



**The Indigenous Games of the People of
the Coastal Region of Kenya
A Cultural and Educational Appraisal**

Mwangi Peter Wanderi



**Organisation for Social Science Research
in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA)**

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Printed in Ethiopia

ISBN: 978-99944-55-56-0

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OSSREA acknowledges the support of the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida), the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD), The Netherlands Ministry of European Affairs and International Cooperation, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and The Danish Development Agency (DANIDA).

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Foreword

Aims and Aspirations as a Tribute to the Coastal Region of Kenya

Many writers describe the Kenyan coast as “a natural paradise”. The human and physical aura of beauty and pleasant ambience at Kenya’s coastal region is a God-given treasure which with time has grown to be its hallmark. It is, therefore, a gateway to Kenya by air, water and on land. Due to these factors it receives a lot of significance, popularity and formidable fame from all over the world. This is a coastal region which historically has been better known than its hinterland for hundreds of years by people from different parts of the world. Its fame has been for two major reasons.

The first reason is due to its early encounters with Greeks, Chinese and Arabs who produced written records about it. None of the other interior regions of Kenya possesses a history that is better known than that of the coastal region. The second and most significant reason is that, up to this day, the coastal region of Kenya has had a “magnetic” appeal to people from all over the world and of all walks of life. These people, at one time or the other, settled there either temporarily or permanently. This is the historical paradise that strongly attracted foreigners from Portugal and Omani; they came and met there, and fatally plotted and executed mass murder on each other to possess this coastal land. They both temporarily occupied it and each of them left notable landmarks. The Britons also came, fought fiercely, killed poor Africans and took possession of this renowned land ... but again only for a while! They too eventually were fought off by the indigenous Kenyans and vacated.

Today, all the amorous cupids are gone forever. However, the perpetual heartbreaker who is the Kenyan coastal region still stands on firmly and steadily with all “her” beauty. A beauty that becomes more and more magnificent by the day. She is eternally smiling to Kenyans; because she knows it just too well is Kenyan and belongs to Kenyans forever. This is the beautiful coastal region that offers hospitality every day to thousands of locals and foreigners who form unending human streams, entering and leaving in all directions: via space, over the waters and on land. This is the coastal region that has seen many come and go, some leaving permanent marks including intermarriages that led to the emergence of the unique Waswahili community and their Afro-Arabic culture. The Portuguese too left behind what has today become a world-wide, well-known cultural heritage, the Fort Jesus. Indeed most of the cultural elements of Kenya’s people of the coastal region are simply fascinating to anyone with a curious eye. From the traditionally tattooed faces of the old Taita ladies (*wunyembo*) coupled with their personal experiences of their tattooing culture, to the UNESCO’s World Heritage enlisted Mijikenda’s *kaya* shrines and climaxed by the donkey and dhow races in Lamu, which is also another UNESCO’s World Heritage coastal Site, as well as the

