

The peopling and history of tanzania history essay



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Although Tanzania has a heterogeneous population comprised of Africans, Arabs, Asians, and Europeans, the African population is largest and is made up of about 120 ethnic groups. The largest among these ethnic groups are the Sukuma, Nyamwezi, Maasai, Luo, Sandawe, and Hadza. The 2006 estimate put the total population of Tanzania to about 38.3 million. Although Tanzania has witnessed series of population movements, its natives were not displaced but rather were amalgamated through a process of assimilation, acculturation, and adaptation, which formed the present Tanzanian. Although the native Tanzanians have been distanced from the history of the emergence of complexity in the region, recent studies have shown that the indigenous people of the country were active players in the process that led to the more complex Tanzania societies in the years following sixteenth century.

The Peopling of Tanzania

Tanzania is one of the ancient regions of the world, as archaeologists have found ample evidence of early human settlements. Archaeological finds have shown that one of the oldest homo species (*Homo habilis*) lived in the plains of Tanzania about 1.7 million years ago. But what was most stunning was not only the skeletal remains of *Homo habilis* but also evidence of the earliest form of human cultural manifestation in form of stone tools that were given the name Olduvai after the place it was first found, the Olduvai Gorge, which is near the Serengeti Plains in northern Tanzania. There is also evidence for the presence of middle and late Stone Age populations.

Numerous rock paintings, particularly in central Tanzania, affirm that the late Stone Age people that inhabited this region were hunters and gatherers who

had acquired sophisticated technologies and a complex religious system. However, it should be stated that, as with *Homo habilis*, this early Stone Age population does not have direct ties to the native Tanzanians that emerged in the later period.

The ancestors of modern Tanzanians began to people the region, for the most part, during the first millennium BCE. By the end of the millennium there had been various waves of migration in the territory. The Khoisan-speaking hunter-gatherers, the Cushitic-speaking herders, the Bantu-speaking ironworkers and plant cultivators, and the Nilotic-speaking grain producers migrated in succession into the region. By the mid-second millennium CE the population had spread throughout the region, which resulted in ethnic assimilation rather than extinction. The congregation of these groups, each with its own ideas and skills, made a mosaic of complex lifestyle in Tanzania. These waves of different groups pose a challenge to tracing of the origin of the present native Tanzanian. Thus, Tanzania became a nation with diverse ethnic groups, and by extension “ the most linguistically diverse area on the whole African continent” (Sutton, 1969: 12).

Outside Contact, Colonization, and Independence

Despite the early development of complex life-ways among the people of Tanzania, early historians – Arabs and Westerns in particular – have linked the development of social complexity in Tanzania to outside invention. According to these historians, complex behavioral pattern did not emerge among the native Tanzanian until 15th century CE – the peak of contact with outside world (Arab, Indian, Asia, and Europe) and engagement in India Ocean business. However, archaeological evidence have shown that the

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development of complexity in the region was planned and executed by the native people as far back as 8th and 9th centuries CE. During this period the native Tanzanian lived in cities and engaged in exchange by the India Ocean before the colonization of their region by the Arabs and later Europeans between 17th and 19th centuries CE.

Coastal cities are of great importance to the history of Tanzania. As early as 6th century CE the natives of Tanzania coastal cities or offshore islands were already trading with the Greek, Arab, Phoenician, Egyptian, Indian, and Chinese merchants. This early long distance trade transformed the political economy of Tanzania, and by the 14th century CE islands like Pemba, Zanzibar, and Kilwa had become important entrepots with considerable Arab influence on the natives' lifeways. This is most noticeable on both the material and non-material aspect of their culture (e. g. architecture, politics, and religion).

The free and easy contact between the coastal Tanzanian cities/Islands and other cities on the other side of Indian Ocean was an impetus for conquest and eventual colonization of native Tanzanians. Following the arrival of Vasco da Gama in east African coast in 1498, the Portuguese launched a conquest mission in the coast of Tanzania in 1506 and was in control of India Ocean trade. By 1729 the Omani Arabs had taken over the Tanzanian coast from the European imperialist. The Arab conquest increased the coastal Tanzania economic relations with other countries. For example, in order to be able to trade free in the region, by 1837 and 1841 the United States of America and British had established their consulates in Zanzibar respectively. The rule of the Arabs in Tanzania also established more trade

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centers. However, the Arabs encouraged slavery. Native Tanzanians became victims of slave raiding both in the coastal and hinterland settlements. The slaves were used as economic machine to work in the production of clove.

Tanzania was not officially colonized until the last two decades of the 19th century. Between 1884 and 1890 German had taken control of Tanganyika (the mainland) in successions. By 1891 the German territory in east Africa had extended beyond Tanganyika (the coast and the mainland). The German administration in Tanzania had nothing but negative impact on the natives. The ruthless regime of the German led to the natives revolt called maji maji revolution in 1905. During the revolt thousand of the native people were killed. However, after World War I the Germans lost Tanganyika, and the territory became a mandated region controlled by the Britain 1922.

Archaeological and historical evidence has shown that the indigenous were spatially segregated and their movement was restricted defined economic boundaries (Rhodes, 2010) during the colonial period in Tanzania.

Like other British colony in Africa (e. g. Nigeria, the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana to mention but a few), Britain established indirect rule in Tanganyika and appointed Sir Donald Cameron as its first governor. Despite the enormity of the complex behavior displayed by the native people, the British administration still regarded them as uncivilized and untamed population who need more superior trainers to put its disarrayed and barbaric institutions together. This is well echoed in Cameron's statement when justifying their mission in Tanzania or Tanganyika: " the mission's obligation is to train the natives that they may stand by themselves ... doing [this] is to build on the institutions of the people themselves, tribal institutions which

have been handed down to them through the centuries. If we set up artificial institution, these institutions can have no inherent stability and must crumble away at the first shock, which they may receive. It is our duty to do everything in our power to develop the native politically on lines suitable to the state of society in which he lives" (Cameron, 1930: 1). However, 20th century native historians (e. g. Isaria Kimambo) have demonstrated that natives Tanzanians have had stable social and political system as early as the 16th century. The political structure of pre 19th century Tanzania was centralized without any form of subjugation of groups or ethnicities. Although political and ritual powers are in the hand of the central figures, the duties are discharged to chiefs in the affairs of each kingdom. Kimambo (1969: 33) suggests that this form of unity, corporation, initiative, and success that existed among the early natives of Tanzania laid the foundation for the realization of the contemporary Tanzania nation.

It is importance to note here that the history of modern Tanzania is the history of Julius Nyerere - the first president of Tanzania. At the return of Nyerere from study expedition in Europe in 1954 he became an advocate for national sovereignty under the auspices of an indigenous political organization called Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). Through a peaceful transition, Tanganyika got independent from Britain in 1961. After three year the native of Tanganyika and Zanzibar reached an accord to become a union state, which resulted into today United Republic of Tanzania. Nyerere's Arusha declaration of 1967 shifts the political ideology of the country towards a socialist policy with the focus to creating Ujamaa (communal) villages. Nyerere's twenty-four year administration in Tanzania

not only monopolized power but also impoverished many natives and polarized the mainland and the coast.

Current State of the Natives and Government Policy

Recently the native minorities in Tanzanian had been put to some difficult situations by the Government policy. In 2006, hundreds of the pastoralist natives were asked to vacate their territory near riverbeds in Mbeya with their over 400, 000 cattle. Also in 2007 the territory of Hadzabe hunter-gatherers in the Serengeti plains was leased to a safari company without the consent of the native minority. These government policies, although claimed to be response to ameliorating environmental degradation in these areas, put the minority indigenous people in hopeless and difficulty situation.

Abidemi Babatunde Babalola

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