as a record of the successful adoption of western achievement sport by the Tutsi. Indeed, Mecklenburg claimed that the event was undertaken under his direction and organization,³⁴ possibly implying less an act of "discovery" than a colonial cultural contribution or a sign of German benefice. Though the most well-known and most widely reproduced, it contains so much evidence of the photographer's culture that it is arguably the least typical photograph of Tutsi high jumping ever taken. The bags of sand at each end of the rope are reminiscent of the apparatus that would have been used in German *schulturner* jumping. The roughly hewn branches comprising the uprights with their crude calibrations are also atypical of the high jump apparatus shown in most subsequent representations, in which long, rigid reeds form both the upright and the crossbar. The photograph therefore explicates the power of the European to orchestrate or negotiate the re-enactment of indigenous performance genres.³⁵ It also reveals the presence of the colonial culture within the re-enactment. Mecklenburg and his adjutant were not unfortunate "traces" in the photograph which would spoil an otherwise "anthropological" record, but a central presence in the event's (and the photograph's) construction. The photograph not only recorded-or reconstructed—an indigenous custom and live objects of display, it reinforced European power.

The image of the Tutsi high jumpers as super-athletes obtained substantial publicity following the publication of Mecklenburg's book in Germany, Britain, and the United States, and its further dissemination via *National Geographic*. Even if their jumping skills were not always illustrated by photographs in articles about the region, they were commonly alluded to in passing.³⁶ By the 1930s European visitors to Rwanda were said to "infallibly" stand under the crossbar at a high jump exhibition.³⁷ It was not unusual for them to return with illustrations of the event, similar in arrangement to Mecklenburg's. It seems that a sort of "structure of expectation" had been created "where the pictures circulating around sights were more important than the sites themselves."³⁸ The prior expectations of the Europeans, set up by Mecklenburg's famous and powerful image, could be argued

to have framed what would be subsequently seen. After the First World War, a number of Europeans adopted poses similar to that assumed by Mecklenburg and von Weisse. Figure 4, published in 1937, depicting English traveler Patrick Balfour is typical.³⁹

The common European presence in such photographs of the Tutsi high jump invite some further ways of reading such depictions. There are some fairly obvious reasons why Europeans should have included themselves in the photographic record of Africans. One would have been to provide a scale by which the height of the jumps could be gauged. Another was to demonstrate to the reader that the traveler writing the text really was there—a means of authenticating the expedition. They may have also provided a personal memento of the African visit. It was also possible that these travelers, though not “scientific anthropologists,” may have followed something akin to “anthropological methodology and orientations . . . showing the ethnographer in-there-with-them, as [became] characteristic of ethnographic anthropology.”⁴⁰ In addition, however, a number of other interpretations can be adduced, based on an exploration of more symbolic meanings of the European presence.

As noted earlier, it is virtually certain that the event photographed by the Duke of Mecklenburg’s expedition was actually organized by the duke himself. But the setting up and the *taking* of the photograph-itself a demonstration of



Figure 4. (Source: Balfour, *Lords of the Equator*)

both surveillance and appropriation—was not always enough, and I would argue that the physical presence of the European was thought necessary to reveal and make explicit colonial power. Central to popular European imagination in the early twentieth century was the notion of occidental superiority. To be included in a photograph of native lands and/or people suggested asymmetric power relations. Whether it was the African's athletic power or the German or Belgian political and cultural power that was being shown to the European audience, the African was being photographed for purposes he did not define.⁴¹ In the photographs considered here, the European tended to be placed in a posed, central position, framed not only by the edge of the picture but also by the rectangle of the high jump equipment (seemingly emerging from the portals of Africa) with clear evidence of the African Other (spectators) in the background. There is a visual hierarchy (which symbolizes the world system) in which the Europeans are at the center with the Africans occupying various degrees of peripherality, simulating a map of the colonial world system.

In most cases I would suggest that the presence of the European deflected the attention of the (European) viewer from the ostensible African object of the photographs—who also happened to be performing what were perceived as stupendous feats of athleticism. In photographs of the high jump, the European could not "look down" on or stand over (literally) the African—a popular positioning in the relation between African and European in many of the photos carried in, for example, *The National Geographic*.⁴² Power over the African by means of the central positioning of the Europeans was the next best thing, and it symbolically revealed them reaching out into African space and appropriating it as their own.⁴³

Many photographs of African "types"—either individually or in groups—were obviously posed; the Africans were clearly "put there."⁴⁴ In the Tutsi/European photographs the pattern seems to be inverted. The African high jumper appears more "natural" than the self-objectified European, and it is less easy to see in these pictures the African as the Europeans' "trophy." The presence of explicitly threatening postures in the more posed photographs might have defeated their objective of showing Tutsi-European compatibility. Paternalism—or maternalism in the case when Queen Astrid of Belgium assumed the Mecklenburg role during a visit to Rwanda in the 1930s—seem better descriptions (though through the appropriative characteristics of photography they obviously were trophies). The western presence can be said to have cemented the contact between the European and the African.⁴⁵ Like certain other colonial photographs, those of Europeans at the Tutsi jumping displays seem to represent a peaceful yet uneasy relationship possessing a tension which had yet to explode.⁴⁶

A paternal presence was found only rarely in photographs of African dancing. The African tradition of dancing was "obviously" savage by European standards and so different from the European equivalent that there was little need for any western presence in its representation to show occidental superiority. In a rare example of a depiction of a European accompanying African dancers, James Augustus Grant (traveling companion of John Hanning Speke) was shown

incongruously assuming the formal movements of the (“superior,” more controlled) western dance style in contrast with the uninhibited and wild movements of the African.⁴⁷ But the Tutsi high jump was not savage; its exotic character was tempered not only by its perceived gracefulness but by the similarity of its form (though not its function) to that of the western high jump. Its superficial similarity to the western form of jumping made for its easy rhetorical and visual appropriation. But the apparent superiority of the Tutsi over the western and Olympic records needed to be countered by the maintenance of cultural distance. *Gusimbuka* was too close to the western model for comfort, and perhaps western standards—and the Europeans themselves—were threatened. Difference had to be sustained by a visible and recognizably European presence. The Europeans could not be recorded as matching the astonishing heights of the “natural” Tutsi jumpers; nor given their lack of training could they use western techniques to make their presence felt or even to take part in the Tutsi high jump. They could not mimic the Tutsi by posing in their clothing and by replicating their customs in the way that some orientalists did by taking on the image of “the East.”⁴⁸ But they could, by their very presence, posture and dress style, communicate to a European audience their *cultural* superiority over the African and, at the same time, serve to preserve the essential *difference* (culture/nature) between European and African in the multicultural content of the photographs. Despite the interlocking practice of high jumping, a display of power asymmetry could be retained.⁴⁹

An alternative way of seeing the presence of westerners in the photographs is that they allow us to be more aware of ourselves as actors on the world stage. Of course, whether Europeans appeared or not, they *were* there, but “in pictures that include a Westerner, we may see ourselves being viewed by the other, and we become conscious of ourselves and our relationships. The act of seeing the self being seen is antithetical to the voyeurism that many art critics have identified as intrinsic to most photography.”⁵⁰ The traveler photographed with the “primitive” was made as much a star of the story as was the Tutsi high jumper.

Captured by Captions

Photographic images are invariably surrounded by written text. Among the most potent forms of such texts are photographs’ captions that serve to guide the reader or suggest one of several possible meanings of the photograph.⁵¹ They are, therefore, what Gren calls “semantic significations” because a particular part or arrangement of the photograph is distinguished from another in defining or describing the representation.⁵² As a result, the caption can sometimes assume supremacy over the image and can divert the audience’s attention away from what might, at first sight, appear to be the central object of the photograph. In such cases, “the image no longer illustrates the words; it is now the words that, structurally, are parasitic on the image.”⁵³ The captions to the photographs of the Tutsi jumpers that featured Europeans often referred to both the African and the westerners. One caption read, “This fellow easily leaps a good foot over the heads

of the members of the Gatti expedition."⁵⁴ Another noted: "While the author (Martin Birnbaum) stood his ground, one after another of these tall natives demonstrated that they could top the official world's record ..."⁵⁵ By making reference to both the Tutsi and the European, the above captions detract from the Tutsi presence and performance by noting the European standing his ground. In addition it establishes the two "types." From these examples, we know the "author" is Birnbaum; we are told the expeditioners are with Gatti. Whereas the Europeans are individual human beings, the African high jumpers are essentialized; they are generalities—a Tutsi, a "tribesman," "tall natives" or a "fellow." This was part of a discourse that represented "the African" as an object "to be looked at rather than a self-constituting subject."⁵⁶ It was a rhetorical form that was ubiquitous in the visual representation of the Tutsi high jump, despite the fact that the names of the high jumpers were recorded orally by the indigenous culture.⁵⁷

The same photograph might be accompanied by different captions in a variety of publications. In its original English language source, the most famous of the Mecklenburg photographs is simply captioned "High jump by Mtussi (2.50 meters)." When reproduced two years later in *National Geographic*, it was amplified as "The champion high jumper of Africa." In Guttman's *Games and Empires*, however, it is captioned as a "Wattussi tribesman leaping over the head of Herzong [sic] Adolf Friedrich von Mecklenburg, leader of an ethnographic expedition to German East Africa." In the first example, as in many others, the caption first appropriates the Tutsi *gusimbuka* by using the European term "high jump" and by applying metric measurements; in the second it applies the occidental idea of a "champion of Africa"; and in the third it engages in "othering" and negating the African by only naming the European. The western sporting terms ("high jump," "champion") describe an indigenous body culture as a western sport—an "imagined sport" as part of Said's "imaginative geographies" of the broader Africanist project.

Picturing Power/Living Diagrams

The concerns of at least some of those who represented Tutsi corporeality were its technical dimensions. Here was a form of body culture that could not only be measured but where technique could also be analyzed. An example is provided in some photographs taken by the Belgian physical anthropologist Joseph Ghesquiere who, while working mainly in the Belgian Congo, was a visitor to Rwanda in 1950. Professor Ghesquiere took a large number of photographs of Tutsi high jumping that he has retained in his private collection and that were never intended for publication. Professionally, his data were quantitative rather than photographic, his specialism being anthropometry. His photographs might, in general, be described as the snapshots of an amateur—a European athletics fan—though, as I will try to show, at least one of them betrays his scientific training.⁵⁸ Most of his photographs show Tutsi jumpers clearing the bar during the course of a demonstration of their skills in Kigali. On one occasion, however, the *mwami* invited an *intore* jumper to perform for him, and the photographs of

this performance reveal a more clinical concern with technique. One of them shows an *intore* high jumper posing with his foot placed at the angle at which he would take off from the termite stone. Here Ghesquire is unable to resist a technical representation—the intrusion of the close-up exemplifying Africanism as a history and discipline of detail.⁵⁹ Here the photograph precisely, and with geometric analysis, provides technical proof of its object of knowledge.

The concern with technique was demonstrated in a much more ambitious form by Jokl, who can be seen as having applied the nineteenth century experiments of photographers who sought to identify the movement characteristics of the human body. These experiments were most popularly associated with the work of Eadward Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey, each of whom included examples of high jumping in their experiments.⁶⁰ Muybridge's technique had enabled him to depict a single body, frozen in flight, in different stages of the jump's progress. From such photographs, measurements could be produced that would enable a more efficient training regimen for the bodies involved. Jokl's representation, based seemingly on Muybridge's approach, classically illustrated the modes of surveillance, idealization and appropriation noted previously. In 1941 Jokl published a short paper on Tutsi high jumping technique in which he selected cinematographic records of jumping scenes for pictorial analysis as part of his search for "the mechanical elements of technique efficiency." Such motor

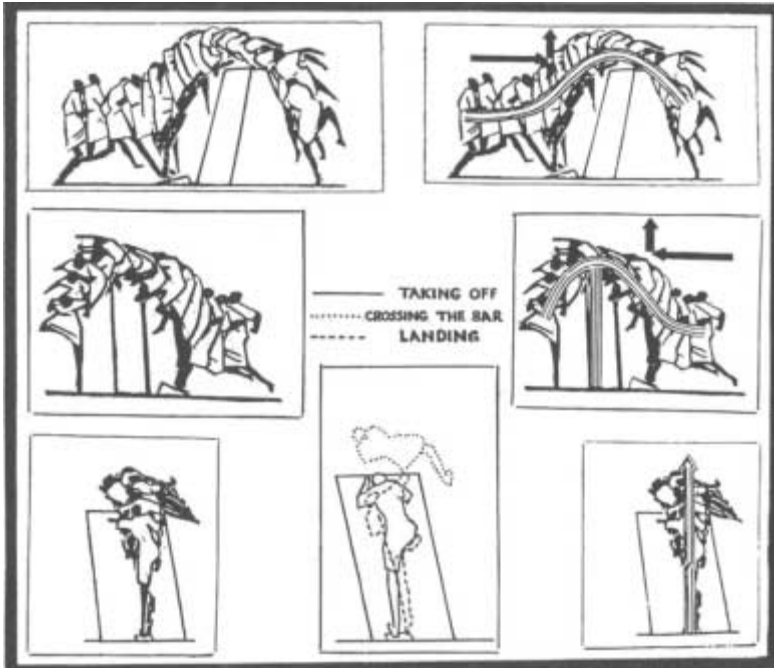


Figure 5. Source: Jokl, "High jump technique of the central African Watussis.")

performances, it was assumed, could only be learnt in a long course of "analytical training."⁶¹ This, he said, was "the first scientifically analyzed observation in primitive men of a movement pattern which, because of its degree of differentiation, has hitherto been thought to belong to the category of technically involved muscular actions."⁶² The language here is one of power, of technicalities, standing in contrast to that used to idealize the gracefulness of Tutsi jumping that I noted in the previous chapter. Jokl's analyses produced a set of diagrams, three of which are shown as Figure 5.

Such abstractions can be read as a juxtaposition of bodies and machines—"the translation of the natural into abstract and disembodied laws of force."⁶³ The photographs on which Jokl's diagrams were based made it possible "to pierce the apparent opacity of the body bringing to the surface new visibilities: visibilities that help propose a machine analogue" for the athletic body—a body which would thence be redesigned to synchronize with the technical rhythms of sport.⁶⁴ Here we witness the *modeling* of the Tutsi. The diagrams seek to generalize the Tutsi as athletes and the "awkward" presence of any European (indeed, any extraneous "noise") is erased. Once seen, everybody will know that this is not a particular Tutsi high jumper but rather that the Tutsi *per se* are good high jumpers. It added to, and scientifically legitimated, the Tutsi as a docile technical object, perhaps part of "an alienated world of bodies in autonomous motion."⁶⁵ According to Seltzer these kinds of representations are "the calibration of body movements, the conversion of bodies into living diagrams, the practices of corporeal discipline that appear at once as a violation of the natural body and its transcendence."⁶⁶ Just as the African landscape had to be mapped, so did the African body. Of course, technique, that the representations sought to identify and improve upon, was central to modern sports to which the Tutsi *gusimbuka* was symbolically appropriated. Here I see the representational modes of appropriation, idealization and surveillance collapsing into one another.

Conclusion

I have tried to suggest "ways of seeing" various kinds of visual representations of Tutsi corporeality that attracted a good deal of interest during the first half of the twentieth century. Photographs of Tutsi athleticism served to establish the European presence. Of course, the Europeans were there, if absent from the photograph, but the fact that they were sometimes included could be seen as presenting a more "accurate," "scientific" picture of the "new" Africa than if they had simply stood behind the camera in search of what they perceived to be "authentic" images. These photographs may not have been perceived as "scientific," but they may tell us more "in a modern documentary sense" than many photographs intending to stand as scientific records?⁶⁷

I have also tried to show how the photographic evidence of Tutsi high jumping can be read in a number of ways. In photography we can never be sure of the role of the photographer nor that of the photographed. Having said that, the photographs included above do seem to me to connote the power and control of

the European over the African. The modes of appropriation and idealization are also evident. The illustrations I have explored produce a variety of ways of seeing Africa and “the African”—as exotic, mysterious, powerful, and athletic. The presence of the European in the high jumping photographs served to emphasize difference but at the same time could present the African as vastly superior to the European.

A further reading is that the European presence made the Tutsi more like the European than the Hutu. I have also shown how bodily performances such as *gusimbuka*, while obviously occurring in a particular space, need not be seen as being set in the rational space of the taken-for-granted—that of spectators (sometimes including Europeans) simply watching a spectacular form of corporeal entertainment. The space of *gusimbuka* is not completely knowable and transparent. A space that constitutes the rationality of the European and invariably male observer may also be “a space riddled with fantasies, pleasures [and] fears.”⁶⁸ The space of *gusimbuka* may almost have been “canonised in a geography of attractions,”⁶⁹ satisfying the fantasies of the European and supplying the pleasures obtained from the spectatorial gaze. But the fears that “the African” could not only entertain but also assume athletic dominance in future Olympic Games were also played out in these spaces. So too were the political aspirations of the Tutsi (and perhaps the Hutu).

This latter point is important, in my view, because it links the photographic images of the physical and athletic dominance of the Tutsi with the later political tragedy of Rwanda. I find it impossible to uncouple the historical, athletic representations from the sorry events of Rwanda’s recent past. Such positive stereotypes reveal that the apparent innocence of a photograph of a man jumping over a bar can clearly be linked to a nation’s political history. These photographs in no way deny the Tutsi stereotype; indeed, they reinforced it to a voyeuristic European public. In their own small way these images can be seen as being complicit with the “invented traditions” that were to create the Tutsi as the “natural leaders of Rwanda—a stereotype that was to contribute to the “racialization” of Rwanda and, in its own small way, to the eventual tragedy of genocide following the overthrow of the Tutsi by the Hutu.



1. Richard Cashman, *Paradise of Sport: the Rise of Organized Sport in Australia*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 171.
2. Eadweard Muybridge, *The Human Figure in Motion*, New York, Dover, [1901] 1955. On Marey see Marta Braun, *Picturing Time; The Work of Etienne-Jules Braun (1830-1904)*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
3. The first photo-finish camera at the Olympic Games seems to have been introduced at Stockholm in 1912. See Lord Killanin and John Rodda (eds), *The Olympic Games*, London, Macdonald and Janes, p. 69. I am grateful to Bim Schrodt for alerting me to this reference.
4. George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986.
5. John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

6. Abigail Soloman-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota press, 1991, p. 154; Rosalind Poignant, "Surveying the field," in Elizabeth Edwards (ed.), *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1820*, New Haven, Yale University Press, p. 42.
7. Linda Nochlin, "The imaginary Orient," *Art in America*, 71, 1983, p. 122. On Gérome's "realism" see C. Tawadros, "Foreign bodies. Art history and the discourse of 19th century orientalist art," *Third Text*, 3/4, 1988, pp. 51-67.
8. John Pultz, *Photography and the Body*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, p. 21.
9. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985.
10. Nochlin, "The imaginary Orient," *op cit*, p. 123.
11. John Bale, "Rhetorical modes, imaginative geographies and body culture in early twentieth century Rwanda," *Area*, 28, 2, 1996, pp. 289-297.
12. Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996.
13. James Duncan, "Sites of representation," in James Duncan and David Ley (eds.) *Place/Culture/Representation*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp. 39-56.
14. Martin Birnbaum, "Reception in Ruanda," *Natural History*, 44, 1939, pp. 298-307.
15. T. Alexander Barns, *The Wonderland of the Eastern Congo*, London, Putnam, p. vii.
16. Attilio Gatti, *South of the Sahara*, London, Hodder and Staughton, p. 11.
17. Christopher Pinney, "The parallel histories of anthropology and photography," in Elizabeth Edwards (ed.), *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1820*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992, p. 76.
18. *Ibid*, p. 75.
19. William Roome, *Tramping through Africa: a Dozen Crossings of the Continent*, London, A & C Black, 1930.
20. Pinney, "The parallel histories," *op cit*.
21. Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 200.
22. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, p.19.
23. James Faris, "Photography, power and the Nuba," in Elizabeth Edwards (ed.), *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1820*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992, p. 214.
24. Bale, "Rhetorical modes," *op cit*.
25. Jan Czekanowski, *Forschungen im Nil-Congo-Zwischengebiet* (vol 3), Leipzig, Klinkhardt and Bierman, 1911.
26. Duke of Mecklenburg, "A land of giants and pygmies," *National Geographic Magazine*, 23, 1912, pp. 366-88; J. Hildebrand, "The geography of games," *National Geographic Magazine*, 36, 1919, pp. 139-50. The first English version of Mecklenburg's expedition is Duke of Mecklenburg, *In the Heart of Africa*, London, Cassell, 1910.
27. Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994; Frank Deford, "Let the Games begin," *National Geographic*, 190, 1996, pp. 42-69; G. Honke, *Au Plus Profond de L'Afrique*, Wuppertal, Peter Hammer Verlag, 1990; and J. Bryant, "Major's mission seeks leap of faith." *The Times* (London), November 30, 1995.
28. James Ryan, *Photography, Geography and Empire, 1840-1914*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1994, p. 176.
29. Pinney, "The parallel histories," *op cit*, p. 76.
30. *Ibid*, p. 92, n10.
31. James Ryan, "Picturing people and places," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 20, 1994, p. 333.
32. This is suggested in Peter Rummelt, *Sport im Kolonialismus-Kolonialismus im Sport*, Cologne, Pahl-Rugenstein, 1986, p. 88, where he applies to it the term *ungeprüften foto*.

- To my knowledge no alternative arrangements of the contents of the photograph exist. Hence, assertions of it being a montage can, at best, be speculations.
33. Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993 and Tamar Rothenburg, "Voyeurs of Imperialism," in Anne Godlewski and Neil Smith (eds.) *Geography and Empire*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1994, pp. 155-72.
 34. Aimable Ndejuru, *Studien zur Rolle der leibesungen in der traditionellen Gessellschaft Rwanda*, doctoral dissertation, University of Cologne, 1983.
 35. Jan Vansina, "Photographs of the Sankunu," in Elizabeth Edwards (ed.), *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1820*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992, pp. 193-205.
 36. For example, H. Shantz, "Urundi, territory and people," *The Geographical Review*, 12, 1922, pp. 329-57. Shantz draws entirely on Mecklenburg's evidence.
 37. Ellen Gatti, *Exploring we would go*, London, Robert Hale, 1950, p. 79.
 38. Mike Crang, "Picturing practices," *Progress in Human Geography*, 21, 3, 1997, p. 361.
 39. Patrick Balfour, *Lords of the Equator; an African Journey*, London, Hutchinson, 1937.
 40. Michael Ball and Gregory Smith, *Analyzing Visual Data*, London, Sage, 1992, p. 9.
 41. Pultz, *Photography and the Body*, *op cit*, p. 24.
 42. Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, *op cit*, p. 205.
 43. Derek Gregory, "Imaginative geographies," *Progress in Human Geography*, 19, 1995, p. 453.
 44. See Annie Coombes, *Reinventing Africa*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995 and Virginia-Lee Webb, "Manipulated images: European photographs of Pacific people," in E. Baran and R. Bush (eds.) *Prehistories of the Future*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. 175-201.
 45. Elizabeth Edwards, "Science visualized," in Elizabeth Edwards (ed.), *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1820*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 116.
 46. Ibid.
 47. Tim Barringer, "Fabricating Africa: Livingstone and the visual image." In J. Mackenzie (ed.) *David Livingstone and the Victorian Encounter with Africa*, London, National Portrait Gallery, 1996, p. 72.
 48. David Bate, "Photography and the colonial vision," *Third Text*, 22, 1993, pp. 81-91.
 49. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 7.
 50. Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, *op cit*, p. 205.
 51. Elizabeth Edwards, "Introduction" in Elizabeth Edwards (ed.), *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1820*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992, p. 11.
 52. Martin Gren, *Earth Writing*, Gothenburg, Department of Geography, University of Gothenburg, 1994, p. 49.
 53. Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, London, Fontana, 1977, p. 25.
 54. Attilio Gatti, "Jumping Giants of Africa," *The Negro Digest*, December, 1945, p. 9.
 55. Martin Birnbaum, "Reception in Ruanda," *Natural History*, 44, 1939, p. 298.
 56. Helen Gilbert, "The dance as text in contemporary Australian drama," *Ariel*, 23, 1, 1992, pp. 133-47.
 57. Ndejuru, *Studien zur Rolle der Leibesübungen in der Traditionellen Gesellschaft Rwandas*, *op cit*, p. 187. Of the travel writing about Ruanda-Urundi which I have encountered, Roome is the only author to have actually used the name of a Tutsi high jumper. See Roome, *Tramping through Africa*, *op cit*, p. 103.

58. I am extremely grateful to Professor Ghesquire for several discussions with him about his time in Ruanda.
59. Gregory, "Imaginative geographies," *op cit*, p. 458.
60. See Braun, *Picturing Time*, *op cit* and Muybridge, *The Human Figure in Motion*, *op cit*.
61. Ernst Jokl, "High jumping technique of the central African Watussis," *Journal of Physical Education and School Hygiene*, 33, p. 146.
62. *Ibid*, p. 148.
63. Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 155.
64. Suren Lalvani, *Photography, Vision and the Production of Modern Bodies*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1996, pp. 159-60.
65. Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1994, p. 249.
66. Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, *op cit*, p. 160. Seltzer sees such images as "a resemblance between the mechanisms of scientific management and the invention of sado-masochism," quoting Deleuze who saw in both "a naturalistic and mechanistic approach imbued with the mathematical spirit."
67. Edwards, "Science visualized", *op cit*, p. 116.
68. Women and Geography Study Group, *Feminist Geographies*, London, Longman, 1997, p. 196.
69. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of ethnography," in Ivan Karp and Steven Levine (eds.) *Exhibiting Culture*, Washington, Smithsonian Institute Press, 1991, p. 413.