**Hidden Histories – Historia** **Zilizofichwa**

**The Project**

Hidden Histories is an oral history project in the coastal areas of Tanga, Tanzania. Developed over 11 years, the aim was to co-create a project with the villagers, who are mostly living with no legal tenancies, or first-generation residents from Zigua, Bondei, Shambaa, Digo and Mbugu peoples, who work mostly as fishermen and on small farms. We documented their lives, thoughts, knowledge and skills.

The museum had a collection of 550 makaramo figures that originated from the area, about 15 miles from where we worked. The makaramo figures were photographed in UK and the images then used to spark conversations in Tanga. It was hard finding people who knew anything about them: eventually three sisters and a daughter (who was a trained and reputable mganga - or healer) gave us the most information.

**Colonial views of Uchawi and Mganga**

The figures were ‘acquired’ in 1958 by the British colonial official Ralph E.S. Tanner. Most colonialists were obsessed with the ideas of ‘traditional’ beliefs and African ways of living, from a very European point of view, (although colonialists often distorted, repressed or rubbished them, even whilst claiming to ‘preserve’ them).

Colonial ‘subjects’ were forced to assimilate although in the coastal regions including Tanga and Pangani there were over 140 rebellions. Colonists feared how spiritual leaders – who were often extremely well known and popular – organized and motivated people to rebel against, ignore or undermine colonial rules.

In contemporary Tanzania there is often a hesitancy to publicly admit to using mganga and waganga. The enormous body of knowledge, and the cheapness of the medical advice still makes it very popular, and many young people see it as a fast, and lucrative way to earn a living.

**What is Mganga and Uchawi?**

There’s a big difference between mganga (healer, or waganga – plural, healers) and uchawi (sorcery) in Tanzania, although they often tend to be muddled when they are discussed in the Global North. This is entirely down to the propaganda spread during colonial rule: Tanzania was occupied by German colonists from 1885 until 1919 when it became a British mandate until independence in 1961.

Mganga are kind, using their power and training for positive ends to heal and cure. Uchawi is sorcery and does not require training. It is used for harm and destruction, sometimes even killing people. Margareth Esther John and her aunts believe makaramo are cursed, and are objects used by witches to cause harm.

**The Future: Should these objects be in a British Museum?**

Today many communities around the world are questioning whether their objects should be in UK museums. The Pitt Rivers welcomes discussions with communities around the future of the collections they hold. The interviewers asked people what they thought about the makaramo figures being in a UK museum and whether they should stay here. We’re thinking about the future by looking at the past.

For the residents of Tanga, there are a range of opinions, no single story:

Mganga is also used to bring good luck: Mama Tausi

Quotes top left:

In 1958 colonial official Ralph E.S. Tanner gave our museum 550 Makaramo figures, misleadingly described as being used to teach morality to young people.

For at least 13 centuries Tanga was a trading port – of enslaved people, ambigris, gold, fish, and goods up and down the East African coast. When Germans took control of Tanga in 1885, then British in 1919, occupancy was brutal and disrespectful. Until independence in 1961, there were over 100 rebellions against pointless taxes and wealth extraction. It is now a protected marine park, as well as the sources of livelihood, leisure and medicinal products. It is earmarked for development as a deep sea port, and a possible oil and liquid gas processing plant, if the predicted reserves are found.

Quotes bottom left:

Mganga is also used to bring good luck: Mama Tausi Haruna Ramadani, a bottle recycler, fruit and fish seller and single mother of five, regularly uses mganga for good luck in her business and her children: “I would love to get my kids into better schools, so they can get into big business. I definitely don’t want them following me in this line of business, not at all.”

Mama Tausi Haruna Ramadani and her son

“At the moment youth are choosing boda boda (motorcycle taxis, and mganga, which are short term options as jobs. They will make us rich and they’re popular. Boda boda business employs the majority of youth in Tanzania…We need to protect ourselves…and the motorbike against uchawi from other drivers”.

Hammadi Kombo (age 21)

“These figures should remain hidden. They should not be left in the open for people to see. If you are found with them, the people will automatically know that you are a witch doctor dealing with evil spirits. All your clients will certainly flee from you. They are clay figurines shaped however you want to form them. Then you send them with a specific purpose to the recipient, the enemy. It enters their body, then they see an image before their eyes, they feel scared all the time and they stagger, and will be screaming…You can make different things out of clay, these makaramo figures are all for cursing, you will hear someone saying this is a chicken, but it’s not”.

Margareth Esther John (trained mganga or healer)

Do you think these objects are dangerous? Why?

Top right:

“In this area, and internationally, I became famous for mafingo, which is where you remove unpleasant things from people’s bodies. Mafingo enters your body at night, possesses you, and then causes aches and pains. I set my traps and I catch the mafingo, like a skilled fisherman with a net. I have the ability and skills, learned since I was a child, over many years. This makaramo figure is used to trap the mafingo and to get rid of them.”

“I’m not afraid of the pictures of makaramo, they are just papers, decorations, not the real thing. If you showed me the real thing, yes, I would definitely be afraid. If you encounter these makaramo in person, face-to-face I would be terrified that they have been invested with curses…once the designated person who has been cursed finds it (and they will find it, because that is part of the curse)…They can either become crazy or even in some cases dies.”

Mwanamvua Salehe

“These makaramo figures are used for cursing people. They’re like drones that the witches live inside. The witches (mafingo) are airborne travelling everywhere. If you wish to do this kind of cursing, it’s a very huge job. This is definitely not healing or medicine, this is witchcraft, this is not traditional medicine.”

Hester Salehe

“They are clay figurines shaped however you want to form them…then you send them with a specific purpose to the recipient, the enemy. If you send them to your enemy, you’ll scare them…it can literally scare you to death.”

Bottom right:

“This one, someone would say I am seeing something with a big nose and big teeth, and it’s frightening, ugly, horrible. It can literally scare you to death. It’s called Saliti, it doesn’t have arms or legs, and it’s a form. When it enters your body, it can suck the blood out of you”.

“No, we do not want them…it’s OK that people can see them…that’s where they should be.”

Mamumvua Salehe

Do you agree with Mwinyi Kombo?

Does discussion about these objects enhance both English and Tanzanian culture?

These clay figures have great importance to the people of Tanga and Tanzania in general. When we look at them, that’s when we start a conversation. That’s how culture grows, as both sides, the Tanzanian and the visitor communicate and explain. I think this desire to learn, and to grow, helps both English and Tanzanian culture to grow.”

Mwinyi Kombo

Do you agree with Mwinyi Kombo?

Does discussion about these objects enhance both English and Tanzanian culture?

“All these things which have been made here, these are natural cultural things. And preserving one’s natural culture and the concepts behind them is a good thing. It’s also about acknowledging the talent and skills that went into making these things. So, if someone in the UK has decided to put this in a museum, they’ve recognised these handmade works are important…We Tanzanians need to be better at preserving the culture for our young people, who perhaps do not understand, or grasp their importance. This is vital. It is vital for us to learn and know about our culture and talents. “

Mywinyi Kombo (a student saving to go to university)

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Very grateful acknowledgements: Dr Samwel Ntapanta, Kala Payne, professor Tony Dowmunt, Professor James Fairhead, Professor Buzz Harrison, Professor Dina Matar, Professor Annabelle Sreberny (RIP). Dr Alison Rooke, Dr Tracey Jensen, Dr Nadine Beckmann, Hannah Conroy, Imogen Slater, Paul Grant, Father Vincent of the Rosminians, Tanga, Marina De Alarcon, Ida Hadjivayanis, Sara Wajid OBE, Professor Jon Henderson, Arturo Rey Da Silva, Jon Blair CBE, Catherine Fitzgibbon, Farah Sameer (Editor).