

THE EFFECTS OF WESTERN CULTURE ON RITES OF PASSAGE AMONG THE HEHE AND BENA SOCIETIES: CASE STUDY IRINGA RURAL DISTRICT

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Western culture impacts the rites of passage among the Hehe and Bena communities in Iringa Rural district, revealing a complex relationship between traditional customs and modern influences. Interviews with community members, including elders and youth, show a strong commitment to cultural preservation despite economic pressures and lifestyle changes. The findings highlight the need to adapt traditional rites by integrating modern elements to maintain relevance for younger generations, fostering cultural evolution. Western media and educational advancements significantly shape local practices, leading to a hybridization of traditions that reflects both resilience and adaptability. The study suggests that cultural preservation efforts, educational programs, and media engagement are vital to sustaining traditional practices within a modern context, offering insights into a balanced approach to cultural development.

Keywords: rites of passage, western culture, tourism, cultural tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Rites of passage are fundamental in communities worldwide, marking key transitions and fostering individual and collective identity. These ceremonies, such as birth, initiation, marriage, and funeral rites, reinforce social cohesion and transmit cultural values. However, globalization and Western cultural influences challenge the integrity of these practices. In Tanzania, the Hehe and Bena societies traditionally uphold elaborate rites of passage integral to their cultural heritage, shaping social roles and community cohesion. Yet, Western influences from colonialism, globalization, and modernization threaten the continuity of these rituals.

Global studies highlight similar challenges. Smith (2006) examines how globalization erodes Native American rites of passage, while Jones (2012) explores how colonialism transformed initiation ceremonies among Aboriginal tribes in Australia. In Africa, Okonkwo (2010)

discusses the impact of colonialism on Igbo initiation rituals in Nigeria, emphasizing Western values and education as forces of change. Moyo (2015) links shifts in Xhosa circumcision rites to urbanization and Western ideologies. Although some Tanzanian studies, like Ng'wanakilala (2018), address broader cultural changes, focused research on the Hehe and Bena rites in Iringa Rural is scarce. This study addresses that gap, examining how Western culture intersects with traditional rites of passage among the Hehe and Bena via education, media, and urbanisation.

The study's findings aim to deepen understanding of African cultural dynamics, offering insights into cultural preservation, community development, and intercultural dialogue. They also seek to guide policymakers, educators, and community leaders on strategies for safeguarding indigenous practices amid globalization pressures.

1.1 Theory of Liminality and Cultural Tourism

According to Turner (1969), the liminal phase in a rite of passage is the transitional period between an individual's old and new status, characterized by a state of "betwixt and between." In this phase, individuals experience ambiguity and openness as social norms and hierarchies are suspended, creating a unique social structure. Turner describes this as a period of *communitas*, where social distinctions like class, gender, and ethnicity are temporarily erased, fostering equality and unity. This transformative experience allows individuals to better understand societal norms, values, and beliefs. Turner's theory has significantly influenced anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies, providing a framework to analyze diverse cultural phenomena, including religious rituals, festivals, political movements, and social protests. Numerous scholars have expanded on his ideas to study liminality and *communitas* across various cultural contexts.

1.2 The Perception of Rite of Passage in Africa

Rites of passage are an important aspect of African cultures, serving as a way to mark important life transitions and reinforce cultural values. According to (Anyanwu, 2019), this study explores the role of rites of passage in African traditional education and highlights their importance in transmitting cultural values. The author argues that these rites help to instil a sense of identity and belonging in young people and provide a framework for their socialization into the broader community. According to (Lema & Kimaro, 2017) the study looks at the traditional healing practices of the Hehe people of Tanzania and highlights the importance of initiation ceremonies as a rite of passage for young people. The authors argue

that these ceremonies play a crucial role in shaping the identity and social roles of young people within their community. The study by Opoku & Boamah (2019) explores the role of rites of passage in traditional Akan society in Ghana and highlights their importance in shaping social identities and reinforcing cultural values. The authors argue that these rites serve as a way of maintaining social order and providing a sense of continuity across generations. In the book of Mwangi, & Ireri. (2018) This study examines the role of rites of passage in sustainable development among the Maasai community in Kenya. The authors argue that these rites play a crucial role in shaping social identities and promoting sustainable practices, such as conservation and community development. Overall, these studies demonstrate the significance of rites of passage in African cultures and their importance in transmitting cultural values, shaping social identities, and promoting sustainable practices

2.0 Methodology.

The methodology chapter of this study outlines the approach and procedures employed to examine the influence of Western culture on the rites of passage among the Hehe and Bena societies in Iringa Rural. This chapter includes a detailed description of the study area, research approach and design, data types and sources, sample population, sampling technique, data collection methods, data processing, analysis, presentation, ethical considerations, time frame, and budget.

The study was conducted in Iringa Rural District, a culturally rich and geographically diverse area known for its unique blend of traditional practices among the Hehe and Bena communities. The Hehe and Bena people are known for their significant rites of passage, which have been impacted by Western cultural influence. This research used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from surveys and demographic analyses with qualitative insights from interviews and observations, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of cultural shifts. A case study design was adopted to provide in-depth insights and facilitate access to sensitive community data, making this approach particularly suitable.

The target population consisted of different groups within Iringa Rural, selected based on their knowledge and relevance to the study topic. Sampling was done through a combination of simple random and purposive sampling to ensure representation and focus. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, enabling researchers to capture both broad trends and detailed personal experiences. In analyzing the data,

quantitative information was processed through SPSS to derive statistical insights, while qualitative data was examined through content analysis to identify patterns and themes. Findings were presented in both descriptive and tabular formats to provide a clear and organized view of the results.

To ensure accuracy and validity, pilot testing was conducted, and expert reviews were sought. Validity was further supported by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, which confirmed the adequacy of the sample and data. Reliability was addressed by ensuring that the methods and instruments used could yield similar results if applied to comparable groups in similar contexts. Ethical considerations, including participant consent and confidentiality, were prioritized throughout the research process.

3.RESULTS

3.1 To Assess the Influence of Western Cultural Values on Traditional Rites of Passage Among the Hehe and Bena Societies in Iringa Rural

The study results reveal a multi-generational impact of Western cultural values on traditional rites of passage among the Hehe and Bena societies in Iringa Rural. Data from 10 elders (12.5% of respondents) show that older generations perceive Western influences as reshaping traditional practices, though they tend to resist complete assimilation. Insights from 30 community members (37.5%) provide a broad view of Western cultural impact across age groups, noting a gradual shift in local traditions. Interviews with 20 teenagers (25%) highlight a notable transformation among younger generations, who often blend traditional customs with modern Western practices. Additionally, 20 individuals engaged with Western media (25%) underscore media's role in shaping perceptions and adaptations of traditional rites. Together, these findings illustrate a nuanced view of cultural transition, with varying degrees of acceptance and adaptation across age groups, suggesting a potential future where traditional and Western practices may increasingly coexist or blend in the Hehe and Bena societies.

"Western culture has significantly transformed our view of traditional rites. Many young people are drawn to modern celebrations because they feel more relatable and engaging. While we don't completely abandon our customs, the influence is undeniable, and we often merge

the traditional with the modern to create a new way of celebrating."

Teenager, Iringa Rural, 2024

In summary, the study highlights a generational shift in the Hehe and Bena societies of Iringa Rural, where Western cultural values influence traditional rites of passage. Elders (12.5%) observe changes yet largely resist full assimilation, while community members (37.5%) recognize a steady shift in customs across age groups. Teenagers (25%) increasingly merge traditional and Western practices, reflecting a substantial transformation among the youth. Additionally, individuals involved in Western media (25%) emphasize the media's role in shaping these evolving perceptions. Overall, the findings suggest an emerging blend of traditional and Western practices that may shape the future cultural landscape of these societies.

4. DISCUSSION

The discussion of findings reveals a complex interaction between the preservation and adaptation of traditional rites of passage among the Hehe and Bena societies in Iringa Rural. Interviews with diverse community members, including elders, teenagers, and individuals involved in Western media, illustrate how Western cultural values influence traditional practices. Many respondents, especially elders, expressed a strong commitment to maintaining traditional rites, viewing them as fundamental to cultural identity, community cohesion, and the transmission of values to younger generations. However, these efforts face challenges due to economic pressures and the influence of Western lifestyles, which create tension between the desire to uphold traditions and the pressures of modernization.

Among younger respondents, particularly teenagers, there is a notable openness to incorporating modern elements into traditional practices. They argue that such adaptation could make these rites more relevant and appealing to contemporary generations, thereby bridging the gap between tradition and modernity. The youth's perspective suggests a pragmatic approach, where integrating modern aspects into traditional rites might ensure their continuity by aligning them with the values and lifestyles of younger generations. This approach reflects a generational difference in attitudes toward cultural preservation and suggests that evolving traditional practices might help sustain cultural heritage in a rapidly modernizing world.

Furthermore, the study highlights the role of Western media and educational advancements in accelerating cultural evolution within these societies. Exposure to global cultural narratives through media and education reshapes perceptions, fostering a hybridization of traditional rites among more educated individuals. Social media and international news, in particular, expose the community to a broad range of cultural influences, prompting a blend of traditional and modern elements in ceremonial practices. Respondents involved in Western media pointed to its significant impact on introducing new ideas, which shape how rites of passage are perceived and practised. Overall, the findings underscore a dynamic balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing elements of modernity, signalling potential future shifts in the cultural landscape of the Hehe and Bena societies.

5. CONCLUSION

The study was conducted to examine how Western cultural values impact traditional rites of passage among the Hehe and Bena societies in Iringa Rural. By gathering insights from various community members, including elders, teenagers, community members, and individuals involved with Western media, the research highlights the tension that exists between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to modern influences. Many respondents, particularly elders and traditionalists, expressed a strong desire to maintain these rites, emphasizing their importance for cultural identity, community cohesion, and the transmission of values from one generation to the next. They view traditional practices as central to the social fabric and as a way to strengthen the bond within the community, imparting wisdom and instilling respect for cultural customs. Yet, there is also a recognition that traditional practices are under pressure from changing socioeconomic factors and Western lifestyle shifts, which challenge the community's ability to sustain these customs in their original forms.

Amid these pressures, younger respondents, especially teenagers, suggested that integrating modern elements into rites of passage could make them more relevant to contemporary life, thus ensuring their survival. This perspective reflects a generational shift, where youth see adaptation as a means to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. For the younger generation, blending traditional practices with modern elements, such as contemporary music or clothing, not only aligns the rites more closely with their everyday experiences but also makes the rituals more appealing and accessible to youth. They believe that adapting these practices is essential to keeping them alive and preventing them from becoming obsolete.

This approach indicates a pragmatic response to modernization, where tradition is preserved not through strict adherence to old customs, but through modification that honours the essence of the rites while accommodating modern influences.

Additionally, the study underscores the significant role of Western media and educational advancements in reshaping perceptions of traditional practices. Through exposure to global cultural narratives via media and education, community members especially those engaged with Western media are experiencing a blend of traditional and modern values. Western media introduces new cultural ideas that, in turn, influence how rites of passage are understood and celebrated, leading to the hybridization of traditional practices. This dynamic evolution shows a cultural landscape in which traditional and modern values are not mutually exclusive but instead coexist, influence each other, and contribute to a unique cultural synthesis within the Hehe and Bena societies. Overall, the findings illustrate a complex process of cultural adaptation, where resilience and flexibility allow these communities to preserve their heritage while adapting to global cultural influences.

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