

## Shake It:

A study of traditional dance and drumming in Tanzania  
with the African Traditional Dance Group



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## **Abstract**

This study was conducted from April 11<sup>th</sup> 2009 to May 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 about Tanzanian traditional dance and drumming focusing specifically on the African Traditional Dance Group, ATDG, a well-established group in Arusha, Tanzania. The study aimed to gain perspectives on the role of traditional dance and drumming in Tanzania and how it is changing today in the face of westernization and globalization, and additionally to learn more about the personal histories of the artists in ATDG. Methods included participant observation, in the form of dance and drumming lessons and participation in group rehearsals, a semi-structured key informant interview, and semi-structured interviews with eleven additional artists out of a total of fifteen in the group. These eleven interviewees were non-randomly selected based on availability during the study period. Results showed that traditional dance in Tanzania plays an important role in educating society, and specifically the new generation. There was, however, a clear consensus among those interviewed, that this role is rapidly changing today. Although the key informant interview, conducted prior to the formal start of the study period, implied that traditional dance and drumming are at risk of becoming obsolete, further interviews and participation in the group revealed that opinions on this issue are variable. Several other themes were evident among respondents concerning both personal histories as well as the importance of traditional dance and drumming in Tanzanian culture.

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## Introduction

Around the world, globalization and modernization are influencing and changing traditional cultures. Communication and the spread of information have become easier and tremendously faster now that technology such as televisions, radios, computers with Internet, and cell phones have become more available. As a result there has been an increase in the transfer of traditions and values between peoples and cultures. Initially anthropologists feared that globalization would have a homogenizing effect. In his article, *Globalizing Africa*, James Ferguson asks,

“What was the fate of cultural difference in a world where fewer and fewer people lived in conditions that could be understood as those of pristine isolation; a world where ever increasing proportions of people lived in cities, drove cars, and watched television; a world where such emblems of an expanding U.S. culture as the English language, pop music, blue jeans, and McDonald’s seemed to be expanding across the globe?” (30)

As it turns out, the rapidity of cultural exchange resulting from globalization has proven to have an effect opposite of homogenization. In fact some would argue that this cultural exchange and mixture has redefined many cultures rather than erased or replaced them. Unfortunately, however, it appears that instead of exchange *between* cultures, there has been more of a one-directional transfer of ideas and values, what some would call ‘westernization.’ American music videos, for instance, appear on the one-channel televisions in the homes of Bangatan villagers in Northern Tanzania (personal observation).

Unlike the United States where indigenous culture is lacking because the majority of the native people were killed when the European settlers moved in, a significant amount of traditional culture remains in Africa today. Additionally, a disregard for tribal boundaries when Africa was divided up by various colonizing governments resulted in a bounty of

nation-states, each home to hundreds of different ethnic groups with their own language and unique culture. Tanzania, for instance, is home to 123 different ethnic groups (Matthews, D&D Lecture Notes, 2009). Unfortunately, this remaining richness of traditional culture also means there is more to lose. Many African cultures and traditions are changing today, and in some cases disappearing, in the face of westernization and modern-day globalization. Numerous traditional languages, for instance, are being lost as is evidenced by the fact that many children today do not speak the mother tongue of their grandparents (Matthews, pers.comm., 2009).

*Ngoma na ngoma za asili*, traditional drumming and dance, is another aspect of many traditional Tanzanian cultures that many would argue is rapidly changing in the face of globalization (Mbangu, pers.comm., 2009). Each tribe has its own form of dance and many tribes have several distinct dances within their tribe. For instance, there may be different types of dance for women, young people, mixed ages, and so on; thus there are countless forms of traditional dance and music in Tanzania alone. Traditionally dance and music has held an important role in Tanzanian culture, and was used to teach lessons, spread messages, and share news. Dancing and drumming in the villages brought people together and acted as a signal of events such as war or celebration (Chrse, pers.comm., 2009). According to Nimla Mbangu, the leader of the African Traditional Dance Group in Arusha Tanzania, the role of traditional dance in Tanzania is changing and with televisions, radios, and Internet available to spread news today, its importance is decreasing (Mbangu, pers.comm., 2009).

In an attempt to keep traditional dance alive and teach others about it, Mbangu and four colleagues started the African Traditional Dance Group (ATDG) based out of Arusha, Tanzania. This group is their way of keeping alive traditional culture that is at risk of being lost in the face of westernization. Although traditional dance is meant to educate the new generation and was traditionally passed down through the ages, Mbangu is concerned that

many young people and students in Tanzania today, especially those living in larger cities such as Arusha, no longer know much about the traditional dance and music from their cultures. Many do, however, know the latest hip-hop songs (Mbangu, pers.comm. 2009). According to Mbangu the growth in popularity of hip-hop music is greatly affecting Tanzanian perspectives and attitudes. He attributes this to the idea that while hip-hop artists are visibly successful because they have cars and other tangible wealth, traditional dancers are seen as less successful because traditional dance does not generate nearly as much income (Mbangu, pers.comm., 2009).

Although traditional dance can be performed to generate income today, its origins are in the bush where it was, and remains to be among certain tribes, simply a way of life. ATDG, based in a city, aims to continue these traditions by performing dances from many different tribes throughout Tanzania. Their performances are primarily a mix of traditional dance, drumming, and singing, and audiences include both tourists and locals. They also make all of their own instruments and costumes. On occasion the group also performs comedy theater and masked dance. Currently the group does performances in and around Tanzania for government functions, tour companies, and schools.

This independent study project was a case study of ATDG that explored artists' perspectives on the changing role of traditional dance and drumming in Tanzanian culture. The study included participant observation and semi-structured artist interviews. The following section on the history of ATDG is based on information and opinions gathered from Mbangu during a key-informant interview that took place prior to the formal start of the study and thus does not encompass the thoughts and opinions of all artists interviewed.

## **History and Organization of ATDG**

Nimla Mbangi and four colleagues started the African Traditional Dance Group (ATDG) in 1994. Having grown up in Morogoro as part of the Mpogoro tribe, Mbangi was surrounded by traditional dance throughout his childhood. Although his father wanted him to go to seminary school and study to be a priest, many other people in his life recognized his talent for dance and eventually his father agreed to send him to Bagamoyo College of Art where he studied music and dance for three years.

In 1994 Mbangi came to Arusha to visit several different cultural groups. He met with a group working at Saba Saba Hotel and, with four of the members, started their own group. They purchased materials, made some of their own drums and recruited some other artists from the Saba Saba group. Within one month the tour company HOPE found out about the group and booked them to entertain their guests. Using the money made from their first performance they were able to buy materials to make costumes and promote the group. Later that year the group made contact with Nature Friends House of Reginbar in Bangata and in 1996 they were given the opportunity to travel to Germany for eight performances.

They have performed in Arusha for honorable guests such as former United States Presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush. They were invited by the government of Kenya to participate in Kenyan national functions and festivals, and they have also traveled to Uganda. Through a connection with a student organization in America they have received three invitations to perform in the U.S. but unfortunately all three of these invitations have fallen through due to unforeseen circumstances, including 9/11.

Most members of the group have learned dance in local ways, following behind their brothers and sisters. It is a principle of the group that to dance well the artists must also be able to teach the dances. Because there is a diversity of ethnic groups among the artists, all of whom learned different dances growing up, ATDG is able to perform and teach dances from

all over Tanzania. Occasionally Mbangu also uses videos from Bagamoyo College to learn and teach dances.

ATDG currently includes fifteen artists, five women and ten men. ATDG never closes the door to those who are interested because teaching dance and getting more artists involved is their way of spreading their culture and preserving traditional dance. The application process to join the group includes a letter of interest from the applicant followed by a three-month trial period in which the current artists and the prospective member can get to know each other. If after three months the applicant is still interested, he/she fills out a form with his/her information and is officially recognized as being part of the group. The new member begins performing only a few dances at first and his/her pay increases with the amount of time spent in the group.

ATDG performs for tourists and local audiences, conducts workshops, and sells CDs of their music. Most of their income comes from performances. Money generated by ATDG activities is first used to pay the artists and the remaining balance is put into a group bank account and used to repair instruments and costumes, purchase materials, and provide financial assistance to sick artists.

Although many of the artists engage in other income generating activities, ATDG is very active. They average three rehearsals each week and can have up to four performances each month, although this varies with the season. Their clients include hotels, tour companies, governments, NGOs, and they also perform at weddings. Their leading client is Abercrombie and Kent, a Tanzanian safari company. During the high season they may have three or four performances in a row, while during the low season this is much more rare. After speaking with more of the artists it became apparent that in the past year the group has been struggling to book performances and has not had a performance in several months (Liyando, pers.comm., 2009).

## **Methods**

This study project took place in Arusha, Tanzania between April 10<sup>th</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009. The sample frame for this project was all established traditional dance groups in Northern Tanzania and the sample population was the African Traditional Dance Group in Arusha. I used non-random sampling since all of the people involved in my study were members of the African Traditional Dance Group. My specific methods included a key informant interview with the leader of ATDG, semi-structured interviews with eleven other ATDG artists, and participant observation which included private training in both dance and drumming. Each of these methods is explained in greater detail below:

### *Key Informant Interview*

During prep week I conducted a key informant interview with Nimla Mbangu to get basic information about the ATDG including history of the group and details about its organization and function (Appendix A). I also learned about his perspectives on the role of traditional dance and music in Tanzanian culture and how this is changing now as a result of globalization, modernization, and westernization. This interview was conducted in English.

### *Artist Interviews*

During the project period I conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven of the fifteen artists in ATDG (Appendix B). These semi-structured interviews had two major sections: personal histories as they relate to traditional dance and drumming, and perspectives on the role of traditional dance and drumming in Tanzanian culture and how it is changing as a result of modernization and globalization. Several interviews took place in the homes of the artists and the rest took place at the AICC Club, the group rehearsal space. I employed a translator when conducting these interviews since all of the interviewees spoke Kiswahili as their primary language. I took interview notes in English. Some questions were difficult to translate directly and were thus adjusted throughout the interview process. For example, a

question about the ‘role’ of traditional dance and drumming turned into a question about the ‘importance’ of traditional dance and drumming. These adjustments, however, did not affect the accuracy or validity of the data collected.

### *Participant Observation*

Throughout the study period I observed and participated in all group rehearsals. Rehearsals took place for two hours three times each week. In order to effectively participate in the group during weekly rehearsals and make valid observations, I took seven dance lessons and five drumming lessons. Through this participation I got to know the artists and observe the role that dance plays in their lives. This experience additionally provided the opportunity for me to add my perspective, as a student learning traditional dance with ATDG, to those collected about dance throughout the study period (see Appendix C).

During the first week of my study, from April 4<sup>th</sup> to April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009 I attended private dance lessons daily. During the second week, from April 11<sup>th</sup> to April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, I studied drumming and conducted the semi-structured artist interviews. Throughout both of these two weeks I attended and participated in all scheduled ATDG rehearsals on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday afternoons. During the third week, from April 21<sup>st</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 I continued participation in rehearsals employing the skills I learned during my lessons. Additionally, in combination with learning the dances and drumming, I learned about the history and significance of the traditional dances that I was studying.

During my data collection I gained interview data and observation data. Interview data included personal histories regarding traditional dance and drumming, and individual perspectives on the changing role of traditional dance and drumming today. For analysis at the end of the study I created tables to represent themes extracted from the responses in order to draw some conclusions about commonalities in the personal histories of the artists as well as their perspectives on traditional dance and drumming.

## Results and Discussion

In order to best represent the artists and what they shared during the interviews I have extracted themes found in their responses. I will report my findings based on these themes using tables followed by a discussion of each theme that includes specific quotes and anecdotes from the interviews. Aside from Nimla Mbangu, the leader of the group, all of the respondents referred to below are artists in the African Traditional Dance Group, ATDG. The themes presented below generally progress in the order of questions asked from personal history through to perspectives on the role of traditional dance.

When asked about personal history responses varied from hour or more long life stories to a few minutes of detail leading up to participation in ATDG. As there was a range of ages among the participants it seemed that the younger members tended to tell longer stories and the older members were more brief. Although I had several questions planned to draw out specifics, most respondents ended up answering these questions through telling their stories from the beginning, volunteering details such as when they started dancing, which groups they had been in and how they came to be part of ATDG. Since I entered this world of traditional music knowing little about it and quickly observed that all of the artists were very talented, I expected that many of them would have learned dance formally, as is common in America for most talented dancers. The interview responses proved otherwise. See Table 1.

<b>Table 1: How did you learn to dance?</b>	Frequency
In a local way	8
With a dance group	5
In school	3

Note: Data was collected in Arusha Tanzania in a series of twelve semi-structured interviews with artists in the African Traditional Dance Group. Data includes a key informant interview that was conducted on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 before the official start of the study and thus followed a slightly different list of questions. The rest of the interviews occurred between April 18<sup>th</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> 2009. All interviewees were non-randomly selected based on availability. The total frequency in this table adds up to more than twelve because many respondents discussed more than one of the categories that appear in the table.

The majority of the artists in the group learned to dance and drum growing up simply because it was a part of their culture and tribal tradition. Even among those who reported

learning dance in other ways, many also grew up dancing as a part of their traditional culture. Several artists reported that in addition to learning dance in local ways, they had learned more formally once they joined traditional dance groups. Of twelve people interviewed only three of the artists had also learned traditional dance in school. Mbangu was the only member of the group who studied dance in university; the other two learned during primary school. Even Mbangu, however, had become initially interested in dance because he had grown up dancing as part of his traditional culture (Mbangu, pers.comm., 2009).

Beda Christopher Emanuell shared that in his tribe, Mmakonde, there is great emphasis on dance and drumming. When he was growing up they celebrated three times each year with dancing and food, and they played drums every weekend in his village. The boys were circumcised at a very young age in a major celebration in the bush with a lot of drumming and food. Here they learned about respecting both their elders as well as those that come after them. By watching all the dancing and drumming going on around them as they grew up, Mmakonde children learned to do these things well because by the time they were ready for circumcision they had to be skilled at drumming. Beda was especially talented and at age eighteen the Tanzanian Tourist Corporation came to his village looking for skilled artists and selected him to return to Arusha to train at Saba Saba Hotel for their traditional dance group (Emanuell, pers.comm., 2009).

It was at Saba Saba hotel where Beda worked with and met several of the other founding members of ATDG, a group that was born out of the artists working at Saba Saba after the management changed and took priority away from traditional dance. See Table 2.

<b>Table 2: How did you find out about ATDG?</b>	Frequency
Worked at Saba Saba	8
Came to Arusha for work	8
Recruited to come to Arusha for dance	4

Note: Data was collected in Arusha Tanzania in a series of twelve semi-structured interviews with artists in the African Traditional Dance Group. Data includes a key informant interview that was conducted on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 before the official start of the study and thus followed a slightly different list of questions. The rest of the interviews occurred between April 18<sup>th</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> 2009. All interviewees were non-randomly selected based on availability. The total frequency in this table adds up to more than twelve because many respondents discussed more than one of the categories that appear in the table.

Of the eight artists who worked at Saba Saba prior to ATDG, four of them had been recruited from their villages to come work there as traditional dancers and drummers. The other four came to Arusha looking for work and happened to find it with Saba Saba. Several of the artists working at Saba Saba had concurrently been practicing with their own private group and when the hotel was sold to new management that pulled focus and funding away from traditional dance, these artists left the hotel to officially establish ATDG. Those who did not learn about ATDG through Saba Saba all had fascinating stories of serendipitous events that led them to the group.

Juma Hamisi, known by the group as Sero, although only 24 years old, had a long history with traditional dance before stumbling upon ATDG. He grew up in Dar es Salaam and had danced with several groups there before coming to Arusha. On one trip to perform in Bagamoyo the leader of his group disappeared with all of their money, and Sero and his group were forced to perform in the streets and villages to raise money to pay for the guesthouse and to get back to Dar. When they realized that performing was not making enough money, they decided to sell everything they owned in order to get home. Back in Dar he suffered through a case of typhoid that he had contracted by drinking well water in the bush when he and the group had had no money to buy fresh water. Eventually he joined another group in Dar that traveled to Zanzibar to perform and there he met a girl who took him to Arusha to help revive a dwindling dance group there. Sero eventually decided to

return home to Dar because times were hard and life was getting difficult. A few nights before departing he went to stay in the house of an old man he knew in Arusha who happened to know Mbangi and this man brought Sero to meet Mbangi and ATDG. The dance group immediately recognized his talent and although he was on his way back to Dar, ATDG paid for his return to Arusha to work with them (Hamisi, pers.comm., 2009).

Kevin Faustin, another artist, shared a story about coming to Arusha looking for work and running into Bahati Abdu Juma Liyando, one of the original members of ATDG, on the street. He knew her from having danced with her in Tanga and when they met she told him about ATDG and he went to see what they were doing. He has been with ATDG ever since (Faustin, pers.comm., 2009).

Awadh Ramadhani Mwikmi, a young member of the group, shared a lengthy story about several groups he had danced and traveled with before happening upon ATDG when a girl he was working with in Arusha brought him to meet the group only three months ago. While watching one of their rehearsals he recognized a mistake they were making in coordinating the drumming and singing for one of their dances. When he expressed this to the group, they became immediately interested in his skill and knowledge of traditional music (Mwikmi, pers.comm., 2009) and, based on my observation and experience with him as one of my dance teachers, it is evident that he is a valued member of the group today.

Having learned the detailed histories of each artist it was clear that many of them worked very hard to get to where they are today. A few respondents mentioned that there were people in their lives who tried to discourage them from pursuing traditional music. Many had traveled with several different groups before coming to Arusha and finding ATDG. Additionally, when asked about what other people think of traditional dancers, while responses varied, the majority expressed that society has a generally negative view of them.

Responses to ‘Why do you dance’ generally demonstrated that it was worth the struggle. See

Table 3.

<b>Table 3: Why do you dance?</b>	Frequency
It's in my blood	7
I love it	7
To educate society	5
To generate income	4
To maintain tradition	2
For exercise	2

Note: Data was collected in Arusha Tanzania in a series of twelve semi-structured interviews with artists in the African Traditional Dance Group. Data includes a key informant interview that was conducted on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 before the official start of the study and thus followed a slightly different list of questions. The rest of the interviews occurred between April 18<sup>th</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> 2009. All interviewees were non-randomly selected based on availability. The total frequency in this table adds up to more than twelve because many respondents discussed more than one of the categories that appear in the table.

It was clear from spending time with this group that they love what they do and have a deep connection to traditional music. It is unlikely that any of them could be so talented and committed without such a passion. While a few people mentioned that this is their job and they do it for income, all four of these respondents also gave other reasons making it clear that none of the artists interviewed do this job just for money. Many artists discussed the difficulty of making money as a traditional dancer and thus it is clear that there is more to it than income. This was easily observable having participated in the group and learned to dance with them. The artists come alive when they dance and they do it because it means something to them.

During the key informant interview Mbangu shared, “When I go to dance and play the drums I feel happy. I feel alive” (Mbangu, pers.comm.,2009). Zainabu Liputa Mwachali, another original member of ATDG, said “If there comes a day that I will not be able to go dance, I will feel sick” (Mwachali, pers.comm., 2009). Oscar Mussa Kiluli, also an original member, mentioned “Without traditional dance and exercising, I will become old” (Kiluli, pers.comm., 2009). In observing and participating in several dances, the artists’ love for traditional dance and music was practically palpable.

Another question that elicited similar responses among the entire group was about the importance of traditional dance in Tanzanian culture. See Table 4.

<b>Table 4: What is the importance of traditional dance?</b>	Frequency
Educate society	12
Educate the new generation	11*
Maintain history and tradition	8
Send a message/signal	3
Bring people together	2
Other	3

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Since each dance and song has a message and serves a specific purpose, traditional dance and music is meant to be educational. This was evident through the fact that educating society was discussed by all twelve respondents in response to this question. While many dances serve to educate society about history and tradition, many brought up the importance of educating society about AIDS, and one respondent specifically mentioned educating tribes that still circumcise women not to do this, and teaching about the dangers of using the same tool to circumcise several people (Mkoballa, pers.comm., 2009). Several respondents discussed traditional dance as a means by which to educate people in remote villages that the government cannot access. Anderson Leonard Mkoballa, better known as Baba Alex, pointed out that traditional dance is more effective than leaflets sent by the government since most of the recipients cannot even read Kiswahili (Mkoballa, pers.comm., 2009).

Eleven of the twelve respondents specifically mentioned the importance of educating the new generation. Of these eleven people, only six of them brought up the new generation in response to this specific question. The remaining five spoke about the importance of educating the new generation in response to different questions. It is thus telling that of twelve artists interviewed only one did not bring up the new generation at all until I asked about it. This respondent was in fact the youngest member of the group. Education of the new

generation referred primarily to teaching younger members of society about the past, and their ancestors and traditions. It appears, however, that this is in itself an important part of traditional music and dance, as eight of the twelve artists discussed maintaining history and tradition separately from education.

Throughout the interview process discussions about the importance of traditional dance were followed by asking if the role and importance of traditional dance was different in the past than it is today. All twelve artists agreed that the role of traditional dance is rapidly changing and had very similar ideas about what these changes mean. Several interesting conversations followed regarding the effects of modernization and globalization on this traditional art form, however, I was surprised to learn that not everyone in the group seemed to think that traditional dance was at risk of becoming obsolete.

Table 5 is a synthesis of all the artists' ideas about the changing role of traditional dance.

**Table 5: How does the role of traditional dance today differ from the past?**

Past	Today
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional dance and drumming had meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional dance is trying to be commercial; it is done for money</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone knew traditional dance and could identify it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People cannot identify traditional dances, even their own</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional dance was always passed down through generations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many young people do not know their own tribe's traditional dances</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional dance was simply a part of life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional dance is organized and rehearsed and requires money for costumes, etc.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone liked traditional dance, everyone attended when it happened</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many people are more interested in modern music such as reggae, bongo flava and hip-hop</li> </ul>

Note: Data was collected in Arusha Tanzania in a series of twelve semi-structured interviews with artists in the African Traditional Dance Group. Data includes a key informant interview that was conducted on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 before the official start of the study and thus followed a slightly different list of questions. The rest of the interviews occurred between April 18<sup>th</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> 2009. All interviewees were non-randomly selected based on availability. The total frequency in this table adds up to more than twelve because many respondents discussed more than one of the categories that appear in the table.

The most common response was that traditional dance used to have meaning and significance in society, whereas today it is more commercial and most commonly done for

income. Fatina Athuman discussed the fact that in the past when you heard drumming, it was known to mean something such as war, celebration, or natural disaster. It was a signal of something important, and it was a way to call people together to spread messages and news (Athuman, pers.comm., 2009). Dancing was a central part of life and performances were done in public for society whereas today it is an income generating activity and requires capital to be successful because there are expenses such as costumes, transport, and artist salaries. Zainabu mentioned that life today is generally more difficult and people need money to buy nice clothes and nice things, whereas life used to be simpler and people just wore skins and danced and sang as a way of life. Money was not as much of a concern because people required less (Mwahali, pers.comm., 2009).

A few artists also talked about people today no longer being able to recognize and identify traditional music and dance. More than one respondent discussed a hypothetical scenario in which a random person on the street were asked to sing a traditional song or do a dance from his or her tribe and noted that they would most likely be unable to do this. Wilhelmina K. Anderson, also known as Mama Alex took this a step further adding that today, if she were to sing a song from the Maasai tradition, even some Maasai would be unable to recognize this as their own music (Anderson, pers.comm., 2009). According to several respondents this lack of knowledge of traditional music is especially evident in schools and among young people who likely all know the latest hip-hop songs but could not sing a song from their own tribe. This was a major concern for many of the interviewees, many of them noting that a major change today is that modern music is pulling attention away from traditional song and dance. This discussion continued as I asked about the effects of globalization and development on traditional dance. See Table 6.

<b>Table 6: What are the effects of globalization and development?</b>	Frequency
Modern music (bongo flava, hip-hop)	8
Increased communication and technology	4
Government not supporting dance	2
Middle man getting more money	1
High cost of supplies, transport, etc.	1
Copying from the west	1

Note: Data was collected in Arusha Tanzania in a series of twelve semi-structured interviews with artists in the African Traditional Dance Group. Data includes a key informant interview that was conducted on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 before the official start of the study and thus followed a slightly different list of questions. The rest of the interviews occurred between April 18<sup>th</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> 2009. All interviewees were non-randomly selected based on availability. The total frequency in this table adds up to more than twelve because many respondents discussed more than one of the categories that appear in the table.

The most common effect discussed was the current popularity of modern music, such as bongo flava and hip-hop, which has captured the attention of many Tanzanians and effectively detracted from the popularity and importance of traditional music. Four people specifically discussed increase in television, radio, Internet, and other modern media as the transmitter of all of the modern music and ideas that are currently drawing attention away from traditional dance and music. During the key informant interview Mbangu shared a firm belief that modernization is occurring so rapidly here that in twenty years traditional dance will have disappeared completely (Mbangu, pers.comm., 2009). I expected that most of the other artists would agree, however, I was surprised to find that many seemed confident that traditional dance would survive even in the face of westernization. See Table 7.

<b>Table 7: Do you agree that traditional dance will be gone in 20 years?</b>	Frequency
Yes	6
No	3
Depends	3

Note: Data was collected in Arusha Tanzania in a series of twelve semi-structured interviews with artists in the African Traditional Dance Group. Data includes a key informant interview that was conducted on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 before the official start of the study and thus followed a slightly different list of questions. The rest of the interviews occurred between April 18<sup>th</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> 2009. All interviewees were non-randomly selected based on availability.

Including Mbangu himself, half of the respondents agreed completely that traditional dance is at risk of becoming obsolete. The other half were split between disagreeing, and believing that it would depend on such things as how hard they worked to preserve traditional

dance and the degree to which the new generation becomes educated about and interested in traditional music. When questioned further, those who believed traditional dance was disappearing had very similar opinions about why this was so. Even those who did not agree completely that traditional dance would become obsolete did raise concerns about the changing role of traditional dance today, especially in light of western influences. Thus, the table below includes responses from all interviewees and not only those who answered yes to the question above. See Table 8.

<b>Table 8: Why is traditional dance disappearing/changing?</b>	Frequency
Lack of government support	10
Modernization of the new generation	8
Popularity of bongo flava and hip-hop	6
Tanzanians not interested in traditional music	6
Lack of money (support and income)	6
Life is difficult now, no reason to celebrate	2

Note: Data was collected in Arusha Tanzania in a series of twelve semi-structured interviews with artists in the African Traditional Dance Group. Data includes a key informant interview that was conducted on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 before the official start of the study and thus followed a slightly different list of questions. The rest of the interviews occurred between April 18<sup>th</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> 2009. All interviewees were non-randomly selected based on availability. The total frequency in this table adds up to more than twelve because many respondents discussed more than one of the categories that appear in the table.

Many of these reasons match up well with effects of globalization and development listed in Table 6. It is interesting to note, however, that while only two people brought up lack of government support as an effect of globalization, this was the most common response to the question of why traditional dance is disappearing. In fact throughout all twelve interviews, only two people did not bring up the role of the government at all, thus demonstrating that the government plays, or should be playing, a major part in preserving traditional music and dance. Many agreed that the government should be responsible for the preservation of traditional culture and were concerned and frustrated that while the government provides support for national teams such as football, it pays little attention to traditional dance and is therefore to blame for its disappearance. Several artists noted that anytime an important leader from abroad comes to Tanzania, the government all of a sudden

wants a traditional dance performance, however, they pay very little and as soon as the honored guest departs, traditional dance and music is forgotten again.

Awadh expressed concern that most of Tanzanian government is based in Dar, a large city that is overwhelmingly affected by globalization. He also talked specifically about the prime minister who is from Dodoma, who grew up in town with money, and thus knows very little about traditional music and does not care about the people around Tanzania sweating and working hard to educate the new generation. If Tanzanian leaders do not know about traditional music or cannot grasp its importance, it will be very difficult to get support from the government (Mwikmi, pers.comm., 2009).

Mama Alex shared similar opinions responding to the question of whether dance would disappear in twenty years with '*Kabisa!* [Completely!] Less than 20 years!' Not only did she attribute this to the government but like other respondents, she discussed the lack of interest in traditional music among Tanzanians (Anderson, pers.comm.,2009). She and several other artists posed a hypothetical situation in which there were a traditional dance performance and a hip-hop or bongo flava performance occurring at the same time, noting that all the Tanzanians would go to see the bongo flava while the *wazungu*, white people, would go to see traditional dance. She continued that only white people come to learn dance; there are no Tanzanians who have wanted to learn traditional dance with them. She expressed concern that in ten years maybe the *wazungu* will be the ones to come back and teach the Tanzanians their own traditional dances and maybe then the government will realize the importance of traditional dance, but it will be too late (Anderson, pers.comm.,2009).

Others had very different opinions that seemed more hopeful about the fate of traditional dance. Zainabu grew up in a village where traditional dance and drumming thrived. "When I was growing up," she shared, "people would skip school just to dance." When asked whether this continues today, she told about visiting her village in 2000 and

noticing that everyone was still dancing, maybe more so than when she was growing up. She expressed that when people see traditional dance it makes them remember their roots. She firmly believes that because everyone has his or her own tribe and culture, anyone who does not see the importance of traditional music or says that it no longer exists has no roots or understanding of where they come from (Mwahali, pers.comm., 2009). Unlike hip-hop or bongo flava, traditional music has meaning and transcends time. Fatina added that although Tanzanians may prefer to attend a hip-hop or bongo flava performance, they would eventually go back to traditional music (Athuman, pers.comm., 2009). Despite these hopeful views of the future of traditional dance these artists still expressed that it is the responsibility of the government to preserve these traditions and that currently the government is neglecting to fulfill this role.

Two years ago Oscar went to the government requesting a loan to build a center for cultural exchange. He envisioned a headquarters for traditional dance in which exchange of dance and ideas could take place between countries in Africa as well as with Western countries. He was not given an answer at the time and two years later he has not heard anything (Kiluli, pers.comm., 2009).

The lack of support for traditional dance from the government makes it difficult for these artists generate income doing this job. Sero explained his realization that Tanzanians generally tend to respect people with respectable, salary paying jobs (Hamisi, pers.comm., 2009), and thus traditional dancers are often viewed negatively in society and in fact many people consider this job a waste of time . See Table 9.

<b>Table 9: How are traditional dancers viewed in society?</b>	Frequency
Negatively	5
Positively	3
Both	3

Note: Data was collected in Arusha Tanzania in a series of twelve semi-structured interviews with artists in the African Traditional Dance Group. Data includes a key informant interview that was conducted on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 before the official start of the study and thus followed a slightly different list of questions. The rest of the interviews occurred between April 18<sup>th</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> 2009. All interviewees were non-randomly selected based on availability. The total frequency in this table adds up to more than twelve because many respondents discussed more than one of the categories that appear in the table.

Mama Alex made the point, however, that if the government were to support traditional dance, the dancers could make more money and maybe then Tanzanians would see traditional dance as a respectable job and value traditional music more. Government support would not only create meaningful, respectable jobs that kept people busy, but it could help slow down what she believes to be a rapid disappearance of traditional music (Anderson, pers.comm., 2009).

Others expressed different views such as the opinion that traditional dancers are unique and educate society and are thus generally respected. Kevin, for example, firmly believed that everyone has a positive view of traditional dancers and thinks they are great people. He shared that when they perform they always get larger audiences than expected and that in comparison to hip-hop and bongo flava dancers, most people prefer traditional dancers (Faustin, pers.comm., 2009). “It depends on how you want to show yourself,” said Beda, one of the three who answered ‘both’. “If you let yourself down then people will think ‘Oh you’re nothing. You’re just a drummer.’ If you work hard people will understand how important it is and respect you” (Emanuell, pers.comm., 2009). He also mentioned that in order to gain respect, it is important to have an aim, such as to educate or to entertain, so that people understand what it is you are trying to achieve (Emanuell, pers.comm., 2009).

Throughout the interview process it became evident that all of the artists have personal goals as well as hopes for the future of traditional dance and drumming. While

responses varied, the most common goal was to see ATDG succeed. When questioned further about what success would mean for ATDG, several respondents mentioned performing abroad, and almost half of the respondents discussed their hopes for ATDG to be able to build its own site and move from the small, cramped space that they have been working in. “I am praying to God that we will be able to build our own place that is big so we can be happy and comfortable” (Chrse, pers.comm., 2009). This would not only give ATDG greater recognition but could draw attention to traditional dance and music in general. Bahati Abdu Juma Liyando, another artist in ATDG and one of my teachers, dreams of ATDG having their own center that would include a hostel for street children to give them a home, food, and educate them about traditional dance (Liyando, pers.comm., 2009). Beda would like to assure that when visitors come to Tanzania they know about ATDG and where to find them, rather than having to hear about them through other people (Emanuell, pers.comm., 2009). Sero, although aware that this is just a dream for now, has hopes of traditional dance attracting tourism just like national parks do today (Hamisi, pers.comm.,2009).

Most artists acknowledged that all of their goals would require financial support, and while several mentioned their hopes for government support, seven of the twelve interviewees requested my help, either directly or indirectly. After finishing my questions I gave each artist an opportunity to share anything else they wanted that had not come up in the interview. During this time I was repeatedly asked to spread the word and to talk to people in America about this group and let them know that ATDG is in need of support to succeed. Many seemed to expect that I might be able to help organize performances abroad. I assured all of them that we would be performing together for the entire group of S.I.T. students, however, I am still questioning what I can do for this group once I return to America.

One thing that came up repeatedly throughout rehearsals was that I learned these dances well enough to take them back to America with me and teach people there. I plan to

do this but I cannot imagine that they will have the same meaning to anyone who has not spent time in Tanzania or with this group of artists. Throughout this study period I got to know the artists in ATDG very well and learned a tremendous amount. Learning to dance, drum, and sing, as well as conducting the artist interviews instilled in me a deep respect and appreciation for traditional dance and music in Tanzania. In a journal reflection following one of the first rehearsals I attended I wrote, "...afterwards I watched them dance and it was so much fun. I couldn't stop smiling. They are such good dancers and so full of energy, and when I watch them having so much fun I can tell how much traditional music and dance means to them. It's a joy to watch them in their element."

When leaving Mama Alex's house after conducting my first two interviews, she and her husband expressed to me that every time I come to dance with ATDG it encourages them to work hard and do better to continue spreading their traditions and culture (Anderson, pers.comm., 2009). Sero shared a similar sentiment when, after finishing my questions I asked if he had anything to add, and, expecting him to ask for my help and support as most of the others had, he simply thanked me and said that he appreciates that I come to work with them because it reassures the group that their culture and traditions are meaningful and valuable (Hamisi, pers.comm.,2009).

## **Limitations and Recommendations**

### Limitations

- Not all members of ATDG were in Arusha during the project period and thus I was unable to meet and interview all of them.
- Although translating was effective and went very smoothly, being unable to communicate directly with the artists during the interview limited the flow of the interview and my ability to ask follow-up questions.
- The questions for the key informant interview conducted during prep week differed slightly from those asked to the rest of the artists during the study period. This created some difficulty during analysis as it made it more difficult to incorporate key informant responses into the themes extracted from the rest of the interviews.
- ATDG did not have any performances booked during my study project period and thus my personal observation was based solely on personal lessons and group rehearsals. Although performing is a major component of this group, I did not have the opportunity to see the group perform other than during the final performance that took place as part of my ISP Presentation, in which I performed with them.

### Recommendations

- Choose one point person with which to make all arrangements because it can be complicated to make plans with several different artists at once.
- Conduct a similar study with a traditional dance group and compare results to this group.
- Conduct another study of traditional dance in villages, rather than with a formal dance group in town, in order to gain a different perspective on the topic.

## **Conclusion**

This study revealed the importance of traditional music in Tanzanian culture as seen by the artists in the African Traditional Dance Group. While all agreed that globalization has a major affect on traditional dance and drumming, especially in terms of the popularity of modern music, not everyone interviewed concurred that these effects would eventually render traditional dance obsolete in Tanzania. Among those interviewed, everyone discussed the responsibility of the government to prioritize and support traditional dance just as they support other national teams such as football.

Many artists expressed concern that Tanzanians today are uninterested in traditional dance and music and many discussed the importance of traditional dance for educating society and specifically the new generation. A handful believed that enough people are still interested in traditional dance to keep it alive, and the commitment that all of the artists show to ATDG is a tribute to this fact. Despite the struggle to make income and the difficulty of being successful as a traditional dancer, these artists continue to dance because it is a part of who they are and it is important to them to preserve this aspect of their culture.

Considering the speed of communication today, it is inevitable that cultural exchange is changing peoples, cultures, and traditions around the world. With an increase in the spread of modern and western ideas, the role of traditional dance and music is changing. Although its risk of becoming obsolete is debatable, it is important that as Tanzania continues to grow and develop remaining traditions such as dance and drumming are prioritized by citizens as well as the government. Without an appreciation and respect for such unique and beautiful remaining traditions the fate of traditional music will risk following the path of other aspects of indigenous culture that have slipped away in the face of globalization.

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## **Appendix A: Key Informant Interview Questions**

1. History of the group
  - How/when did it start?
  - Major turning points/performances
2. Organizational aspects of the group
  - What are the components of the group, what do you perform (dance, drumming, costume making, instrument making, community theater, etc.)
  - Where do you learn the dances?
  - How many dancers are currently in the group (males, females)? How many can the group accommodate?
  - How many performances do you usually have in a year?
  - Where do you perform?
  - How do you get performance gigs? How do you advertise?
  - Who funds the group?
  - Who makes the money? What is the money used for?
  - How often do you rehearse?
  - How does one join the group? Do they need prior experience?
3. Brief history of traditional Tanzanian dance and drumming
4. What is the role of traditional dance and drumming in Tanzanian culture? How is it changing? How is traditional dance viewed by society?
5. How is globalization affecting traditional culture (dance, drumming, etc.) in Tanzania?
6. Personal history
  - Where you are from
  - Family
  - How you learned to dance
  - Why you started the group
  - What else do you do
8. What do you see for the future of this group? What are your goals?

## **Appendix B: Artist Interview Questions**

### Semi-Structured Artist Interview

#### *Demographics*

1. Name, Age, Gender, Ethnic Group, Education Level

#### *Personal History*

2. How and when did you learn to dance/drum? Does anyone else in your family dance/drum?
3. How did you learn about ATDG and when did you join?
4. Why do you dance/drum? What does dance/drumming mean to you?
5. What else do you do besides dance? What work do you do outside of ATDG?
6. What are your personal goals (regarding traditional dance and drumming)?

#### *Perspectives on role of traditional dance and drumming*

7. What role does traditional dance and drumming play in Tanzanian society? What role did it play in the past and what role does it play today?
8. Is this changing today? If so, how?
9. What effect do you think globalization is having on traditional dance and drumming in Tanzania?
10. What effect do you think development is having on traditional dance and drumming in Tanzania?
11. Nimla Mbangi mentioned to me that traditional dance and drumming is disappearing today and that in 20 years, he believes no one will do it anymore. What is your perspective on this?
12. How do you think dancers are viewed in society today? (Traditional dancers vs. hip-hop and bongo flava dancers)
13. What would you like to see for the future of traditional dance and drumming?

## **Appendix C: Personal Reflection**

I initially decided to study traditional dance and drumming because it was something that I was interested in but knew very little about. Having danced in various capacities back home in the United States, I jumped at the opportunity to learn a new kind of dance here in Tanzania because it seemed to be a unique aspect of culture that I had not yet experienced. Although a wild experience getting lost in Arusha left me an hour late to my first meeting with Nimla Mbangu, the leader of ATDG, the dance group with which I was hoping to study, I was able to make arrangements with him to conduct my study with his group. I felt a warm welcome from the minute I met Mbangu and after attending my first rehearsal, I could not wait to spend more time with this group and learn more about traditional dance and music.

As soon as the drums sounded and the harmonizing voices filled their small rehearsal space, I could feel the energy in the room. Everything about the experience was exciting to me. It was so fun to watch them dance and their passion for dance and drumming was exhilarating. I was fascinated listening to Mbangu explain the significance of the dances going on before me.

A couple days later I attended rehearsal and I was encouraged to begin learning one of the dances. It was hard! I was not used to this type of movement, but it was a fun challenge to learn. I felt a little ridiculous trying to master these moves that seemed to come as second nature to all these talented artists. I was excited and nervous for my project to begin.

After my first dance lesson, I spent some time reflecting in my journal about how much fun I had had and how happy I was about choosing this project. At this point I had only learned as much as Mbangu had shared with me during the key informant interview I had conducted with him during prep week. I ended the entry, "I feel like I'm supposed to reflect on the role of traditional dance and what it means to me but right now I'm really not sure. I really like learning it but it's hard to see traditional dance in a larger context right now. I

think it's really beautiful and it's sad that something so beautiful is losing significance and disappearing from culture.”

Throughout the first week of studying dance and getting to know the group I was learning so much, but I still did not know much about its significance in the larger context of Tanzanian culture. Coming from a country that lacks indigenous culture, and from a background of dance that serves little purpose other than to entertain, learning these traditional dances was a completely new experience. I was in awe of the talent that these artists exhibited, most of them skilled at both dance and drumming, not to mention that they could all sing beautifully.

With the start of interviews I was surprised to discover that all of the artists had learned to dance growing up simply as a part of their culture. Although a couple had learned in primary school, and a handful had studied further with dance groups that they participated in prior to ATDG, I almost could not believe that they had not had formal training. This reaction was a result of growing up in the United States where those who are considered to be good dancers have generally been through years of training. I was especially impressed one day when Awadh taught Sero a new dance and Sero picked it up immediately; it was almost as if he knew it already. Unlike my lessons in which I had to be shown certain steps repeatedly, Sero simply danced alongside Awadh, following along and picking up every step everything within two tries.

Although I was initially frustrated with the lack of mirrors in the space because I am used to learning dance in front of a mirror, I soon got used to this. I had other things to worry about, after all. After my third dance lesson, for instance, I wrote, “The other problem I’m having that they keep telling me is that I have to bend forward more. My lower back especially was so sore after today and I still wasn’t bent over enough!”

After an intense week of dancing and mastering three dances I continued coming to rehearsals and learning some more dances as well as beginning drum lessons and interviews. Drumming was more difficult because I have had less experience drumming but I enjoyed learning the drumming for each of the three dances I had learned in the previous week. Each day my respect for these artists and my appreciation of traditional music grew.

The interviews were fascinating and also contributed to my understanding of the role of traditional dance and drumming. Learning about the effects of globalization and development on this art form and hearing many artists discuss their struggles to make it as dancers and drummers also contributed to my respect for them and my understanding and appreciation for its importance. Throughout the entire project period, I almost could not help feeling jealous that these people have such rich culture and I began to question my own culture.

School kids would often come to the door of the rehearsal space to watch us dancing and although this initially made me nervous I eventually got used to it. I could only wonder, however, what they must think of this white girl learning to dance like an African mama. After discussing with Mama Alex her concern for the lack of Tanzanian interest in their own traditional music, I questioned why I thought this dance and music was so special when so many Tanzanians, for whom this is their natural culture, would rather listen to hip-hop. How could anyone not appreciate this?

Mama Alex expressed that Tanzanians are often interested in and respectful of things that come from the West and support things that *wazungu*, white people, are doing. Thus if they could get the *wazungu* to appreciate traditional music then maybe the Tanzanians would like it too. This comment made me somewhat sad and uncomfortable, however, it was extremely intriguing; was it not influence from the western *wazungu* that caused the current supposed lack of interest in traditional music here in the first place?

As Mama Alex was only my second interviewee, I was relieved to learn that not all of the artists shared her same opinions that traditional dance and music is at risk of disappearing. While everyone agreed that globalization is having an effect on traditional dance and drumming, many were hopeful that enough people were connected to their roots and traditional culture and respected traditional dance and music enough that it would prevail, even in the face of western influence.

Throughout my time learning to dance and drum and getting to know the artists, my appreciation for traditional dance and music grew immensely. Having no indigenous culture of my own, I had never before appreciated its importance. In fact, only now that I've come to Tanzania and become so aware of indigenous culture, specifically the beauty and significance of traditional music and dance, do I fully understand my great loss for having grown up without it. I feel extremely privileged to have had the chance to come to Tanzania and develop such appreciation for an art that has been passed down through generations and is still alive today, an art that I would have likely known nothing about if I had not had this opportunity.

## Appendix D: Demographics of ATDG Artists Interviewed

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Tribe</b>	<b>Education</b>
Nimla Mbangi		Mporogoro	University
Anderson Leonard Mkoballa (Baba Alex)	46	Mgogo	Primary (Std. 7)
Wilhelmina K. Anderson (Mama Alex)	40	Mhaya	Secondary (Form 4)
Bahati Abdu Juma Liyando	36	Mporogoro	N/A
Beda Christopher Emanuell	41	Mmakonde	Primary (Std. 7)
Fatina Athuman	35	Mmezdiwa	Primary (Std. 7)
Awadh Ramadhani Mwikmi	25	Mruguru	Primary (Std. 7)
Geb chrse	30	Mzigua	Primary (Std. 7)
Oscar Mussa Kiluli	49	Mzigua	Primary (Std. 7)
Zainabu Liputa Mwahali	43	Mmakonde	Primary (Std. 5)
Kevin Faustin	45	Mgoni	Primary (Std. 7)
Juma Hamisi (Sero)	24	Mzalam	Primary (Std. 7)

## ISP Evaluation

- a) Yes, the process of ISP did modify my learning style in several ways. I have never before planned and executed an independent project like this before. The process of getting the idea and making it into a reality in terms of planning logistics, scheduling, and a focusing a study question in order to learn so much about a topic was completely new to me.
- b) I did not encounter many problems throughout my project. Overall it ran very smoothly and I was able to accomplish a lot. One problem I encountered was that while I had planned most of my project with the leader of the group during prep week, I dealt mostly with the other artists in the group throughout the course of the project and a couple of times there were some scheduling difficulties because I was communicating with different people. This was, however, insignificant and did not affect the success of my project. I learned quickly to simply make arrangements with the artists I was working with and deal as little as possible with the leader of the group.
- c) For my project I conducted a semi-structured key-informant interview, and eleven semi-structured interviews with artists in the group I studied. A significant part of my project was also participant observation in which I studied dance, and drumming in private lessons and attended group rehearsals three times each week.
- d) Baba Jack was a great advisor. He was very helpful in planning my project during the proposal phase. His help in analyzing my data and writing up my paper was also very helpful as I my project followed a format different than other projects. He advised me in a direction that I believe made my final write up very successful and representative of all the experiences I had during my project period.
- e) I did not reach any dead ends in my project. Everything that I did was useful in some way and I learned a tremendous amount throughout the entire study period.
- f) Given that my entire project was a study of a specific aspect of culture (traditional dance and drumming), I gained a lot of insight into the culture throughout my project. See my personal reflection (Appendix D) in paper for more detail.

## **Nuts and Bolts**

### Food:

- Explore all the local restaurants. City Center and Mapinduzi are especially delicious.
- Get take out for dinner while it's still light outside and eat it in the room. If you want to go out for dinner go to Khans Barbeque, it's a little expensive but really delicious.
- Supplement your continental breakfast by keeping peanut butter, honey, bananas, etc. in your room.

### Accommodations:

- Backpacker Hotel is a pretty good place to stay. They will try to get as much money out of you as possible so make sure to negotiate a good deal. If you stay in a quad do not pay more than \$5/night. The restaurant on the roof is overpriced but a good place to hang out with friends, read, or do work, and you don't have to buy anything just to sit up there. If you don't want them in your room every

### Things to do:

- Join the gym at the New Arusha Hotel. It is worth the money to have a place to go hang out and sit by the pool and get some exercise while you're here. It's also a great place to sit in the lobby and get work done.
- Check out the used clothing market.
- Go out on the weekends. Maasai Camp is the best on Saturdays and Via Via can be fun on Thursday nights.

### ATDG:

- It is helpful to be competent in Kiswahili because this is the language in which the large majority of communication with the group occurs.
- Get as involved with the group as possible. Attend all rehearsals and take advantage of any opportunity to go to their homes because they are extremely welcoming.