International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Review; Vol. 10 No. 2; November 2024
ISSN 2415-1157 (Online) ISSN 2415-1335 (Print)
Published by Research Institute for Progression of Knowledge

Aggressive Patriarchy, Masculine Insecurity: Mzee Punch and the History of Hazing and Gender Discrimination at the University of Dar es Salaam

Ryan Ronnenberg, PhD
Associate Professor of History
Kennesaw State University
USA

Abstract

In 1990, the suicide of a female student at the University of Dar es Salaam brought media attention to an institution that had persisted on campus for two decades. "Mzee Punch," as it was called, was a secret organization of male students greeted the new influx of female students in the early 1970s with targeted hazing. The organization's members exposed the secrets and foibles of women on campus by crafting massive cartoons on walls of the major buildings on campus. Mzee Punch surveilled the behavior of female students, undermined their ambitions for academic success, and at the end leveraged anxiety of exposure for sexual favors. The present work, relying upon interviews of both members of the secret society and its victims, reconstructs the history of the institution, exploring its relevance to an understanding gender attitudes in elite society postcolonial Tanzania.

In 1990, Revina Mukasa, a young woman attending the University of Dar es Salaam, took her own life. Her suicide brought to public attention an institution that had existed at the University of Dar es Salaam for two decades. Since the University began admitting female students, they had endured a hazing tradition that pried into their private lives, exposed their secrets to the world, and humiliated them for entertainment and social leverage.

The institution called itself "Mzee Punch," ("mzee" meaning "old man") and was sustained by a secret society of male students. Mzee Punch operated by publishing the foibles of the female student body through large cartoons inscribed on the walls of campus buildings at night. The campus community would head to the "Literature Walls" at UDSM every morning, eager to laugh at the illustrated scandals, while the targets, those women who found themselves "punched," were violated, isolated, and traumatized.

This essay is an effort at historicizing this tradition with the aim of understanding its motivations, its humor, and its lasting impact. It relies rather heavily on interviews conducted in the decades following the end of the institution in the 1990s with former students, members of the Mzee Punch society, and victims how endured the hazing treatment. Comprehending the history of the Mzee Punch hazing rite reveals much about the early nature of UDSM society, the relationship between higher education and Tanzanian society broadly, and the intersection between intellectual elitism and gender discourse in early independent East Africa.

The Uncomfortable World of the UDSM Student ca 1970

Mzee Punch made his dramatic entrance in 1970, the University of Dar es Salaam's inaugural year. The new university got off to a troubled start, as young Tanzanian scholars, dependent upon government subsidy, found that although classes had begun, the receipt of their bursaries was in doubt. University students began wondering if their confidence in the new national university administration was misplaced.

One student at the time explained the tension thusly: "We waited, and waited, and waited….It was like a cannon stuffed with more and more money, ready to split its sides and explode."(Sawaya, 2005)[1]

The students did eventually receive their scholarship money, but the scene pointed out the precarious position of the UDSM student in early independent Tanzanian society. President Julius Nyerere explained this awkward situation in stark financial terms:

> The annual per capita income in Tanganyika is Sterling Pound 196. The cost of keeping a student at this college can be about Sterling Pounds 1,000 a year. That is to say it takes the annual per capita income of more than 50 of our people to maintain a single student at this College for one year. It should not be necessary to say more. It is obvious that this disparity can only be justified morally or politically, if it can be looked upon as an investment by the poor in their own future.(Nyerere, 1966)[2]

Yet this investment was more than a monetary one, as the continued support of university students of an elite academic institution extracted an ideological price as well.

The inauguration of UDSM in 1970 came after nearly a decade of political and academic tumult surrounding "ownership" of the University.(Shivji, 1993; Luhanga et al., 2003)[3] After all, in 1961 it had been a member college of the University of London. In 1963, together with Makerere in Uganda and Nairobi in Kenya, it became a constituent college of the University of East Africa, but the British university legacy remained largely intact, at least with regard to curriculum and administration system.(Luhanga et al., 2003)[4] Moreover, the "students' lifestyle and behavior were modeled on that of British students at similar institutions." (Luhanga, et al., 2003)[5] For a nascent socialist state, one deeply suspicious of the ideological trappings of colonialism, this was something of a problem.

President Julius Nyerere argued, "Our young men and women must have an African-oriented education. That is, an education which is not only given in Africa, but also directed at meeting the present needs of Africa" (Nyerere, 1966)[6] At the same time, Leftist student organizations in the 1960s saw the issue in a more severe light. A memorandum of a student vigilance organization contended,

> …the real issue at stake is a fundamental one concerning the ownership of this University College whether the college will ultimately belong to the people of Tanzania and East Africa or to imperialism. The students maintain that at present this University College is controlled by and for the interest of imperialism. The students further maintain that as long as neocolonialist expatriate lecturers constitute a majority of the teaching staff and they are allowed to impose their ideology to the exclusion of socialism, as long as they decide what should be taught and who should teach it, then the University College will remain a dangerous stronghold of counter-revolution and imperialist subversion against socialism in Tanzania…From this premise, it is obvious that the struggle has already outgrown the Faculty of Law where it started, just as it has already outgrown the New Curriculum issue which sparked it off. In short, it is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggle.(Shivji, 1993)[7]

Whether cast as simply ill-adapted to postcolonial African realities or as perniciously attached to a stubborn imperialist enterprise, prevailing 1960s political attitudes placed significant pressure on the national university to make substantive changes.

---

[1] Sawaya, M. Interview. February 24, 2005.

[2] Nyerere, J., *Freedom and Unity*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 307, quoted from, Luhanga, M., Mkude, D., Mbwette, T., Chijoriga, M., Ngirwa, C., *Higher Education Reforms in Africa: The University of Dar es Salaam Experience*, Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam Press, 2003, p. 39.

[3] Shivji, I.G., *Intellectuals at the Hill: Essays and Talks*, Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press, 1993, p. 93, quoted from Luhanga (et. al.), 2003, p. 27.

[4] Luhanga (et. al.), 2003, p. 21 .

[5] Ibid, p. 23.

[6] Nyerere, 1966, p. 130.

[7] Shivji, 1993, p. 93. Excerpt from a memorandum of a student vigilance committee of the Faculty of Law.

In 1967, for instance, a portion of the University's socialist contingent founded the University Students African Revolutionary Front (USARF,) an organization with a clear understanding of what shape the national university should assume. USARF was responsible for the publication of the popular and appropriately titled newspaper *Cheche*, or "spark,"(Luhanga et al, 2003)[8] and through their vigilance committee convinced law students to demand,

> -That the staff should be Africanised;
> -That lecturers should be recruited from socialist countries;
> -That students should not be allowed to participate fully in decision making;
> -That the post of Dean should be held solely by Tanzanians.(Luhanga et al., 2003)[9]

These changes, coupled with curricular reform, like the inclusion of Islamic and Customary Law in legal studies, were to alleviate the contradictory and potentially damaging presence of an ostensibly British and imperial higher educational institution within an Ujamaa state.

These ambitions were at least partially realized with the party assuming control of university operations in 1970. The Africanization of UDSM, for instance, occurred rapidly, as one "development that characterized this period was the departure of many foreign lecturers who found the new situation unbearable for one reason or another."(Luhanga et al., 2003)[10] They left for a number of reasons, not the least of which was a real concern for security in the face of an increasingly militant majority of the student body. "Militant students tended to attack, verbally and sometimes physically, lecturers judged by them to be reactionaries."(Luhanga et al., 2003)[11] Others departed because the new socialist focus of the institution, with its attendant concern for politically relevant changes both to department curricula and research programs, meant an end of the academic freedom enjoyed in the early 1960s. New lecturers, many keenly interested in Ujamaa political philosophy, filled these now vacant positions. This community would, in the years that followed, give rise to the "Dar es Salaam School" of social and political thinking.

Ideological change attended the turnover in university faculty. The University's new charter outlined in The University of Dar es Salaam Act of 1970 described the school's first function as "To preserve, transmit and enhance the knowledge for the benefit of the people of Tanzania in accordance with the principles of socialism accepted by the people of Tanzania."[12] This was tailored to fit a new Tanzanian nation pursuing an African socialist plan of postcolonial development. The new university would be responsible to the Tanzanian people, its scholars teaching and researching with a single purpose, the realization of proper African socialism in Tanzania.

Africanization of the University of Dar es Salaam exposed contradictory position of the university student in Tanzanian society. Students were to lead the way in building the Ujamaa state, but their privileged position was yet unearned. They were subject to the largely agrarian Tanzanian populace whose knowledge and skills they largely exceeded.

---

[8] Luhanga (et. al.), 2003. p. 28
[9] Ibid, p. 29
[10] Ibid, p. 36
[11] Ibid, p. 36
[12] Ibid, p. 30. -To preserve, transmit and enhance the knowledge for the benefit of the people of Tanzania in accordance with the principles of socialism accepted by the people of Tanzania;
-To create a sense of public responsibility in the educated and to promote respect for learning and pursuit of truth;
-To prepare students to work with the people of Tanzania for the benefit of the nation;
-To assume responsibility for University education within the centres of learning, education, training and research;
-To co-operate with the Government of the United Republic and the peoples of Tanzania in the planned and orderly development of education in the United Republic;
-To stimulate and promote intellectual and cultural development of the United Republic for he benefit of the people of Tanzania;
-To conduct examinations and to grant degrees, diplomas, certificates, and other awards of the University

A Cloistered UDSM Community

> ...and the members of the University of Dar es Salaam live in the midst of a huge, fast –growing metropolis, vibrant with political and economic arguments at the same time as it is both a centre of conspicuous consumption by some people and of struggle, frustration and disappointment on the part of the great majority. These are facts, not political comments. They affect the attitudes-the fears and the hopes-of those who teach or study here. And they affect the way in which students and staff react to the hardships inherent in working or studying at universities in a country suffering from severe economic difficulties while simultaneously passing through a period of major political or ideological change.(Nyerere, 1995)[13]

Nyerere's description of Dar es Salaam, the image he paints of a place marked affluence and equally evident poverty, is telling. Yet the extent to which the University was truly "in the midst" of the country's largest city is somewhat misleading. It would be more appropriate to say that it resides somewhat above it, or at least it has since it moved to Mlimani ("on the hill.") Though originally situated in a TANU office on Lumumba street, UDSM has been far from the humdrum of the Dar es Salaam streets for some time.

The campus by1960s was between the two largest bus stops in the city, Mwenge to the north and Ubungo to the south. A steep uphill drive of approximately one kilometer through the University's landscaped grounds linked the campus to the main road between the two stations. Regardless of its proximity to Dar, from Mlimani, the view was of mostly green fields and blue skies, the city a pale haze spread out across the horizon. In the early 1970s, the campus even sounded different from the rest of Dar es Salaam, as English was the common conversational language, facilitating lively discourse among Europeans, Ugandans, Kenyans, and Tanzanians.

The University's to Dar es Salaam, proximity to the city without being *within* the city, was evinced by nicknames the student body assigned to its buildings. Early 1970s UDSM classes named the two cafeterias "Harvard" and "Manzese."(Muga, 2004)[14] The former's reference the American university was clear. The latter referred to an important (if modest) Dar es Salaam neighborhood laying between Magomeni and Ubungo, bisected by Morogoro Road, leading out of the city.

The situation of the national university to the country's largest urban city was a source of anxiety to parents. Indeed, a young student (usually female) leaving a home in the inland provinces coming to the city, and therein finding their morals compromised, was and is a common theme in Tanzanian literature.(Kazilahabi, 1988)[15] This motif plays upon the anxiety provoked by the physical distance between parents in the provinces and their children in the coastal metropolis, as well as the moral chasm between home villages and the city. An essay penned by one parent of a University of Dar es Salaam student observes that Tanzanian parents have reasonable expectations for their national institution of higher education. "Most parents view their children's admission into university and their eventual graduation as an important step towards a good start in adult working life." (Lwakatare, 1996)[16] Parents' concerns for their sons and daughters were chiefly moral. They expected students would emerge from the university as "confident," "balanced," and "mature" minds.

[13] This quotation is taken from Julius Nyerere's address to the University of Dar es Salaam during the 25th Anniversary Celebrations in July of 1995.

[14] Muga, Peter, Interview, October 4, 2004.

[15] See, for instance, Euphrase Kazilahabi's *Rosa Mistika,* Dar es Salaam, 1988.

[16] Lwakatare, S.L., "University Crises: A Typical Parent's Perspective in Mbwette," T.S.A. & Ishumi, A.G.M. (eds.), Managing University Crisis, Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam, 1996, p.p. 157. "-Attainment of good academic standards which will get international recognition to open up good opportunities for employment and postgraduate studies within and outside the country;

-Production of a confident graduate with a mature mind for balanced judgement on issues of varying complexity, be they professional, social or political in nature;

-Creation of a "gentleman" or a "lady" conscious of social and other obligations in society. This would have to be reflected in his or her general conduct, in concern for the welfare of others, and in the image portrayed, including physical appearance such as clothing and self-expression.

-Production of a responsible person and a hard worker of good physical and mental health."

They were to become young gentlemen or ladies mindful of the substantial social obligations to which they were bound. (Lwakatare, 1996)[17] They also, pragmatically, viewed university education as a means of securing enhanced employment opportunities. (Lwakatare, 1996)[18]

Parents sold farms, cattle, and denied themselves basic necessities to afford higher education for their children.[19] Each young man and women matriculating in the University of Dar es Salaam was the product of a collective investment, both at the society and familial level. There was a very real understanding that those who graduated from university would repay this investment by financially supporting those family members not afforded the opportunity to study.[20]

Apprehensive family appreciated that students, in leaving their homes, also left behind parental surveillance, making them vulnerable to Dar es Salaam's vices. This familiar anxiety, in a country where (as Nyerere noted) few possessed such opportunities, the stakes were somewhat high. Academic failure, expulsion, or unwanted pregnancy meant shame for one's parents that reverberated throughout one's home community. In Tanzania at the end of the 20th century, students became adults through other trials, most often marriage, rather than university enrollment.[21] This meant UDSM students were in a precarious position. Geographically independent, they were still "children" in the eyes of society, and therefore subject to criticism by parents, residents of Dar es Salaam, and the country more broadly. Parents might, in joining with the government, look harshly upon any deviation from the expressed academic and moral purpose of their sons and daughters, with divergence from proscribed behavior and assertions of independence tidily accounted for as the rash actions of "spoiled children."

Daughters in the City

Roughly coterminous with the first sightings of Mzee Punch was the initial enrollment of significant numbers of young women at the national university. "The Musoma and Lindi Resolutions of 1974…allowed women to enter university directly, from the schools, instead of having to put in two years' work first, as was required for men. These measures allowed female enrolment to rise from 11 percent in 1971 to 24.4 percent in 1978."(Yahya-Othman, 2000)[22] This influx of young women did not, of course, create new gender conflict out of whole cloth, but it did make existing social tensions readily apparent. The increased female student population posed a number of significant challenges to the University and to Tanzanian society itself. Not least amongst these was the refiguring of a woman's role within her own family. In most parts of Tanzania, for instance, a wedding consists of two parts, the first of which is a send-off in which the bride's extended family celebrate her departure, and with it the end of the primacy of her role as "daughter" in favor of her new one as "wife" and later, perhaps, "mother." Leaving home, then, for a young woman, for much of Tanzanian history, was no small matter.

Upon reaching the University, female students faced considerable resistance on a number of registers. Socially, young women found themselves in many instances forced to submit to "the paternalistic, domineering, and sexist attitudes of their mates."(Yahya-Othman)[23] Young women were "treated as a separate class, who [could not] practice the same social and academic activities as men…barred from some meals in the student cafeterias, dictated to about how they should dress, and a few of them even made to do housework such as cooking and washing while the men 'study' on their behalf."(Yahya-Othman, 2000)[24] Some women, in fact, were "terrorized in their rooms if they refuse to take the dominant male position in student clashes with the administration."

[17] Ibid, p. 158.

[18] In fact, in contemporary Tanzania, both are practical and related, as the social networking available to students at the University is, for many, their best hope to secure employment with foreign interests. Though this phenomenon existed in the 1970s, it was almost certainly more subtle and less pervasive.

[19] Lwakatare, p. 157.

[20] Ibid, p. 157.

[21] This is, especially for women, still largely true. It is important to distinguish between academic and professional accomplishment (and the economic self-determination it facilitates) and reaching adulthood. The education one receives in the days leading up to a woman's send-off and the couples wedding is a lasting testament to the fact that, even if in possession of a doctorate, one is still a child until marriage.

[22] Yahya-Othman, Saida, "Tanzania: Engendering Academic Freedom," in Sall, Ebrima (ed.), *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa*, Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2000, p. 39.

[23] Yahya-Othman, 2000, p. 41.

[24] Ibid, pp. 40-41.

(Yahya-Othman, 2000)[25] Both men and women who attended the University of Dar es Salaam in its first days remember these social attitudes, but neither gender found them out of the ordinary, commonly explaining simply "it came from the way of society." (Shayo, 2005; Masanja, 2005)[26] Zubeda Tumbo, a former UDSM student, recalls, "Many times men thought themselves above women. [They felt] women were not to do as they liked. Men felt that it was their inherited right to do so. Women possessed no control over the direction of their lives." (Tumbo, 2005)[27]

The attitudes nurtured, strengthened, and sustained in social practice outside the classroom found their way into the academic sphere as well. For much of the University of Dar es Salaam's history, men labeled women succeeding in the classroom as "prostitutes." (Shayo, 2005)[28] A female student's top marks were credited to an illicit relationship with an instructor rather than academic prowess. (Yahya-Othman, 2000)[29] For some of the brightest students in the school, this help was most often construed as a quid pro quo relationship in which a young women exchanged sexual favors for "*marks za bure*" ("free marks") from a male lecturer. (Mandele, 2005)[30] Perhaps more devastating than rumors robbing them of their rightful achievements, though, were the actual advances of instructors. Male professors took advantage of gender iniquity. (Shayo, 2005; Yahya-Othman, 2000)[31]

In fact, male students and lecturers competed for the sexual favors of female students. Yet there was a third, critically important entrant in this competition, Dar es Salaam residents. Young women venturing to the city were vulnerable, at least in the Tanzanian popular imaginary. (Hamis, 2005)[32] If she had visitors from town, her peers would notice without fail, and should young men be amongst these guests, her reputation was in jeopardy. Did not she belong to the Hill, after all, and therefore to its young men? Other students, parents, university administration or (though they were to an extent one and the same) the government imposed enormous social pressure upon the female student body, making UDSM a rather insular community where secrets did not last and rumor carried enormous weight. In this cloistered environment, there was nothing more closely monitored, commented upon, and critiqued than a female student's sexual behavior. This surveillance invested itself in witnessing female students fail, for their moral fortitude or scholarly endurance to give out, for each and every young woman to find herself exceeded intellectually and subordinated socially to men.

In the face of this onslaught, young women at UDSM, housed together at the same dormitory (Hall 3), experienced a real sense of gender solidarity. Female students staying in the dorms chose to remain there on the weekends, and this built comradery. These young women exchanged ideas and helped each other personally and academically. (Shayo, 2005, Ngaiza, 2005, Masanja, 2005, Tumbo, 2005)[33] The following narrative attests to the strength of this female stronghold in the early years of the University of Dar es Salaam.

> All of the women stayed in one dormitory, Hall Three. Therefore, there was a certain kind of sisterhood…For example, if a young man came to make trouble at Hall Three… There was one time a young man came by Hall Three…to be crass, he came by to "do the math," that is he waited outside of the dorm. Hall Three, you know, was at the very end of campus, so many people, if they were studying in the afternoon, and if the sun was hot that day, would wear just underclothes and sit down at a desk to study. Now, because it was a the far end of the campus one did not bother to close the curtains on the windows…This young man came by peaking in at the women as they were studying like this [in their underwear]! So, when we realized he was there we ran after him. All of us poured out of the dorm and chased after him…though of course later Punch drew the women chasing after the young man, some of them carrying clubs, but all of them wearing underwear. (Tumbo, 2005)[34]

[25] Ibid. pp. 40-41.
[26] Rose Shayo, Interview, April 15, 2005. Dr, Alice Masanja, Interview, March 2005.
[27] Tumbo, Zubeda. Interview. April 14, 2005.
[28] Shayo, 2005.
[29] Yahya-Othman, p. 40.
[30] Ibid, p. 41. Mandele, Interview, April 13, 2005.
[31] Yahya-Othman, 2000, p. 41.
[32] There are numerous popular and literary examples of this concept, from penny dreadful novels to the short stories (not to mention the cover art) found each week in the magazine *Bongo*. Hamis Magic, Interview, March 3, 2005.
[33] Tumbo, Shayo, Masanja, Ngaiza, Interviews, March through May of 2005.
[34] Tumbo, Zubeda, Interview, April 14, 2005

Though some former students, male and female, recollect that initially the first substantial classes of women were quiet, reserved, and indisposed to venturing out in the evenings or speaking up in classrooms, this changed quickly, and by the mid-1970s, there was *udada* ("sisterhood") enough for the women of Hall 3 to chase away an overly curious young man. Moreover, many of the female students matriculating in the 1970s had served in the National Service, and were more assertive in laying claim to their right to an equivalent educational experience. (Sawaya, 2005)[35] They had survived days of grueling labor, more than occasional sexual harassment, and a partial rewriting of the expectations of their gender. These women were, for the most part, strong-willed, and ready to assume their place in the wider campus community. They took their tea alongside the men. When asked why they chose to do this, they laughed off the question, deeming it too absurd to answer. (Sawaya, 2005)[36] They were unwilling to even engage in a serious conversation with the more conservative masculine viewpoint. Why should they not enjoy their tea, after all?

There were many strong young women in those first few classes, some of whom went on to assume important positions in government, and others who became tenured professors abroad and at the University of Dar es Salaam. Yet not all enjoyed such strength. Young women were the most vulnerable members of an already fragile class of university students. They lived within an awkwardly-situated community, one residing geographically and ideologically between the moral authority of the home village and the temptation of the city. They shouldered their parent's expectations and society's doubts to the extent that they were able. When they faltered, Mzee Punch was there as a witness.

An Entrance

It was in this community of youthful angst, of closely monitored social interactions, where female sexuality was subject to public discourse, in which Mzee Punch set up residence. One morning in the autumn of 1970, as students arrived on campus, they saw on the walls of campus buildings words and, especially, pictures, inscribed by hand on a massive scale. The cartoonist claiming credit for these renderings called himself "Mzee Punch." Though all would have understood the import of an *mzee* (an "elder,") it is less clear if the second part of his name would have found much resonance with the student body. For some, the association with the English verb was satisfying enough. Yet Punch took on much more intimate significance for some students, the founding members of the secret society responsible for Mzee, (hereafter *mpanchi* (sing.) or *wapanchi* (pl.)) (Tumbo, 2005; Shayo, 2005; Ngaiza, 2005)[37]

Some of the country's primary and secondary school, particularly those in the north, used donated copies of cartoon magazines as instructional tools. A founding member of the Mzee Punch society remembered "lov[ing] books with pictures. The English had certain books….I myself had nearly seventy copies of comic books. People liked these. They were a little easier to understand than Punch. Punch's English was a little difficult." (Sawaya, 2005)[38] He recalled most vividly one particular Punch cartoon in which rather crude subject matter was dressed in the publication's customary refinement. In this instance, a dog was depicted consuming its own defecate. Sawaya remembered how he felt looking at the uncouth panel for the first time; rather than revulsion, he found it appealing as humor. (Sawaya, 2005)[39] It was the works arresting power to inspire laughter through base transgression that seized him with excitement. Sawaya understood the depictions of Africa in the publication were offensive, but the racist illustrations did not deter him from finding the potent humor within.

Later Sawaya would read scholarly history of *Punch*, learning of its roots in the Punch and Judy puppet show, as well as its role as a cultural critic. He would also meet a University of Dar es Salaam library well-stocked in the old Victorian publication, with issues current to 1970, a fact he attributed to the significant number of expatriate scholars at the university during its early years. (Sawaya, 2005)[40] This collection remains in the library to this day.[41]

[35] Sawaya, February 2005
[36] Sawaya, February 2005
[37] Tumbo, Shayo, Ngaiza, 2005
[38] Sawaya, February 2005. *Wapanchi* names (as well as precise interview dates) are withheld in this paper.
[39] Sawaya, February 2005
[40] Ibid
[41] The author has confirmed this observation.

The inspiration for the UDSM Punch, then, was his Victorian counterpart. Mzee Punch was deeply interested in social criticism, particularly regarding women and their sexuality. In fact, though certainly it was a happy bit of contingency (a schoolboy's interest in cartoons) that brought Mzee Punch to the national university, the fact that he assumed power so quickly, that he presided over the university with such unquestioned strength for more than two decades, speaks to the ease with which his type of humor mapped neatly into the social fabric of University of Dar es Salaam life.

Who was Mzee Punch? The Masquerade.

> I was a stranger yet at the University. I had yet to see the thing they called "Punch." And I had never before seen a human drawn by using a pen…and with it rendering an image that completely captured his appearance. Truthfully, for me it was something strange and new. It was very strange/very different. Now, when I saw this [Punch] I was very surprised. I said, "Goodness! Are there really goings on like this here at the University?" (Matthias, 2005)[42]

Former students recollect how entertaining Punch's efforts were in the 1970s, so much so that the student body would arrive early at the campus, and, with a feeling of excitement and expectation, make their way to the "literature walls" to see what Mzee had to say that day. Students at the time felt Mzee's artistic contributions were an essential part of campus life. (Yahya-Othman)[43]

When asked who or what Mzee Punch was, early society members insisted, "He was a University *person*," bending the rules cordoning off the real from the desired through to the minutiae of the performance. (K-, 2004)[44] Mzee Punch tended the thin tissue of his personality with remarkable care, his steady hand inscribing a single writing style, identifiable to all.[45] He had his own table at the cafeteria, the "High Table," where his invisible presence precluded interlopers. (K-, 2004)[46] Most critically, no one ever saw him.

He acted only at night, exercising an independent voice at a moment in Tanzanian history when nearly all public voices tended to accord. (Nditi et al., 1996)[47] His presence made the night security on campus nervous and reluctant to perform their duties with much vigor.(Mattias, 2005)[48] Young women were obliged to remain in their rooms, or only venture out accompanied after dark. It was at night that Mzee Punch did his "research," ferreting out the secrets of that small University community. He devoured their reliance upon, and fear of, rumor. (White, 2000)[49]

The "person" that was Punch stylized himself an "*mzee*," an elder. He was a source of authority and discipline, shaping the behavior of the UDSM student body in constructive ways.(Muga, 2004)[50] Mzee Punch referred to the students at the University of Dar es Salaam as his grandchildren.(K-, 2004)[51] His values were, on the whole, in keeping with what a student's parents might have expected of him/her.

---

[42] Mattias, Interview, February 12, 2005

[43] Yahya-Othman, 2000. "The oldest and most well-established force behind such activities exists at the University of Dar es Salaam, by the name of Punch. The genesis of Punch was a forum of wall literature in the 1960s, when it was used as a forum for making socially relevant critiquing of the government and the university administration." (41)

[44] Sawaya, 2005. (Subject's emphasis.)

[45] Mandele, Interview, 2005. Mandele remembered one class (in the late 1980s) in which a peer (designated as K- in this paper) was writing on the blackboard. One classmate remarked, "Mbona maandishi yako yanafanana na ya Mzee?" ("Why does your writing resemble Mzee [Punch]'s?").

[46] K-, interview, August 2004.

[47] See Nditi, N.N.N., Mvungi, S.E.A. and Mwaikusa, J.T., "Origins and Causes of the Crises at the University of Dar es Salaam (1970-1990)" in Mbwette, T.S.A. and Ishumi, A.G.M. (eds), Managing University Crises, Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam Press, 1996, pp. 166-175.

[48] Mattias, 2005

[49] White, Luise, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Central Africa*. University of California Press, 2000. Louise White has capably demonstrated rumor's power, its "truth" value, resides in its unverifiability, in the fact that one cannot properly test or falsify it, for there is no identity to which one may assign its claims. Mzee Punch set up residence in that odd semantic/semiotic gap between the accusation and the accuser, between narrative and witness. There he lived, quite happily, needling his targets gleefully, drinking of their humiliation.

[50] Muga, Peter, Interview, October 4, 2004.

[51] K-, interview, August 2004.

He was fond of rules, forbidding female students from taking afternoon tea, or anyone from wearing sandals to the cafeteria. (Shayo, 2005)[52] In a place where young men and women left behind the watchful gaze of parents and extended family, his never left them.

What was Mzee Punch? Players Behind the Mask I

From the beginning, the students responsible for Mzee Punch's well-being kept their identities, collective and individual, a secret.

> In those days, the "Punch concept" was around but…Punch was an invisible person….that concept was there, but one was unable to know who is Punch…so at the time we were studying [at the university], one awoke in the morning to go to examine the walls…you could not know when he wrote [his cartoons]…you were unable to know who is who…(Shayo, 2005)[53]

The individuals behind Mzee Punch, were mostly unknown. People were not generally disposed to investigate his identity, as there was a standing threat that whoever sought him out would be put "on the pipeline," and subjected to a barrage of scandalous cartoon renderings. (Shayo, 2005)[54] Fear of reprisal was a significant part of the Mzee Punch's façade.

News reports named the artists "*wapanchi"* (singular *mpanchi*.) Yet, in fact, it was possible, with some difficulty, to know who lurked behind the Mzee Punch mask. "He was not one person….but rather "he" was a group of people." (Tumbo, 2005)[55] Mzee Punch was not an alias for a single individual, but rather a group of students were responsible for the cartoons on the literature walls. Those suspected to be *wapanchi* were, according to most reports, rather more reserved than most of their peers. (K-, 2004)[56] *Wapanchi* considered themselves engaged intellectuals, concerned with the well-being of the University. (Sawaya, 2005)[57]

Wapanchi were exclusively who "felt that they had a right to trouble young women." (Tumbo, 2005)[58] Conversely, women were Mzee Punch's primary targets, though there were some exceptions to this rule. (Mandele, 2005)[59] This asymmetry in the production of shame was, for students at the time, largely in keeping "the way our society was." (Oswald, 2005; Tumbo, 2005; Shayo, 2005; Masanja, 2005)[60] Male students dominated the public spheres of campus life. More vocal in class, they ran the student political machine. Mzee Punch was just one more example of this more general phenomenon.

The secret organization flourished because it drew upon students from a variety of different disciplines possessing different specific skills. There "…were people…looking for 'news' and then there were artists…there was a scientist…a theatre person, sketch artists, there were those who studied art, social scientists, there was a lawyer, there were engineers." (Tumbo, 2005)[61] The secret congregation included in their ranks a significant number of artists, but the rendering of the cartoon itself was only one part of the operation. "It was a factory!" (Tumbo, 2005)[62]

The Art of Mzee Punch

Wapanchi understood well this artistic position halfway between dramatic and literary art, that the effect of their work was to be assessed both in terms of the quality of its humor and the magic that brought it to life. There were three key elements in making this kind of art a success: research, performance, and rendering.

[52] Shayo, 2005.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55]Tumbo, 2005.
[56] K-, 2004.
[57] Sawaya, 2005.
[58] Tumbo, 2005. Note: there may have been women who took part in the Mzee Punch institution, but no interview subjects, be they victims, *wapanchi*, or bystanders, could name no examples.
[59] Mandele, 2005. "Mostly women were punched…men very seldom."
[60] Oswald, Bertha, interview, March 16, 2005. Also, Tumbo, Shayo, Dr. Alice Masanja 2005.
[61] Tumbo, 2005.
[62] Ibid.

Research

A significant component of Punch's artistic achievement was the research that preceded the cartooning event. Mzee's cartoons humorous stories about campus residents, intimate nonfiction. A student at UDSM in the late 1970s explained, "They would cover you in detail…the news would explain…news about my village, news about secondary school…perhaps Punch collaborate with some of our civil community…details that should only have been known by close friends…" (Shayo, 2005)[63] *Wapanchi* discovered the most intimate of details about the student body, be they liaisons between faculty and students, uncivil breakups, or instances of female student interest in Dar es Salaam boys.

Young women on campus felt this surveillance acutely, concerned that a few words spoken in anger or a misconstrued remark could make them a target of a Punch cartoon. "So people were very careful, even amongst friends…which could in turn spread doubt even in close communities like Hall 3." (Shayo, 2005)[64] The skill with which Punch consistently obtained the secrets of the student body spread mistrust and suspicion even between close confidants. Women in Hall 3 chose their words carefully: "You were very careful….very aware of everything you do and everything you say." (Tumbo, 2005)[65] At night they would whisper quietly amongst themselves, wondering aloud about their peers' treachery. "All were sleeping in Hall 3...wondering which person would be [punched.]" (Shayo, 2005)[66] This feeling became mundane: "while we were studying it was a daily problem." (Shayo, 2005)[67]

Magic/Performance

> You could pass by a wall and turn around immediately and there would be something. Very efficient system. (Shayo, 2005)[68]

Magical though his efforts may have seemed at the time, in truth, Mzee Punch's nighttime performances were the product of audacity and careful. Though some remember *wapanchi* as being tough, intimidating men who would outmuscle security guards or threaten them to a sworn silence, the truth is they relied more upon stealth and wit than on brawn. (Mandele, 2005)[69] The following tactic was particularly effective, and generations of *wapanchi* would reuse it again and again to good effect.

One *mpanchi* would hide in a quiet corner of a university building and wait until nightfall. Another would, at an agreed upon time, generally in the dead of night, approach the security guard on duty, his face one of anguish, explaining that his classmate was, on one of the top floors of the Social Sciences building, moaning in pain. The security guard would, predictably, run to the aid of the ailing young man.[70] As soon as he did so, a well-organized team of not fewer than four would steal into the University common area and make their way quickly to the agreed upon canvas (generally the cafeteria.) Once there, while some acted as lookouts, others would form a kind of human ladder. One sturdy fellow would brace himself while another climbed atop his back, eventually standing on his shoulders, placing his hands against the wall for support. Thereafter a third *mpanchi* would scramble up the both of them, charcoal in hand, and begin the drawing.[71] Once the artist had, through considerable dexterity on all parts, completed the work, the group would make its escape, becoming indistinguishable from the rest of the student body, apparently just young men kept up late studying.[72]

---

[63] Shayo, 2005.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Tumbo, 2005.
[66] Shayo, 2005
[67] Ibid
[68] Shayo, 2005
[69] Mandele, who befriended several *wapanchi* in the late 1980s, maintains that they were very dangerous individuals, though there is no real evidence for this, and this reputation certainly owes a debt to the sense of the uknown surrounding Mzee Punch.
[70] This is one of the tallest buildings on campus, and the elevator was out of service more often than not.
[71] Sawaya, 2005, K-, 2004, Semzaba, interview, Apil 2005. Charcoal was inexpensive, which was a consideration in the first years of the Punch institution. In later years, this gave way to prerendered parts of images on white paper affixed to walls using industrial glue.
[72] Mathias, 2005

Mzee's magic, then, amounted to a caper, but one that gave rise to an ephemeral art form, inscribed at night, washed clean by the patient custodial staff the following afternoon. Ideally, perhaps, the illusion, the success of the performance, should have hidden *wapanchi* behind Mzee Punch, their true identities safely guarded secrets. And for the most part, it did. Yet there were a few instances when astute and stubborn individuals could penetrate Punch's magic and peek behind the disguise.

> Generally they did not like to reveal themselves, but, if a person was defiant, she could get to know them. I myself knew them, because I was a hard case. I wanted to know who it was that went and put up pictures at night. And I was frustrated by it. So it was until I got to know who it was, and they became my friends. They punched me several times but never saw me falter in any way. In the end, they had to ask, "What sort of girl are you? I punch you but you do not get angry nor do you break down! (Tumbo, 2005)[73]

Stagecraft, then, did have its limits.

Visual Art

The operation in the beginning (the early 1970s) was done with a tight budget. Mzee's first compositions were drawn freehand using charcoal. There were no drafts, so no paper records were left behind. Their accomplishments are even more impressive after taking into consideration the condition under which the artists were forced to compose.

In the early 1970s, Mzee Punch patterned his cartooning style more or less directly after the British Punch. (Semzaba, 2005)[74] In time, however, as the first *wapanchi* graduated, this convention changed. The shape of the depictions took on forms more appropriate to East Africa. Mzee's style fit with what Tanzanian newspaper cartoonists were offering their readership at the time. What did remain constant, however, was the writing that accompanied the images. Generations of *wapanchi* practiced Mzee's penmanship until they could reproduce it perfectly, thus preserving the illusion of a singular author.

Punch generally wrote in English, especially in the earliest years of his existence, in part in deference to Kenyan and Ugandan students less accomplished in Kiswahili, and in part because of its status as an academic language. His vocabulary became part of his humor, as it would change in accordance with the target of the moment. If he was punching a member of the Law faculty, he would write in legal language. If he wanted to comment upon a medical scandal, Punch would deploy medical terminology.

Punch In Practice

> I have been punched…it did not bother me. I met him when he was at Manzese [cafeteria]….until the year 1980, Punch was doing good work…and his aim was to make one laugh…entertainment…(Masanja, 2005)[75]

In the first decade or so of his existence, most students and faculty looked upon Punch positively. Reading the "literature walls was entertaining, and for some, his views concerning gender mirrored their own. Men in particular contended Punch was a disciplinary force on campus. (Muga, 2005)[76]

Punch's form of discipline took on two forms. He, of course, could "punch" students and faculty directly, exposing their secrets through publication on the walls of campus buildings. Mzee Punch also issued rules for the campus community. "Punch issue[d] so-called 'ten commandments' to all freshers, and those who [did] not heed these or other forms of regulation, then face[d] the prospect of the wall punching." Yahya-Othman, 2000)[77] Students took the treat seriously, as all knew that the threat behind them. "Punch put together 10 commandments to live by on campus...if a young woman came to 4 pm tea, she would be punched…so they were afraid to go."

[73] Tumbo, 2005.
[74] Semzaba. Interview. April 14, 2005.
[75] Masanja, 2005.
[76] Muga, 2005.
[77] Yahya-Othman, 2000, p. 41

(Shayo, 2005)[78] The commandments also mentioned a specific dress code, forbidding hats and sandals in the cafeteria. (Shayo, 2005)[79]

Of Mzee Punch's rules, perhaps the most immediately mysterious was the reservation of the High Table for himself alone. (Shayo, 2005)[80] This was the most desirable table in the larger university cafeteria and was to remain empty. Only the male engineering students, beginning in the 1980s, would dare sit at High Table, and this in turn gave rise to the notion that they were responsible for Punch's nighttime mischief. (Kazazuru, 2004)[81]

Of course, the problem with Mzee Punch's scrutiny was that it was far from even-handed. Though men were sometimes punched, Punch focused his attention on women and their behavior. "[Punch] would write which man you went out with…or if you dressed well he would say it was purchased for you by someone…and in our culture this is looked down upon." (Shayo, 2005)[82] Moreover, that Punch was given to focusing only on the failings of the female student body was compounded by the fact that "Not everyone was Punched…just those that rose above to excel…" (Shayo, 2005)[83] In other words, Punch concerned himself primarily with women who outperformed men in the classroom or who spoke their mind a bit too freely. "They would say something like she received gifts from someone…or if she did well in class she received good marks…" she thinks she is so strong but she's not it is because of somebody."(Shayo, 2005)[84] Punch was, then, most often a vehicle enforcing patriarchal power.

Female students living in this closely-surveilled campus environment understood that their sexuality represented as disturbing an affront to the male student body as their academic prowess. Prevailing attitudes from the 1970s until the reform efforts of middle 1990s held that each young woman must have a boyfriend, and there were a variety of institutions, including the fall semester "Freshers' Ball" held at Silver Sands resort, that worked to assign her one. A few women did resist this custom. (Tumbo, 2005)[85]

The practice preserved, in the minds of Punch society members, the virtue of young women against the vice of the city. It also protected, for the sake of the young men on campus, their most precious resource, the minority female student population, from the unwanted advances from Dar es Salaam boys.

> At that time there was conflict between men at the university and those outside of the university. Male students tried to forbid female students from going out with men from outside he university. And those women had a right to have relationships with any men they liked.so the big conflict was that…(Tumbo, 2005)[86]

For young women, Mzee Punch represented an overtly oppressive force that strengthened the hand of male students seeking to assert academic and social dominance. Mzee Punch's "discipline," his efforts to protect the morality of female students by publicly exposing their secrets, amounted to coercion. Female students found even the slightest moments of social agency exaggerated. (Tumbo, 2005)[87]

> …they can write that that young woman has lots of boyfriends, and that this is the very reason her young man was arguing with her. So they add some salt, and that young woman might feel bad. Or they can write "That girl is a whore!" You see? Come to find out, she was just arguing with her boyfriend and decided to return home by herself or something, or she left her boyfriend who had brought went home with another young man from the university. (Tumbo, 2005)[88]

[78] Shayo, 2005
[79] Ibid
[80] Ibid
[81] K-, 2004
[82] Shayo, 2005.
[83] Ibid
[84] Ibid.
[85] Tumbo, 2005
[86] Ibid
[87] Ibid. "So what did young men like? A young woman to wait for him until he took her to the dance…but not for the girl to go herself…therefore I went to the dance on my own and they did not care for it.."
[88] Zubeda Tumbo

For more than two decades, the Mzee Punch organization inserted itself into an ongoing gender debate on Mlimani campus. This discussion was over nothing less than what it meant to be a successful woman in a young, postcolonial nation. While the colonial patriarchal legacy was apparent everywhere, would not socialism and the embracing of "comradeship" provide a platform for advocating for egalitarian treatment of all? In the 1970s, the social tensions regarding gender roles covered a variety of intellectual terrains. In the following narrative, Punch brought the debate to the female form itself. Zubeda Tumbo recalled:

> I have been punched several times…first of all I was punched because of the way I was made, because of something I did not really care about…because I was woman with large teeth, and because I had these "hairs" like the facial hair of a beard (laughter.) So, some of them did not care for this, [asking] why did I have facial hair like theirs, and moreover why was my voice so deep? Afterwards, they began to punch me, suggesting that was a lesbian, something that was not true. It was simply my nature, the way I was made. Every human being is different, and so I did not feel bad. I got on with my studies. I laughed and wrote down my views right over theirs and was on my way. (Tumbo, 2005)[89]

Zubeda Tumbo's body itself became subject to an aggressive debate over what a women should be like. Insofar as she exhibited physical features that *wapanchi* understood to belong only to men, she represented a threat. In response, they "punched" her. Their words failed to intimidate her.

> …They would write maybe, "This person should go to the hospital so they can take a look and see if she has female flesh…maybe there is some male flesh in there as well…So I would just pass by and write that I have just a female body…and then go to class
>
> After writing down my views (and not caring), one day he came up to me. He said, "You are a strange person? Someone else right now would be crying."
>
> "Am I to cry at foolishness like that?"
> Then he wanted to know why I thought it was foolishness. I saw this as just instigation…(Tumbo, 2005)[90]

Punch had clearly met his match. Tumbo was punched because of her strength and ability because her assertiveness intruded upon a masculine domain. That part of her that *wapanchi* chose to satirize was, to their minds, a sign of her misplaced ambition, and in attacking it, they sought to put her back into her rightful place, one that they could readily understand. Tumbo rejected this limited conceptualization of her gender. (Tumbo, 2005)[91] "They would say 'You are intelligent!" not because I worked hard did I succeed [in their eyes] but because I was smart…so even if you showed this they hated it…" (Tumbo, 2005)[92] Tumbo eventually confronted the *mpanchi* responsible for "punching" her. "I asked him if he still had the picture because I really liked it." (Tumbo, 2005)[93] She took the picture from the artist and claimed it as a keepsake, and the two remained friends thereafter.

There were other instances in which female students confronted the misogynistic practice. Rose Shayo, who attended UDSM in the late 1970s and early 1980s, recalled,

> …Women who were punched…were very tough…[and]…outspoken…we felt that the men would fail to keep us down…Every morning they would send out one person to look to see who [*wapanchi*] had put up today...then they would mobilize women to go and remove it...(Shayo, 2005)[94]

Counterpunching became a regular practice for young women at the University of Dar es Salaam.

[89] Tumbo, 2005
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid. "A young woman should be quiet, wait for a young man to take her out to eat."
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Shayo, 2005

In fact, female students were left with no choice but to fight back directly, as there was little or no effort on the part of the university administration to put an end to Punch's activities. Though the "wall literature" on campus was never formally protected, most saw it as an entertaining and essential part of the UDSM experience. It might have been a transgressive practice, secret and nocturnal, but it was also an institution. Young women generally perceived that there was no means of protecting themselves, but to write back on the campus walls, forced in this way to participate in a public discourse over their very position in the campus community.

Magdalena Ngaiza, who enrolled at the University of Dar es Salaam in 1975, rejected the "literature wall" entirely. When she was "punched," she angrily reflected that one's story was one's own. (Ngaiza, 2005)[95] A group of young male students came by to say that they were sorry for what had been done to her, and would, if she liked, defend her by pasting a positive account of her life on the walls. She asked them, "Why? Aren't you just like Mzee Punch? How is what you are doing different?" (Ngaiza, 2005)[96] They felt that they, as men, had a right to examine her life and judge her.

She gathered together her friends, and together they drafted a list of likely suspects. They broadcasted (near these suspects) that for men to spread such lies and then hide their identities was a sure sign that they were impotent. Why else would they be threatened when they found they could not have the smarter girls? They refused dignify Punch's comments with a reply, and would not recognize the legitimacy of the wall literature discourse. They threatened an *mpanchi* with a legal complaint, and he immediately asked for forgiveness. To his entreaties Ngaiza responded, "Forgive you for what?" (Ngaiza, 2005)[97]

Punch Changes Character

> There was an increase in the frequency and character of what is commonly known as 'wall literature.' Instead of the humorous kind of the previous era, there began to emerge a type that was obsessed with obscenities and character assassination which was targeted at Government and University officials and some female students. (Luhanga et all, 2003)[98]

By the beginning of the 1980s, engineering students had asserted control over student government and campus society. These students were almost exclusively male, and they considered themselves the elite academicians at the University, poking fun of their peers, for instance in the Mathematics Department, as they exceeded them in the calculus classroom. (Kazuzuru, 2004)[99] As this group took control of UDSM life, displacing *wapanchi* from the fine arts fields, Punch's artistic technique changed, his work became more personal, and his character darkened. (Kazururu, 2004)[100]

Wapanchi, lead by graphic artists in the early 1970s, focused on representational craft and humorous quality. With engineers filling *wapanchi* ranks in the 1980s, these skills began to erode. Artistry gave way to an emphasis in the more performative aspects wall literature expression. The "research" remained the same, but humor and the accomplishment of the renderings lost importance. (Semzaba, 2005, Chikoko, 2005)[101] Engineers did away with the charcoal freehand drawing tradition in favor of white office paper. Engineering *wapanchi* employed artists to draw on sheets of paper numbered to mark position in larger works. The piece could be assembled in moments with the aid of industrial glue and several *wapanchi* working cooperatively. Punch cartoons could "appear" during the middle of the day, as if created through magical event. *Wapanchi* posted Mzee's cartoons in increasingly adventurous architectural locations, at previously unfathomable heights and impossible angles, the performance attending the cartoons overshadowing their content.

[95] Maggy Ngaiza, Interview, April 25, 2005.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid
[98] Luhanga (et. al.), 2003, p. 54
[99] Kazuzuru, 2004. Engineering attracted top students almost certainly because it fetched desirable jobs. Top level directors in the country's electric company, for instance, are, as a rule, graduates of the UDSM Engineering Department.
[100] Kazuruzu, 2004
[101] Semzaba, Interview, April 14, 2005. Chikoko, 2005.

That character of Mzee Punch's cartoons changed significantly in the 1980s. Whereas earlier Punch was more restrained, increasingly the literature walls veered closer to pornography. After 1980, *wapanchi* "began to illustrate private areas [of the body,]" shocking campus onlookers. Sexually explicit scenes became more frequent as well. One former *mpanchi* recalled a particularly graphic rendition of a professor answering his phone while in bed with one of his female students.

Engineering students leading *wapanchi* at this time emphasized shock with purpose. Punch became a means of exercising power, engaging in overt character assassination of young women. (Yahya-Othman, 2000)[102] Mzee took up libelous up campaigns against specific female students.[103] "Punch was a misogynist…picking apart a person, [using] slanderous campaigns…, he truly hurt a person….like an extreme bully…(Masanja, 2005)[104] Mzee Punch now isolated his targets, putting them into "the pipeline," repeatedly punching them in serial fashion.

Those in the pipeline in the 1980s found themselves alone, their social network dismantled with the shameful exposure of secrets. Friends not convinced by the claims of Mzee Punch's cartoons were intimidated the prospect of being punched themselves. (Che-Mponda, 1992)[105] Mzee's efforts to pare away social support did not, by the 1980s, end at the campus community. *Wapanchi* began the practice of sending copies of their wall literature efforts to their victims' home villages.

Mzee Punch became self-interested. (Che-Mponda, 1990)[106] *Wapanchi*, who hinted at their identities by sitting down at the High Table, used their power as social leverage. They would "punch" young women who affronted them by exceeding them in class or refusing their sexual advances. (Mandele, 2005)[107] This pattern was made particularly with the society's treatment of Revina Mukasa.

Revina Mukasa came to the University of Dar es Salaam as a friendly and accommodating young women with a lively wit. She matriculated knowing there was an existing support network in place, with her older brother being a UDSM student and her aunt a professor on campus. Her pleasant demeaner would change with an altercation at that year's "Fresher's Ball." Her disagreement with a young man at that event lead to her being "punched" the following morning.

She was labeled "Wanton Fresher" by the literature walls. In the weeks that followed she was depicted by Mzee Punch as a lascivious young woman with numerous sexual partners. Revina's studies suffered, and she withdrew socially even as friends began to avoid her for fear of being "punched" themselves.

In early February, news of another incident spread through campus. A young man had broken into Revina's room with ostensible aim of raping her. (Masanja, 2005)[108] Revina ran outside to escape the man. She later reported the incident to campus administration, who disbelieved her account. (Ngaiza, 2005; Masanja, 2005)[109]

Alone, Revina returned to her room. She made her bed. She washed, ironed, folded, and put away her clothing. Then, when all was in order, she swallowed an enormous amount of chloroquine and ended her life.

Revina's Tears and the Death of Mzee Punch

[102] Yahya-Othman, 2000, p. 42.
[103] Masanja, 2005
[104] Ibid
[105] Che-Mponda, 1992, p.11.
[106] Che-Mponda, "Go political 'Punch' challenged," *Daily News*, Saturday, March 3, 1990, p. 3.
[107] Mandele, 2005. Not all who remember Mzee Punch agree with this mainstream argument. Some still contend, "He punched for the public interest." According to this argument, how could he do anything else, as he was such a closely guarded secret? There was, therefore, no means by which an individual could exploit the institution of personal gain. Moreover, according to this view, Mzee Punch focused on promiscuity, on the behavior, not a specific gender.
[108] Masanja, 2005. "They had the keys…" [to her room.]
[109] Ngaiza, Masanja

Revina's death shook the university community to its core. (Yahya-Othman, 2000)[110] It also touched off something of a media frenzy, as journalists like Che-Mponda of the *Daily News* attacked the university's attitudes toward women. To her mind, and others like her, Mzee Punch was a symbol of misogyny at Mlimani and was indicative of a campus that instilled fear in its young women in order to control them, "to keep them down."(Tumbo, 2005; Ngaiza, 2005)[111] Out of the press coverage of the Revina Mukasa suicide, in fact, grew the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA), whose mission statement is entitled "Tears of Revina."[112]

In the wake of Revina's death, an angry Magdalena Ngaiza and her female colleagues asked that the Secretary for Social Welfare of the National Executive Committee (NEC) Minister Gertrude Mongela come from Dodoma. She agreed, coming "as a rural mother comes for the body of a daughter," dressed in a fine *kitenge*, weeping. Some of the female faculty on campus wanted to prepare an actual coffin and bring it into the cafeteria, but there was no time to do so. Instead, the minister marched into the café, and breaking Punch's rule, stood atop "High Table" to give a speech. Her speech was about what Revina's death meant, from her perspective as a minister, and as a mother losing one of her daughters. According to many, it was that day that Mzee Punch died, killed by a grieving mother. Even so, there are those who remember that Mongela herself was "punched" the following day. (Mandele, 2005; Kazuzuru, 2004)[113]

In the weeks that followed, female faculty and students, keenly aware not only of a campus climate that was hostile to young women, but also of an administration and counseling service that had failed Revina entirely, began holding a series of discussions regarding ridding the university of Mzee Punch, increasing security, and reforming counseling services. (Yahya-Othman, 2000)[114] Women who had been "punched" testified to the fact that they had undergone "extreme trauma, humiliation, and erosion of confidence." (Yahya-Othman, 2000)[115] The campus community learned that others had passed away before Revina, including a student who had died just after graduation. (Yahya-Othman, 2000)[116] In light of these discussions, the administration did undertake reform project in the decade that followed.

Though Revina Mukasa's death perhaps signaled that Mzee Punch had begun to overstep his bounds, the society did persist for some time after her suicide, and even expressed regret for the passing of his "granddaughter" (though he did not accept responsibility for her fate.) In fact, after the death of Revina, many spoke out on behalf of Mzee Punch, saying it was dangerous to get rid of him, for they would lose the protection of his watchful eye. (Mandele, 2005)[117]

Then Punch targeted President Ali Hassan Mwinyi. (Nyerembe, 2005)[118] "They drew a very bad picture of the President…a picture most uncivil." (Tumbo, 2005)[119] The president was lampooned in an image that was consistent with the sexualized humor of later Mzee Punch's work. The president was not impressed. Students were shocked, as "…even if you walked by on the street you could see it…the President naked!" (Mandele, 2005)[120]

The reaction of the government and the party was to renounce the act as defamation. It was the end of Punch's foray into national politics. (Tumbo, 2005)[121] Until that time, despite the investigation regarding Revina Mukasa, little was done curb Mzee Punch's actions. Now, with the students sent home, the administration tried to destroy Punch completely. (Tumbo, 2005)[122]

[110] Yahya-Othman, 2000, p. 42.
[111] Tumbo, Ngaiza, 2005
[112] Tanzania Media Women's Association mission statement (Dar es Salaam.)
[113] Mandele, 2005. Kazuzuru, 2004.
[114] Yahya-Othman, 2000, p. 42.
[115] Ibid
[116] Ibid
[117] Mandele, 2005
[118] Nyerembe, Paulo, Interview, March 3, 2005
[119] Tumbo, 2005
[120] Mandele, 2005
[121] Tumbo, 2005
[122] Tumbo, 2005

Investigators searched the empty dorm rooms for traces of Punch. Where they found any evidence, they expelled suspected collaborators immediately. Parents and students alike felt the impact of this decision at once. (Lwakatare, 1996)[123] It was through this aggressive pursuit of all traces of Mzee Punch that the administration tried to destroy the institution. Still, it was difficult to identify those who were actually *wapanchi*, and Punch did not disappear completely until the mid-1990s.

Mzee Punch as a society ended not because of Mogela's assault on his moral authority nor the president's door to door search. Rather, Mzee Punch died a quiet death of irrelevancy. He passed on because of a change in context, and because, in the end, his actions became unremarkable. (Shayo, 2005)[124]

By the mid-1990s, the liberalization of the national media introduced the eventual proliferation of television images. Mzee Punch no longer was able to titillate and shock the student body, his renderings now increasingly tame by the standards of the day. Two decades after his last intensive campaign, UDSM forgot Mzee Punch entirely. Former students, those who remembered him fondly, when asked questions about him, responded with a wry smile and a bashful laugh. Critics pointed to a campus climate that improved greatly, the establishment of a gender library, a gender awareness program, and classes about gender on the timetable in a variety of disciplines. (Shayo, 2005; Ngaiza, 2005)[125]

Lasting Significance of Mzee Punch

Punch did not come to an end because of a moral awakening of those responsible, and its secret was never really discovered by an administration tasked with unearthing it. Rather it ended because it no longer elicited the same sense of shock from its audience. There is no evidence that university reforms occasioned a change in the same patriarchal insistence that gave rise to and sustained Mzee Punch for two decades. His audience moved on, but to comprehend the legacy of Mzee Punch is to appreciate the extent to which the institution laid bare the fraught late 20th century gender discourse amongst Tanzania's elite. Punch was the expression of what young male students, many of whom would go on to be amongst the nation's leaders, really desired when they could exercise their will absent any conceivable reprisal.

Further, though the origin of Mzee Punch is by now clear, it is more significant to reflect upon the more remarkable point that an institution of this sort continued for as long as it did. Punch survived because many, and amongst them men and women, students and faculty, found the "literature wall" a thrilling way to begin the morning. It is also certain that some agreed with Punch's positions, or at least found them familiar. Together, these two facts granted Mzee Punch, a secret organization engaged in regular criminal activity and actively hurting people, a measure of legitimacy. The administration allowed it to persist, but there was no public outcry for its cessation either.

Lastly, this analysis focused on the history of the institution as it evolved over two decades. Certainly, by all accounts Punch changed in the 1980s as a new cadre of engineering school dominated UDSM. The technique changed, the humor became cruder, and target of Mzee Punch became focused on, at least in part, leveraging female students for sexual favors. There have been arguments that Punch was an important independent voice on campus, that he was at first a protective force insuring morality of campus society. This view would argue that in the case of Revina Mukasa, Punch's role was exaggerated, and that a laudable society had lost its way and could still be redeemed. This seems naïve. (Mbogoni and Chambulikazi, 1981; Shivji, 1993)[126] From the beginning, Punch was an organic outgrowth of masculine insecurity by the country's future parliamentary members and ministers. Self-interest weaponized Punch in the end, certainly, but the same comfortable patriarchal assumptions persisted into the decades following the institution's demise.

[123] Lwakatare, 1996, p. 162. The Vice-Chancellor wrote to me again on 15 December, 1990 and informed me that the President had sanctioned our being told the reasons for Ronald's expulsion. We were informed that a piece of paper with "Mzee Punch" inscriptions had been found in a pile of rubbish of papers in Ronald's room after the closure of the University. Ronald's account on the matter was required and investigations were proceeding. This was of great relief to us because we now knew what the issue was, about which an explanation could be given.

[124] Shayo, 2005

[125] Shayo, Ngaiza, 2005.

[126] Mbogoni, L. and Chambulikazi, *Some Notes on Mass Media and the History of Punch*, UDSM 1981, p 1. Shivji, 1993.