1. Introduction

The relationship between religion and human rights is the focus of research within the research project Human Rights and Religion. In this paper, this focus is concentrated on the relationship between women's rights and religion. If we restrict ourselves to the three Abrahamic religions, we see that already in Old Testament creation account the subordinate position of women is religiously legitimized. In indigenous cultures in Africa it is not different. That is what this contribution is about, focusing on the position of women's rights in Tanzania. What are young people's attitudes towards women's rights? And what is the influence of their religious beliefs and practices on these attitudes?

Women in Tanzania as it may apply in other parts of the world are disadvantaged for so long. At times women were regarded not like human beings but more like commodities to reckon with. The crucial concern is how some religious beliefs and practices were used to oppress women justified by scriptures and other written documents which at large were written by men. However things are dramatically changing within the main religions such as Christianity and Islam although at unpredictable pace. Thanks to science and technology there is a rapidly growing awareness of human dignity among humankind of our time especially of the rights of women. But the question is how far this process has gone already.

The paper begins with a brief description of indigenous culture in Tanzania, the culture in which most of the respondents are grown up. To shade light on the situation on women in Tanzania we consider the position of women rights in this indigenous Tanzanian culture and the role of Christianity and Islam, which are the mainstream religions in Tanzania (section 2 and 3). After that we describe the empirical research design (section 4) and report the results of the research (section 5). Lastly we discuss these results (section 6).
2. **Indigenous Culture in Tanzania**

Without entangling oneself into the problem of the definition of culture we settle for a working definition. For this limited scope we assume that culture refers to a system of beliefs, values, practices, institutions and relationships of a community of people to identify with, by which they distinguish themselves from other communities.

Initially, like most African societies indigenous cultural values in Tanzania are premised on a religiously based community spirit. The central belief is that community primarily begins with the extended family. Family serves as a paramount social reality apart from which humanity cannot exist. As Mbiti writes, “People simply assimilate whatever religious ideas and practices are held or observed by their families and communities” (Mbiti 1989,3) This is further understood as a sacred phenomenon created by God, protected by divinities and governed by ancestral spirits. In the same context the ancestors comprise the principal link between the community and the realm of the spirits.

Therefore, full participation in the community is a fundamental requirement of all humans. It comprises the nature of cultural devotion. The family is the cornerstone of personal and social identity. Mbiti says it well: ‘To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involve participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements is to be out of the whole picture. Therefore, to be without religion amounts to a self- excommunication from the entire life of society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion’ (Mbiti 1989,2).

The indigenous family might be a large, closely-knit community of blood relatives that is constitutive of the life and destiny of each of its members. All family members are believed to be descended from a common ancestor. Also in traditional indigenous families, all elderly men and women, including uncles and aunts, are called father and mother, while those closer to one’s own age are called sisters and brothers. With such kinship relationship in place, all concerned are duty bound to accept the corresponding behaviours as prescribed by tradition. Besides the

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1 This description is drawn from the Ndali ethnic group understanding of a family which one of the authors belongs to.