

**Museums and Politics; Human Rights and Cultural
Diversity in Tanzania:**

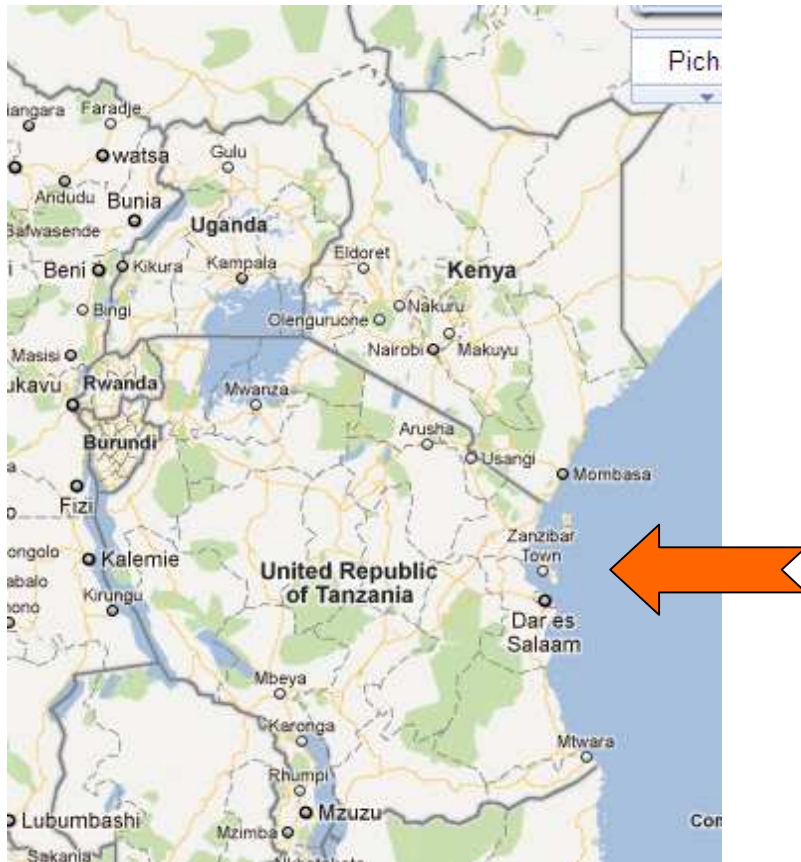
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Introduction:

Habari gani? (What's news?)

Tanzania is one of the five countries in the East African Community which includes Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.



In the field of natural heritage tourism it is mainly known as the country of Kilimanjaro, Serengeti and Zanzibar. Kilimanjaro is the highest mountain in Africa; and Tanzania is the only entry point to climb and view the snow and glaciers on top of this peak. Serengeti is one of the wonders of the world where about 500,000 wildebeests migrate every year in June or July, past the famous Mara River.



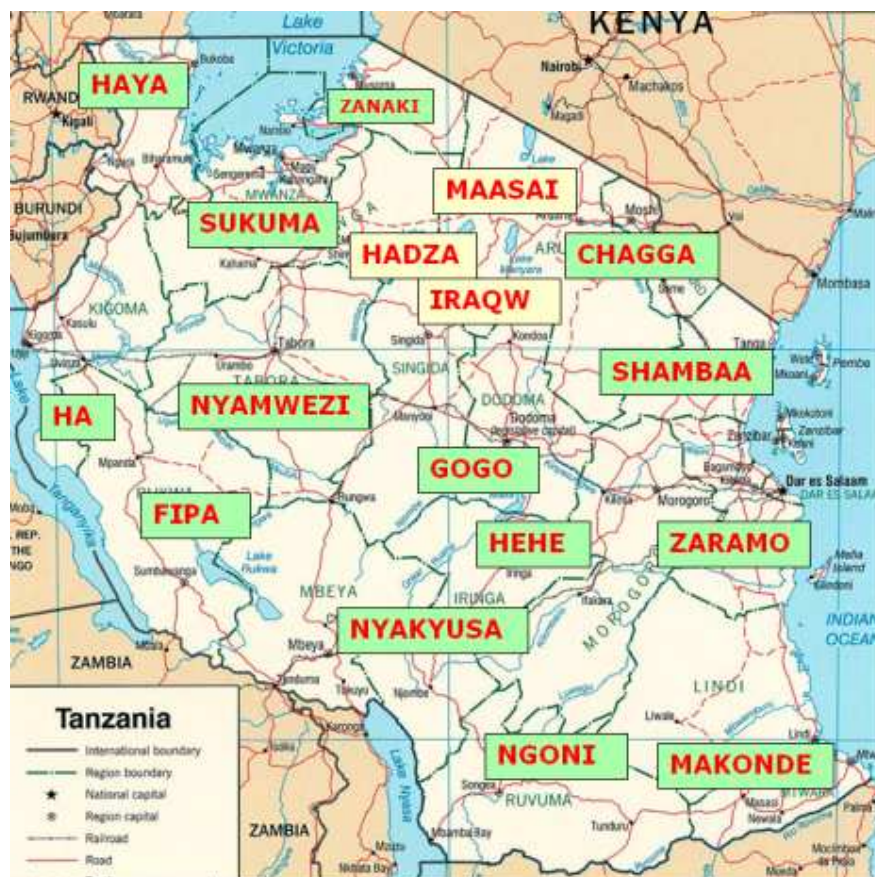
Migration of wildebeest in River Mara at Serengeti

In the area of cultural and research tourism Tanzania is the land of Zinj, the fossil hominid skull which first supports the theory of human evolution as proclaimed by Charles Darwin. This skull was found in Olduvai Gorge in 1959 paving way to other researches about this matter in Africa and the rest of the world. Zanzibar is a spiced Island and holds the famous Stone Town. Kilimanjaro, Serengeti and Zanzibar are world heritage sites.

Personally, I am also part of heritage in Tanzania. I am the first woman employed by the National Museum of Tanzania as an Education Officer in 1978. Before that women were employed in the shop floor and where the highest was a typist. There are numbers of human right violations in Tanzania Society such as Domestic Violence, Rape, Albino Killings, Female Genital Mutilations/Cuttings and/or Corruption to mention jus few. For this reason, I first see myself as a human rights fighter and have always tried hard to interpret the museum collections, use the museum and my position

as a platform for **hapa** raising voices for the minority community. I have tried to conduct different programmes to address the issue of human rights. I am here to share my experience with you. As you go on listening to me, you will note that the government with her organs is working very hard to reduce these practices. The aim of this paper is to show how museums can interpret the negative cultural practices to create a positive image to the public which will at the end result to the promotion of human rights.

Dynamic cultural values and practices in Tanzania



Tanzania is a wide country of more than 123 ethnic groups, rich in their dynamic cultural values and practices. They touch from kinds of houses they build, food preference, costumes, kind of work, medicines (Cure and prevention), education system, marriage, children preferences just to

mention a few. Initially, traditional ways of living gave respect to all people depending on their age.

In the normal circumstances, elderly men and women were respected to the extent that no one was counted childless because traditionally if one has grown up and undergone all the initiation ceremonies as was considered in the traditional informal education system even if got married and never gave birth, then his or her relatives would give him children that could be counted as own. As far as children were concerned no child was counted parentless because if the mother passed away one of the female relatives would take charge. Likewise if the father passes away one of the male relatives would take charge. No one was counted or died a loner. To date, adult people are normally referred to as “Baba Fulani or Mama Fulani” meaning “ So and so’s father or mother” Adults are not called by their names. They are called by their children’s names. There were no orphanage homes or camps for old people because all stayed at their homes.

Working hard was another practice that we can count as a positive cultural practice that promotes development and human rights. Actually, in my village for example, one would not be allowed to get married unless both sides are satisfied that the members of the clans where the young man or woman belong were hard workers and intelligent. Today, there are a lot of intermarriages and for this matter no one knows the roots of those who want to get married.

What this paper wants to put here is that there were very good practices that promoted human rights. But as we go further we find that since culture is not static, there are some cultural practices that hinder development. Through these practices, human rights are violated.

Culture is such a strong phenomenon that it can either change the public positively or negatively. Museums being cultural institutions cannot get away of keeping the public alert of whatever happening.

Museums have important role to play in reviving, remoulding and popularizing the national culture. Museums must play the role of a national educational institution at the vanguard in the process of mobilizing the masses to know their rights and duties to their nation; and forge the rightful national identity through their own work.¹

Museums are public bodies. Part four of the Declaration of Principles of Freedom of expression in Africa 2002 asserts that,

Public bodies hold information not for themselves but as custodians of the public good and everyone has the right to access the information, subject only to clearly defined rules established by law.²

¹ Wembah Rashid, J.R. (1974), *The Role of the National Museum of Tanzania Today, The Role of Anthropological museums in National and International Education, Multinational seminar held at Moesgaard Museum, Denmark, 3-5 June, 1974*

² Legal and Human Rights Centre (2005.384), Bisimba, Helen Kijo and Peter, Chris Maina, *Justice and Rule of Law in Tanzania*, in Selected Judgements and Writings of Justice James Mwalusanya and Commentaries. Legal

The National Museum of Tanzania is a body corporate established by Act of Parliament. It exists in accordance to section 3 of the National Museum Act No. 7 of 1980 section 4. It is a scientific, educational and cultural institution charged with the duties of collecting, conserving, displaying, and researching on all materials relating to Tanzanian's cultural and natural heritage.

The Museum and House of Culture is one of the six national museums in Tanzania. It is a demonstration museum in the world, where the terms "Museum" and "Culture" are combined to make the museum collections talk to students, adults, youths, women and children and people of all walks of life in general. The programmes conducted here address the United Nations Millennium Development Goals which include human rights. We at the Museum and House of Culture find ourselves responsible to the effective change of attitudes towards certain cultural value; emancipate the public to clear the world for today and future. Kayombo (2005: 1) asserts that;

**Museums are distinctive kind of institutions
which have been developed in response to
certain needs of communities.³**

The **vision** of the Museum and House of Culture is to have an outward looking society with a strong sense of value and pride, responsible in its dynamic use of and access to heritage and culture.

The **mission** is to become a platform for stakeholders' partnerships and networking, creating and promoting cultural experiences, material expression, attractive and interactive programmes and dialogue, for the development of present and future generations.

This museum has an ethnography gallery where despite of exhibiting normal cultural collections there is a special exhibition on HIV/AIDS. The reason is that there are cultural practices that accelerate the spread of this dreadful disease. Apart from that, there is a television screen which shows different video tapes on cultural practices. One of them "Ukatili dhidi ya wanawake na watoto" meaning "Cruelty against women and children" which have been summarized to suit this presentation. There are many other programmes going on in this museum.

What has gone wrong in the society?

This paper is accompanied with a short film showing the violations of human rights; Domestic violence, elderly women killings, female genital

and Human Rights Centre (LHRC), Justice Lugakingira House, Kijitonyama, P.O. Box 75254, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

³ Kayombo, Norbert.A. (2005.1), General Guidelines for Establishment and Management of Museums in Tanzania; Dar es Salaam University Press

cutting or mutilation, rape and albino killings. The central cause of these actions is the drop of positive cultural values where people believe too much in superstition. Although superstitious beliefs may fall under the category of complex phenomena in the society, they are, however, about control and survival mechanisms. The more powerful one is, the more influential and successful one is believed to become socially, economically and politically. Superstition is accompanied with witch craft. The witch craft Act holds that **Witch craft includes sorcery, enchantment, bewitching, use of instrument of witchcraft, purported exercise of any occult power and the purported possession of any occult knowledge. Section 5 of witchcraft Act sets out the penalty for any who commits an offence under the act with an intent to cause death, disease, injury to any property as imprisonment for not less than seven years.**⁴

Those who are caught with the possession of human body parts and witchcraft are normally sent to court. Something that follows after the procedures sometimes make the society dissatisfied with the decisions given because in some cases the accused are set free though there was enough evidence. In this way the society looks at it as a corruption which Bouvard (1996) defines as;

Dishonest or illegal behaviour especially on the part of people in authority. Also acting with an intent to give some one an advantage inconsistent with official duty and the rights of others; a fiduciary's or official's use of station or office procure some benefit either personally or for someone else, contrary to the rights of others.⁵

All these are human rights violence. Despite of personal respect there were other good cultural beliefs that promoted the environment and therefore controlled climate change. It was believed to be a taboo to cut big trees in water sources and even in the villages people were prohibited from cutting certain kind of trees. Negligence of those cultures has led to a vicious circle. Trees are cut, no rain, no water, no firewood, women are using cow dung which produces poor charcoal and does not cook well and produces acid, and the acid causes red eyes and permanent coughing. Our people should be aware of the environment protection as a way of control of climate change. The world would be a better to live if we could have happy heritage; suitable and stable climate change.

Killings of elderly women

⁴ Tanzania human Rights report (2007) Incorporating Specific Parts in Zanzibar, Legal and Human Rights Centre, P.O. box 77254 Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar Legal Service Centre, P.O. Box 3360, Zanzibar.

4. Bouvard, Marguriete Guzman (1996), Women Reshaping Human Rights: How extraordinary. Activists are Changing the World, A Scholarly Resource Incl., Imprint 104 Green Hill Avenue, Wilmington, Delaware-DE 19805-1897

The ordinary respect on human has dropped and killings happening especially in the villages. Elderly women are being killed in the pretext of wizards. These poor women who live in the semi desert areas suffer because of climate change. No enough rain in their area and so no trees and water. This forces the women to travel far in search of water and fuel. When they miss firewood they turn to dry cow dung. Long use of dry cow dung as source of fuel for cooking cause Respiratory Tract Infection and Red eyes especially as they get older when the eyes turn extremely red and their voices always rough because of too long coughing. Anything going wrong in the homestead the old women with red eyes fall victims of the course. If a child falls sick, the assumptions are that it has been bewitched by the grandmother.

Female Genital Cutting or Mutilation

In the traditional informal Education system education and skills is imparted by apprenticeship. In some areas this knowledge cannot be given unless the elders are satisfied that the candidates are matured enough to bear the challenges of adulthood. So, one thing practiced is the cutting of the female genitals in the pretext that if one does not undergo this operation she will be misfortune in life. (Kadogo Marwa one of the women who has become a victim in many human rights violation, whom you will see in the presented film) explains that she was forced undergo the operation because even her Father in-law would not allow her to open the gate for the family cattle or milk the cows. As such, girls are not allowed to get married before they are operated and young men are not allowed to marry uncircumcised girls. This act leads to over bleeding and eventually death, the scar left in the cut genitals fails to open during child delivery and causes severe tear which can also lead to rigorous bleeding and ultimately death.

Domestic Violence:

In the roving film we see a woman who has lost her legs. Her name is Kadogo Marwa. She says that, she was born in 1979, had her genital cutting ceremony in 1998 and then got married. Like other women in the village she was forced to work very hard and became a petty trader selling ripe bananas in their small town (walking in the streets, garages, bars and any other places with many people to catch customers) with her banana tray on her head. She says that she got enough money to buy home utilities. Her husband was just loitering around but very jealous. He could not believe that the money running their home was only from the bananas his wife was selling. One man cheated him that his wife was having sexual affairs with other men that was why she had much money for the family to live so comfortably.

One day without even proving the allegations, he beat her up with a club on her head until she was unconscious; broke all the legs as though he was preparing bones for soup and then smeared them with acid from a car battery. She was rescued after four days when she was taken to hospital and ended up with an amputation of one of the legs and the other drew out itself in the process of healing. That is how she lost her two legs. She is still carrying the responsibilities of taking care of her four children. The husband has run away to avoid the police.

Rape:

In the film also we see a little girl narrating a story of how she was raped by a man who was assisted by his wife. Again, this is superstition. The family did not have a child and as they consulted a witch doctor they were told that the man should cleanse his spirits by having an intercourse with a virgin girl so that when he later sleeps with his wife she would conceive. The wife helped because she believed that later she would get her own children.

Albino killings:

The film moving in this presentation records the Regional Police Commander of Mwanza Mr. Jamal Rwambo saying, rumor has it that the albino organs possess mystical powers that can make a person fabulously rich within a short time. He further narrated that, to show how serious the problem was, recently buried albino dead bodies were sometimes exhumed at night by unidentified people in search of the 'magical organs'. Since the mining and fishing industries are currently enjoying an unprecedented boom, so the two sectors are attracting people from all walks of life and cultures and this factor has increased the albino risks. Those who seek instant riches are by hook or by crook hunting for the albinos.⁶

Mr. Rwambo calls the public to stop the practices by saying that,

Let us always seek success that does not jeopardize other people's dignity and material wellbeing and let us have the courage to cope with our pressing issues without resorting to short-cuts or simple solutions.

Mr. Rwambo finally testifies that all the suspects he held confirmed that the killings never helped them because though they had all the body parts they had been ordered by the witch doctors they did not become rich.

The role of museums

As explained above, museums have roles to play to change people's attitudes towards these practices. The film we have seen has put it well that the entire government from the President himself, the Minister for Gender and Welfare,

⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/08/world/africa/08albino.html>

the Police are working hard to stop all these cultural practices that lead to the violation of human rights. The Prime Minister shed tears in the Parliament and vowed that he will do whatever possible to track anybody violating these rules. There is a national campaign now going on well through out the country called “Acha! Acha kuwaua Maalbino!” in English it means “Stop! Stop killing the albinos” School students are rallying with posters carrying relevant messages.

With all the above progress the museum joins hands with those other human right institutions. Since the Ethnography gallery at the Museum and House of Culture has an exhibition on Traditional healing the museum find it impetus to conduct different programmes to support the national campaign. As it as been pointed above the museum is a platform for all people and especially the marginalized.

Creation of awareness:

Festivals:

Each year we have a festival for the physically challenged children. They gather for three days discussing on matters pertaining their conditions and ways forward. Stakeholders from other areas also participate or invited to see their work. They sing, dance, show other talents and are taught on how to become independent. We call psychologists who organise lessons with topics that can help them deal with their situation. Minders are reminded on or taught on how to take care of them and the children are treated psychologically through counseling sessions. They normally come up with different slogans like;

- **Share the knowledge with us, we can cope**
- **Give us the opportunity, we can**
- **You are also a disabled only that your disability is not physically visible; so please just love us**
- **You look well today but could be unable tomorrow, so just love us**
- **We want all the suspects to be announced**
- **Stop corruption**
- **Stop the violation of human rights**

The other children are also involved so that they can learn to mix with them and offer assistance.



Figure 1: Albino children singing but also urging the public to stop albino killings.



Figure 2: Every one has the right to enjoyment. All these children are physically challenged. View the picture carefully and you will notice.



Figure 3: This girl is blind since her birth; she is 18 years old but see the size of her body. She participated to this festival as a singer. The messages in her songs created very high emotions to the public to the extent that some people cried.



Figure 4: this choir group is composed of different physically challenged children (Museum Day, 2011)

Museum club:

We have established a museum club which has 430 members in 8 primary schools. They gather at the museum once monthly. One of the school is for the physically challenged with 60 members. During the meetings we discuss on matters related to our country and teach extra mural classes. We have covered the topic of;

- What is heritage? In this topic they have learnt why we have albinos in our society and how to live with them.
- What is peace? They have discussed about domestic violence, albino killings, climate change-because as they discussed they realized that climate change can cause displacement.
- Human rights; they looked at their rights as children and also their responsibilities as children.

International Museum Day:

The topic for the International Museum Day this year was Museums and Memories: Our museum conducted a special exhibition about the liberation struggle of Africa. During the discussion children asked if they were already liberated while they are being harassed, tortured and discriminated. They remembered women and children who have become

victims of human rights violation; those old women who were killed, those women who were battered by their husbands and those children who are now homeless because of different causes. They recommended that more efforts be done to create a peaceful atmosphere in the country. On the issue of female genital mutilation, call was given to the young men to discourage marrying circumcised girls.

Youth workshop:

We had a workshop with youth mainly from the societies that practice female genital mutilation. The male youths came up with a declaration that they will discourage their girl fiends from that by saying “If you cut, I will not marry you” Some circumcised girls have retarded from proceeding to marriage. (See the girl student in the film presented). She was operated but ran away and now she is attending secondary school classes.

The day of the African Child-16th. June:

This year we had a special programme for the Day of the African Child. We had some homeless children (The so called street children). We had a class with them asking them if they were satisfied by the name “Street children” They answered that they were not satisfied because they were not born by the streets. Every one had his or her story that caused her to run away form home but as we analyzed critically we found that the cause was absence of peace in their living environments.

One of the children gave a testimony on how human rights were violated in the homes and streets.

**Recommendations from all the programmes we have conducted:
We can change the human wrongs to human Rights:**

We have seen that awareness creation to the public is a thrust. Those women and men who believed that a loving husband should beat his wife should know that fighting is a crime and therefore the government will not excuse that.

People must be educated to know why we have albinos in our society and that they are just like other human beings. Female genital mutilation or cutting must stop. Some women have even suggested that to respect people’s culture, cutting should be stopped but the syllabi attached to this act could continue because young people learn to be responsible adults through these teachings. Use the Members of Parliament who are albinos to act as modals for our museum clubs. The President nominated one albino woman a Member of Parliament while in the 2010 general elections MP Salum Kahalfan Barwany was first person elected with albinism.

**Ladies and gentlemen,
Asanteni sana na KARIBUNI TANZANIA**

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