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## Islamic Cultural Heritage at the Coast of Kenya: Focus on the Digo Community of Mtongwe

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**ABSTRACT:** Given the evidence pointing to early Islamization of the coast of Kenya, the Digo Muslims of Mtongwe still remain attached to witchcraft- a practice that Islam is opposed to. It's paramount that we locate the phenomenon of witchcraft within the broader history of Islamization, specifically at Mtongwe. In the research review, authors of history of Islam at the Coast, including Sperling, Trimigharm, and Lewis among others, have written extensively on factors that facilitated Islamization without focusing on witchcraft. The paper other than identifying factors for Islamization, it also brings out reasons for not accommodating Islam wholesomely. Through personal interviews and questionnaires, the research confirmed that witchcraft is one of the factors of Islamization among Digo community of Mtongwe. It also confirmed that trade, intermarriage, celebrations were the main factors that led to the Islamization of the Digo community of Mtongwe.

**KEYWORDS;** History, Islam, Mtongwe , Digo

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper traces historical development of Islam at the East Coast of Africa in general and the Digo community of Mtongwe specifically in Mombasa County, Kenya. It will also seek to evaluate the role of witchcraft in the Islamization of the Digo. In other words it seeks to demonstrate the indispensable role of trade, intermarriages, celebrations among other factors in the introduction and expansion of the new religion of Islam in the Digo community. This demonstration will enable the reader to appreciate the Digo community and its beliefs based on their historical context. This historical background gives insights on how the community still keep belief and practice of witch

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### The coming of Islam to East Africa

A number of scholars of history among them Trimigharm<sup>1</sup>, Were<sup>2</sup>, Sperling<sup>3</sup>, Moreno<sup>4</sup>, Ogot<sup>5</sup>, etc. seem to converge on the idea that the advent of Islam in East Africa stretches back to around 1000 CE. Until around mid-19th century, it remained largely confined to the coast and closely bound up with the history of the Swahili towns situated on it. The Swahili language remains central to many east African Muslims, hence the occasionally heard phrase, "Swahili Islam."<sup>6</sup>

The earliest concrete evidence of Islam and Muslims in eastern Africa is a mosque foundation in Lamu where gold, silver and copper coins dated AD 830 were found during an excavation in 1984<sup>7</sup>. The oldest intact building in eastern Africa is a functioning mosque at Kizimkazi<sup>8</sup> in southern Zanzibar Island dated AD 1007. There is evidence to suggest that the religion of Islam was common in

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<sup>1</sup>Trinmingham J, S. (1964) *Islam In Africa*. Oxford.. pp. 53-55.

<sup>2</sup> Were, G.S (1968) *East Africa Through a Thousand Years: A History of the Years A.D 1000 to the Present Day* (Nairobi: Evans Brothers Ltd)

<sup>3</sup> Sperling D. C (1988) *The growth of Islam among the Mijikenda of the Kenya coast, 1826-1933* , Dissertation submitted for the Ph.D.degree School of Oriental and African Studies University of London pp 214

<sup>4</sup> Moreno D, (1978) in *History of East Africa* Edburg: HTS press pp. 222

<sup>5</sup> Ogot B . (1964) *East Africa, Past and Present*, Editor.pp. 442

<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> The **Kizimkazi Mosque** is a mosque situated on the southern tip of the island of Zanzibar in Tanzania and is one of the oldest Islamic buildings on the East African coast. Despite its name, it is located in Dimbani, not Kizimkazi, which is 3 miles (4.8 kilometres) away (this is because the official names of these two joined villages are Kizimkazi Dimbani and Kizimkazi Mtendeni). According to a preserved kufic inscription, it was built in 1107 by settlers from Shiraz. Although the inscription and certain coral-carved decorative elements date from the period of construction, the majority of the present structure was rebuilt in the

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the Indian Ocean Islands by AD 1300. These scholars, though extensive in their works, did not explore the role of witchcraft in the expansion of Islam among the Digo community.

Qurayshi (1986)<sup>9</sup> cites Ibn Batuta of Morocco as having visited the East African coastlands in 1332, who reported that Islam was wide spread and dominant from Mogadishu all the way down to the present border between Mozambique and South Africa and vast majority of the coastal settlements were Muslim, and Arabic was the common literary and commercial language spoken all over the Indian Ocean littoral. Islam thus seems to have arrived quite early in East Africa through traders. This seems to suggest that Islam did not spread through conquest<sup>10</sup>, but remained a peaceful urban<sup>11</sup> and coastal phenomenon for many decades. Later it spread to the interior after 1930 according Nzibo (1995).<sup>12</sup> However, Qurayshi did not focus on the phenomenon of witchcraft and its interplay in the spread of Islam among the Digo community.

There are two views about the relation between Islam and African languages and culture in the East Africa coast. The first is advanced by Mazrui<sup>13</sup> who argues that it would be erroneous to consider Islamic practices in eastern Africa as Arabic practices, and associate Islam with Arabs, since Islam did not Arabize East Africans; on the contrary, Arab immigrants, Islam and Islamic practices got Africanised or Swahilised, thereby developing Islam as an indigenous<sup>14</sup> African religion! This is also linguistically evidenced by the fact that Arab immigrants became Swahili speaking, adopted the Swahili dress, food and eating habits and other cultural elements. Islam is therefore not a foreign but rather a local religion on the coast. This view is also supported by Vilhanová<sup>15</sup> who noted that like Christianity, Islam in Africa can be seen as an African religion that had originated outside the continent but entered the African continent during the earliest days of its existence, spread, and has then in the course of time been adapted in many different ways to suit many different contexts. The processes of Islamic conversion were incorporated within the historical process of the development of African societies. Conversion patterns or models can be likened to a mosaic of elements of different religious faiths, traditional African religions, Islam and Christianity, all possibly at times co-existing and at other time intermixing.

The second view<sup>16</sup> held by Sperling holds that primarily, Islam spread through the interactions of individuals, with the Arab Muslims who had settled in small groups maintaining their culture, and religious practices. Despite encountering local communities, Islam was not 'indigenized' along the patterns of the local Bantu communities. Nevertheless, Islam grew through absorption of individuals into the newly established Afro-Arabic Muslim communities. This resulted in more 'Swahilization' than Islamization. It was perhaps this swahilization that justified witchcraft among the Digo.

According to Nzibo (1995) there was strong resistance towards Islam by the majority of communities living in the interior. The resistance was because conversion was an individual act, leading to detribalization and integration into the Muslim community going against the socially acceptable communal life.

Islam on the Swahili Coast was different from the rest of Africa. Unlike West Africa where Islam was integrated in the local communities, the local Islam was 'foreign'; the Arab-Muslims lived as if they were in the Middle East. (Vilhanova, 2010: 134-167)<sup>17</sup>

The primary concern for the vast majority of early Muslims was trade with only a few of them interested in propagating Islam. The arrival of the Portuguese in the 15th Century disrupted little progress that had been made in spreading the religion along the east African coast. On the other hand, the interstate quarrels between the different city states along the coast meant that much effort was now directed towards restoring normalcy and not Islamization. (Middleton, 1994<sup>18</sup>; Mathew, 1963).<sup>19</sup>

### Mijikenda

Reyn<sup>20</sup> says that the *Mijikenda* ("the Nine Tribes") is a group of nine related Bantu speaking groups inhabiting the coast of Kenya, between the Sabaki and the Uмба rivers. This is an area stretching from the border with Tanzania in the south to the border near Somalia in the north. Archaeologist Chapuruka Kusimba contends that the Mijikenda formerly resided in coastal cities, but

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<sup>9</sup> Ibn Batuta fully: Shams al-Dīn 'Abū 'Abd al-Lāh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Lāh l-Lawātī ṭ-Ṭanḡī ibn Baṭūṭah; Arabic: February 1304 – 1368 or 1369) was a Muslim Berber Moroccan scholar, and explorer who widely travelled the medieval world.<sup>1112</sup> Over a period of thirty years, Ibn Battuta visited most of the Islamic world and many non-Muslim lands, including Central Asia, Southeast Asia, India and China. Near the end of his life, he dictated an account of his journeys, titled *A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of*

<sup>10</sup> Abdul-Aziz, M.H. (1995) *Impact of Islam on the Development of Swahili Culture* and M.Bakari *Islam In Kenya* (Mombasa: Mewa Publications) P.148

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Bakari M & Yahiya, A (1995), *Islam in Kenya* : MEWA Publication, Mombasa pp.211

<sup>13</sup> Ali A. M, (2000) *Africa and Other Civilizations: Conquest and Counter-Conquest*, in *African World Politics: The African State System in Flux*, ed. John W. Harbeson pp. 441

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Villanova, P.V, (2010) *Rethinking The Spread Of Islam In Eastern And Southern A SIA N And African St u di e s*, Institute of Oriental Studies, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia viera.vilhanova@savba.sk pp 134-167

<sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam\\_in\\_Kenya#Islamic\\_arrival\\_on\\_the\\_Swahili\\_Coast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Kenya#Islamic_arrival_on_the_Swahili_Coast)

<sup>17</sup> Villanova, V.P (2010), "Rethinking the Spread of Islam in Eastern and Southern Africa, ASIAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES, p.134-167.

<sup>18</sup> Middleton, J (1994), *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization*.

<sup>19</sup> Mathew, G (1963), "The East African Coast until the coming of the Portuguese" in *The History of East Africa* (eds) Oliver Roland & Mathew, G.PP.94-128

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert, Erik; Reynolds, Jonathan T. (2008). *Africa in World History: From Prehistory to The Present*. Pearson Education, Limited. p. 229

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later settled in Kenya's hinterlands to avoid submission to dominant Portuguese forces that were then in control. Historically, these Mijikenda ethnic groups have been called the Nyika or Nika by outsiders. It is a derogatory term meaning "bush people."<sup>21</sup> The nine Ethnic groups that make up the Mijikenda peoples are the Chonyi, Kambe, Duruma, Kauma, Ribe, Rabai, Jibana, and Giriama and the Digo. The group is subdivided into the northern and the southern. The Northern Mijikenda includes the first eight while the Digo belong to southern Mijikenda.<sup>22</sup> The Digo are also found in Tanzania due to their proximity to the common border.

### Religion of the Mijikenda

Approximately half of the Mijikenda are Muslims while the other half are either Christian or African Religion followers<sup>23</sup>. One group of Mijikenda peoples, the Giriama were mistrustful of the British; the reason for this was that prior to the colonization of the coastal and hinterland areas this group had been terrorized by Arab/Swahili slave raiders during the 19th century.<sup>24</sup>

There are differing accounts of this period, with some sources stating that these enslaved Giriama people participated in a complex patron-client relationship which was important for the establishment of large scale plantations on the East African coast.<sup>25</sup> This account adds that these enslaved Giriama people were integrated into the Swahili and Arab land owning families and were sometimes referred to as dependents rather than slaves. The overall treatment of these slaves was not very harsh, because of the following; ease of escape, the kin-based patron-client system, and Islam's prohibition of harsh treatment of slaves. This treatment is a stark contrast to the treatment of the slaves on the nearby islands such as Pemba or Zanzibar where slave owners were harsh and did not have the same temperament as those in Mombasa who were treated more humanely. As slavery declined on the East African coast many of the ex-slaves moved on to find employment as manual laborers on their former master's plantations and were paid a portion of the crop as compensation in a similar patron-client relationship as before.<sup>26</sup>

There has been no consensus on the type of treatment that the Giriama received under their masters. However, some accounts state that the slavery that the Giriama people endured was harsher than was previously believed.<sup>27</sup> The enslaved Giriama were known to have fled by the hundreds to any sanctuary they could find, in some cases seeking refuge in Christian missionary stations. There are other cases where the ex-slaves fled to runaway slave settlements. The idea of transiting from ex-slave to manual laborer was made difficult due to the British's fear that the fugitive and freed slaves would start a rebellion.<sup>28</sup> It's believed those who ran to Christian missionary stations became Christians and also helped in the growth of Christianity in the area. The others maintain their African faith while others who lived with the Muslims embraced Islam. Unfortunately Islam did not grow as fast as it should have been among the Mijikenda of North Coast mainly because of the economic decline of Muslim towns and villages. This resulted in the weakening of Islam in the area north of Mombasa, where only a minority of Mijikenda became Muslims.

### Islamic influence on the Mijikenda

The Mijikenda inhabit the area between north strips of Mombasa to southern end of Tanga in Tanzania. In the early fifteenth century this area was predominantly non-Muslim. Historical writing about the early coastal towns generally stresses the influence of Islam as argued by Sperling<sup>29</sup>. Muslim chronicles are the main source of evidence and little is known about the indigenous African people during this period especially at the coast as no documentations were found. Foundations of these towns are not very clear since according to Sperling<sup>30</sup> it is not known whether these towns were founded by immigrants from overseas, or were indigenous African. What is clear is that, at one time or another, most towns had at least some Muslim inhabitants, as is evident from the ruins of mosques. The towns might have also been inhabited by indigenous people living along with the immigrants as early observers like Krapf<sup>31</sup> suggest.

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<sup>21</sup> Gilbert R *Mijikenda People* (2008) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>

<sup>22</sup> Sperling *Op.Cit*

<sup>23</sup> Gilbert R (2008) *Mijikenda People* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Gilbert *Op., Cit.*,

<sup>26</sup> Ibid pp. 114

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Sperling *Op., Cit.*, pp 123

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Krapf and HenryC. ArAngelo, (1845) *A Rough Sketch of the River Juba*, *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, February.. p. 281

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### History of Islam in Mtongwe

Kaingu<sup>32</sup>, Sperling,<sup>33</sup> Trimigham<sup>34</sup> and Mazrui<sup>35</sup> agree that Digo community is a member of the Mijikenda communities who originated from Shungwaya, North of river Tana or southern Somalia. Mzee Shaaban Khamis Kondo<sup>36</sup> confirms the origin of the Digo that they came from Shungwaya. I asked him about the the origin of the Tangana people, he surprised me that Tangana is just but a place in Mombasa and not a people in Mtongwe as some books suggested. This is contrary to Sperling and other authors<sup>37</sup> who state that, since the founding of Mtongwe, the Tangana Swahili had exerted a strong influence on the neighbouring Digo of Mihongani and Kiteje. He says the influence continued during the second half of the 19th century. According to him by 1875, the Digo population of Mtongwe (*kaya Kiteje* and Mihongani) is said to have been "half of the Digo community who had converted to Islam."

The Mijikenda people of the Kenya coast have been in contact with other African Muslims at least since the 17th century. The first Mijikenda conversions to Islam occurred in the 18th century through the influence of neighbouring Swahili peoples. Early Mijikenda converts migrated to Swahili towns, thereby establishing a pattern of urban Islamization that hindered Islam from spreading among the Mijikenda of the interior. From the beginning of 1830s, the East African economy expanded, and Muslim commercial activity in the coastal hinterland increased. The migration of Muslims to settle near Mijikenda villages led to closer relations between Muslims and Mijikenda. By mid of the 19th century, the cultural influence of Islam was evident among the Mijikenda in the following ways; their dressing, food, beliefs, etc. The low number of converts could be attributed to an absence of proselytising by Muslims as to the strength and integrity of Mijikenda society. Differing Mijikenda settlement patterns in the north and south of Mombasa influenced the way Islam spread. In the north of Mombasa, Mijikenda Muslim converts continued to immigrate to towns and or to separate Mijikenda Muslim villages. In the South of Mombasa, beginning in the 1850s, the Digo Mijikenda converts remained resident in their home villages, while centring their social and religious life as Muslims in town. Under the continuing influence of Swahili and other Muslims, including the immigrants within Digo villages, Islam slowly gathered strength among the Digo. By the end of the 19th century, the Digo had already built several mosques, and educated Digo Muslims were teaching and actively proselytising among their fellow Digo. The British colonial rule brought about changes that affected the growth of Islam among the Mijikenda. They instituted legal regime rulings in favour of Islamic law that strengthened Islam, and which eventually made Islam to emerge as the majority religion among the Digo south of Mombasa.

Sperling stresses that though the number of Digo converts continued to increase into the 20th century, the practice of Islam and Digo customs co-existed: Mtongwe is the most thoroughly Mohamedan community, but even there the elders regularly attend and sacrifice at their ancestral Kayas. This is confirmed by Sheikh Ismail Tsembea<sup>38</sup>. He says that even though the Digo embraced Islam, some of them are still traditionalists. According to him, the Digo integrate their traditions including marriage and burial rites within Islamic practices. The village of Mtongwe established itself quickly, when Jaka wa Fumbwe, one of the earliest settlers, came with "a large number of livestock while there were some settlers who began fishing, others planted coconut trees and began to cultivate the land. Krapf<sup>39</sup> who crossed from Mombasa island to the southern mainland noted. "The banks of the bay are chiefly inhabited by Muhamedan planters, though now and then a Wanyika cottage has been erected." Jaka wa Fumbwe and Muhammad Mwijaa, who had also come to Mtongwe from Pemba, travelled up-country, and to the south in sailing ships and brought slaves to work on their plantations.

Sperling<sup>40</sup> states that for several years, the Tangana of Mtongwe attended Friday prayers in Mombasa, but eventually decided to have a mosque of their own at Mtongwe. The Mkunguni Mosque built by Mwalimu Mwamwinyimkuu sometime in the 1840s, was the first mosque to be built in the 19th century on the mainland south of Mombasa. The place where the original mosque was is now occupied by the Kenya Navy according to Mzee Mohammed Hamis.<sup>41</sup> According to tradition, the mosque was built on the foundations of an old stone mosque which Mwalimu Mwamwinyimkuu found in the area.<sup>42</sup> In the 1850s, Jaka wa Fumbwe, helped by his son Mwalimu wa Jaka, built a second mosque, the Girandi Mosque (also known as Jaka's Mosque), and dug a well beside the mosque.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Kaingu K.T. (1998) *Cultural Practice of the Midzichenda* " At Cross Roads: Divination, Healing, Witchcraft and the Statutory Law

<sup>33</sup> Sperling Op., Cit., 222

<sup>34</sup> Trimigham J, S. . *Islam in Africa*. Oxford. 1964. pp. 53-55.

<sup>35</sup> Ali A. M (1993). *Jangamizi: Spirit and sculpture*. Journal of African Languages and Culture Vol. 1 pp 129

<sup>36</sup> Mzee shaaban Khamis Kondo (O.I., 3.3.2019)

<sup>37</sup> Sperling Op., Cit., pp 288

<sup>38</sup> sheikh Ismail Tsembea (O.I 14.4.2019)

<sup>39</sup> Krapf Op., Cit., pp 234

<sup>40</sup> Sperling Op. Cit pp 211

<sup>41</sup> Mohammed Hamisi (O.I 14.10.2019)

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*

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### Witchcraft for Medical Purposes

Witchcraft, this study revealed, though ignored by many researchers, was one of the strongest factors in the spread of Islam among the Digo. Witchcraft was understood as a medical approach to the myriad conditions that afflicted the Digo. The Digo would go to Mtongwe or Mombasa for medical treatment when their traditional cures failed them. Equally Swahili Muslim medicine-men or healers frequented the rural Digo hinterland in search of patients. They interacted with and influenced many Digos. This answers the question why there are many Muslim *waganga* (medicine men) among the Digo. This view is consistent with Ustadh Karega's.<sup>44</sup> As early as the 1840s Krapf came across a wandering-Muslim *mganga* in a village south of Likoni. The fact that the Digo turned to Muslim *waganga* was consistent with their concept of sickness and the spirit world. The Muslim *waganga* concept of treatment known as *Ruqya* appeared consistent with the Digo treatment custom. Traditionally they practised a variety of therapeutic treatments and ceremonies (including exorcism), depending on the sickness or spirit involved.

Once a Digo had become closely involved with non-Digo Muslim *wagangas*, he also considered himself a master of the subject. This probably explains why Ustadh Salim<sup>45</sup> says that some Digo boast of being experts in exorcism. The malevolent action of these spirits could only be counteracted by the corresponding medicinal power of Islam possessed by a Muslim *mganga* (doctor). Ustadhi Salim said that one Muslim healer is described as having told a Digo who was seriously ill, "You are possessed by the spirit of an Arab; if you convert, you will get better."

According to Sheikh Ahmad,<sup>46</sup> the Imam of Tauba Mosque, "There is no doubt that some Digo sensed a higher form of healing strength in Islam". He added that the reality that seems to have mattered, however, was the suitability of specific cures, not whether Muslim medicine was more powerful than traditional medicine. The Digo methods were considered to be impotent against Muslim spirits because such spirits were believed to come from outside Digo community. He quoted Kiswahili saying, *kipya kinyemi ingawa kidonda* (people will always get attracted to new things irrespective of what negative effects they may have)

Through the process of conversion, the convert gained access, without rejecting traditional cures, to supernatural resources which could cope with foreign spirits (and perhaps with a few local ones as well). The spiritual power of Islam could prove equally ineffectual in dealing with a Digo non-Muslim *waganga* with whom they may have competed, but their methods complemented each other. The use of Muslim methods of treatment, side by side with traditional ones, came to be widespread practice, even among non-Muslims. This explains why there are many people among the community who converted and claimed to be good witchdoctors as observed by Mr. Baahassan sineno<sup>46</sup> The conversions arising out of treatment by Muslim *waganga* were recognized by the Digo as leading to a particular kind of Islam, *Uislamu Ila pepo*, what we might loosely call "Islam brought on by spirits", as if the convert had somehow become a Muslim in order to deal with some spirits which otherwise would have got the better of him. Such conversions tended to be superficial, in comparison with conversions resulting from trading contacts and friendships with Muslims. They did not imply any change in traditional beliefs and practices; the world of Muslim spirits was simply incorporated into a traditional context. Perhaps this could be the reason why sheikh Ismail Tsembea<sup>47</sup> meant that Digo did not drop their traditional beliefs. This practice to some look like witchcraft but accepted since it is done by the Muslims. This also explains why they don't kill witches like the other communities.

### METHODOLOGY

This section consisted of research design, methods used in sampling and tools used in data collection, analysis and presentation. These included data collection procedure, sampling techniques and sample size, data processing and analysis.

The study used a descriptive survey technique to obtain information on perception of witchcraft among the Digo. The study targeted Mtongwe area of Mombasa County. The area is apparently inhabited by majority Digo community who are the first to have accepted Islam among the Mijikenda.

A non-probability sampling method was used to determine the sample size. In non - probability sampling, the sample is selected purposively by the researcher... Various methods were used to accomplish non-probability sampling, among them purposive sampling. Through purposive sampling technique, the researcher identified various groups of people believed to be relevant to the study. This fitted well for the study because the selected informants provided the required information. In addition, structured and unstructured questions were used, as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The study purposively selected informants from Muslim scholars, local leaders, traditional healers, government officials, youth, cultural historians and seekers of traditional healers of the area. The study targeted a sample of one hundred and eighteen respondents (40 Muslim scholars; 30 local leaders; 5 Traditional healers. 7 Government local administrators; 30 Youth; 3 cultural historians and 10 Seekers of traditional healer

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<sup>44</sup> Ustadh Karega (O.I, 14.4.2019)

<sup>45</sup> Ustadh Salim (3.4.2019)

<sup>46</sup> Mr. Baahassan (O.I., 21.4.2019)

<sup>47</sup> Ismail Tsembea (O.I. 12.3.2019)

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## Summary of Respondents

**Table 4: Summary of respondents**

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Number</b>
1	Imam	10
2	Madrassa teachers	10
3	Muslim School teachers male	5
4	Muslim School teachers female	5
5	Non-Muslim School teachers female	5
6	Non-Muslim School teachers female	5
7	Local leaders Muslim male	10
8	Local leaders Muslim female	10
9	Local leaders non-Muslim male	5
10	Local leaders non-Muslim female	5
11	Traditional healers	5
12	Seekers of traditional healing	5
13	Government local administrators	10
14	Youth in school male	10
15	Youth in school female	10
16	Youth out school male	5
17	Youth out school female	5
18	Historians	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>

The main tools were questionnaires, interview guides and focus group discussions (FGD) guides. These tools were used.

- i. A hundred and twenty-five questionnaires were distributed to the respondents as mentioned earlier,
- ii. The researcher used archival, textual and content analysis of sources.
- iii. The researcher also used a Focus Group Discussions the role of witchcraft in the introduction and spread of Islam among the Digo.

To analyse the data the researcher used mainly descriptive survey techniques to obtain information on witchcraft among Digo community of Mtongwe area according to Kombo et al (2005) .

## RESULTS

From the question posed to the 125 respondents on whether witchcraft exists among the Digo community, the following were the findings of the research;

**Table 2.1 Table Showing Existence of Witchcraft**

Yes	No	Don't know
88%	10%	2%

This shows that witchcraft is a common phenomenon among both the Digo of Mutongwe and the other Digo in Kwale county. This is in agreement with the findings of other scholars discussed in the Literature Review section,

**Table 2.2: Reasons for perpetuating the practice of witchcraft in Mtongwe ward.**

Jealousy	Wealth	Protection	Love	Fame	Other reasons	Healing	Don't know
23.125	5.625	9.815	9.255	2.585	13.835	23.625	12.265
23	6	10	9	3	14	24	11

This Table indicates that Healing was the overarching reason why many Digo practice witchcraft despite having embraced Islam quite early. Many older informants insisted that many early Digo embraced Islam for purposes of accessing Islamic *ruqyah* power for healing. This practice has been passed on to later and contemporary generations.

## DISCUSSION

From the research it was established that 88% practice of *utsai* (witchcraft) exist. During an interview, Ustadh Salim Bakari, (P. I. 23.9.2019) explained witchcraft to be a reality and that Digo Tcommunity associated calamities with witchcraft. Explanation of Ustadh Salim Bakari is supported by functionalist theory which argues that, 'society is a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability.' Some people seek traditional methods of solving socio-economic problems. An example of this is untreatable sickness in the family, frequent and unexplained deaths, intractable economic poverty; formal unemployment; among others and more so longstanding marital disputes. Witchcraft is a common practice as observed by Mutuku (2010); Akosua (2014), Dzovu (2013) and Lumwe (2017). Dzovu(2013) notes that among the Digo of Kenya the belief and fear of sorcery is most prevalent that many things are explained in relation with it. The Holy Quran (2.102) acknowledges existence of witchcraft among people. Some 10% of the respondents did not believe that the area was deeply in the belief of witchcraft. This could be attributed to the fact that maybe this category of respondents had formal schooling, and hence, had little or no regard for witchcraft. Lastly, 2% of the

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respondents indicated that they did not know whether witchcraft existed in the area or not because they had not experienced it nor heard of its effects on people. .

Furthermore, the study established that over 24% of the respondents stated that witchcraft was used as a mechanism to heal the sick. (Mzee Pawa, P.I.12.6.2019) told the researcher that he had in his shop some oil used by traditional healers to treat people struck by spells from witches. On the positive extreme, traditional healers help cure ill-stricken people and act as a positive force or antidote against the otherwise debilitating fears of witchcraft. Majority of the respondents indicated that because of the healing power of Islamic ruqya and its seeming coherence with Digo witchcraft, many Digo converted to Islam.

In addition older respondents said that many Muslim healers, compared to native Digo healers, appeared to be more powerful. This encouraged many native Digo to convert to Islam in order to acquire more potent healing power.

The study established that traditional healer is often a medicine-man, a leech, a herbalist, a soothsayer, and a diviner; all in one. He has useful functions, as expected by functionalist perspective, even if one accepts the point of view that witchcraft is impossible as noted by Parrinder (1963). Witchcraft is part of African traditional lifestyle, dynamics, and customs, including healing practices.

As an example is the charm or *githito* was used by a majority of the Agikuyu as a symbol of security against numerous potential dangers in the life of the individual. Such charms could be manufactured for a group, especially for a family as when a father decides to protect his homestead. They could also be individually acquired by people involved in various specialized activities like hunting. Such a hunter would seek a charm to protect him from wild animals and enemies of all kinds.

Just like any other place Richard, (2001) reports that in the 16th century, Italy had a high portion of witchcraft trials involving love magic. He says that the country had a large number of unmarried people due to men marrying later in their lives during this time. This left many women on a desperate quest for marriage leaving them vulnerable to the accusation of witchcraft whether they took part in it or not. Trial records from the Inquisition and secular courts discovered a link between prostitutes and supernatural practices. Professional prostitutes were considered experts in love and therefore knew how to make love potions and cast love related spells as observed by Christopher (2001).

On similar situation, Ruth (1989) reports that until 1630, the majority of women accused of witchcraft were prostitutes. A courtesan was questioned about her use of magic due to her relationship with men of power in Italy and her wealth. Similar findings are reported by Thomas, (1993:189-195). It states that the majority of women accused were also considered "outsiders" because they were poor, had different religious practices, spoke a different language, or simply from a different city/town/region as noted by

The study, additionally, established that majority of respondents stated that practice of witchcraft in the area was not based on a single factor. Over 75% of the respondents gave other mixed reasons other than the ones already discussed such as pride, arrogance and hate. Ustadh Abdulqadr (P.I. 15.8.2019) is among the respondents who held such view. To them all mentioned reasons and others not mentioned could be factors motivating the practice for witchcraft. The same motivations for witchcraft are consistently cited in the modern African society. Ngulube (1989) concluded from his field studies in urban and rural Zambia that there are up to seven motives for being a perpetrator of witchcraft; loathing, seeking revenge, jealousy of someone's achievements or wealth, cruelty directed randomly at others, punishment for close relatives' wrong deeds, and individuals being driven into witchcraft because they have been possessed by evil spirits. These motives for witchcraft, as the case in traditional society, mean that anyone can become a witch or can be a victim of witchcraft. One can be a victim of witchcraft if one is perceived by close social acquaintances as being very rich, too powerful, selfish, too arrogant and boastful, daring, has too many wives and children, too happy, too old, or too beautiful, this is an observation of many respondents in including Bahassan (P.I. 3.6.2019). This may also explain why mixed reasons are among major reasons for practicing of witchcraft in the area. What is significant in these explanations is not that witchcraft in itself is believed in, but that it can be used to explain virtually any illness which is sudden, whose cause is mysterious or cannot be cured by modern medical science and technology.

Just like other areas it was established that witchcraft is done for various reasons. According to Mbiti (1969) there are three legitimate mechanisms of social control: one, government, which we allow to use all sorts of methods to maintain social order. Two, religion; where the fear of eternal damnation persuades us to keep trying to be good. Three, customs where the society punishes us through alienation or torment by spirits if we don't abide with the norms. Witchcraft, scholars tell us was one of the tools used in the traditional society to control and balance society as observed by Mbiti, (1969). He adds that the customs was so strong that the colonial government banned it, and so did the independent Kenyan government. No government wants citizens believing in powers that it cannot control. However, with life rapidly becoming complicated, modern governments and the religious institutions can no longer provide all the answers to the questions unleashed by globalization. Progress through scientific thinking has proven inadequate in answering the numerous questions it raises. Witchcraft helps some people to articulate the internal contradictions of modernity.

The farmer who loses his cow no longer gets quick answers from the Government, though he is supposed to vote and pay taxes to enable the same government protect his property. The farmer is forced to look for his own catch-thief mechanisms. The moral framework subscribed by the church fails to prevent the thief from doing his thing despite threats of hellfire. The poor man cannot make sense of how his neighbor's government employed daughter, who dropped out of school in form four, is suddenly

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putting up some flats in town. The poor farmer's degree holding son has been languishing at home for years. And that rich man or woman wants a shortcut to corporate or political power!

Stenberg (2009) tell us in 'Modernity through the eyes of Witchcraft' that this "extremely unequal world..., witchcraft is increasingly employed as a means of explaining and tackling human misfortune." In this rising uncertainty, people, rich or poor, resort to the occult. Humanity does not allow for a free fall. It creates cushions where they don't exist. When everything fails, we get such cases like Paul Magu's, of cult-based tragedies.

Note that the rise of cultish practices, the 'gospel of prosperity', get-rich-quick schemes and the idea that someone called Satan can dole out free money rose when the central government started failing sometimes in the 1980s as Waweru (1997) claim.

Some 11% of the respondents said they did not know if witchcraft existed in the area or not. For this reason they could not tell what witchcraft was for. The study established that these respondents were young people with no knowledge of historical facts of the area while others had no experience of witchcraft practiced in the area when others were mostly foreigners to the area. Interview with Mwachilole (P.I.21.6.2019) actually confirmed that he had no experience of witchcraft in the area. The study also established that other than not knowing others denied its existence in the area. To them witchcraft is just a fallacy. Geschiere (1970) noted that witchcraft has been more often dismissed by scholars as an imaginary or unreal phenomenon. Because of its complexity, some people have concluded that the language used to describe witchcraft and sorcery is actually a coded language that means something else. In other words, witchcraft is not real. So, is witchcraft in Africa real or an imaginary phenomenon? Do people use this terminology to make Africa look diabolical and backward, or is witchcraft part of a general African cultural phenomenon? This could be the view of those who deny its existence. However witchcraft is done for various reasons at different places as scholars put it. Mitchell (1977) insists that some of the reasons witchcraft is directed at a person include jealousy, envy, and enmity. It is easy to see why witches are the most feared individuals in a community as Mitchell (1977) put it. To Mitchell witch beliefs have played a very important role in societies until very recent times. The fact that some people no longer hold these ideas, though, and the fact that they regard them as superstitions, products of ignorance and error, often hampers communication in the African. The failure to understand the precise nature of witchcraft beliefs and, of even greater significance, the failure to understand the roles of these beliefs in the context of the lives of those who hold them, is often at the basis of naïve statements that the 'African mind' is different in some fundamental way from other cultures and in an ultimate sense incomprehensible. But these beliefs are social, not psychological, phenomena and must be so analysed.

Mwalwa (1999) found that some few church members, among the Kamba people, still consulted witches when they were faced with crises. He concludes that practice of witchcraft among the Akamba Christians rampant: At least (80%) of Christians admitted frequent and constant consultation to traditional specialists commonly known as 'Awe'. He says that most Christians irrespective of gender, marital status and age seek and consult these powers when confronted by problems. In this connection, the Akamba Christians are seen in behaviors that subscribe to witchcraft such as wearing protective charms, keeping broken pieces of pot on top of their houses and complaining of being bewitched by their fellow Christians. The voluntary and repeated confessions and lynching of witches, some of whom are Christians proves that the belief in witchcraft exists among Akamba Christians. This being the case those who do not openly admit witchcraft's existence do so on the surface. He too observed that the practice of witchcraft among the Kikuyu community and established that; witchcraft, and divination are still present in Gikuyu society. 33% of the respondents indicated awareness that witches are still present in the post-Christian society while 73% indicated that the practice of sorcery is still going on among Christians in Tetu Division. This study also found that the Church is aware of the presence of witchcraft, and divination since some of the people who had been accused of the practices and those who had confessed of the practice are Christians. He notes that witchcraft phenomenon can be understood through folklore theories. Folklore encompasses the customs, knowledge systems, games, beliefs, practices, literature, performing and nonperforming arts, which include dance music, theatre, drama, painting, sculpture, making of crafts with several materials, festivals among others. The process of transmission of knowledge contained in all the aspects of folklore mentioned above through sustenance, reshaping, renewal, creation of variants has been a continuous phenomenon since the human civilization appeared on this earth.

This is specifically, the anthropological arm that explains cultures and cultural dynamics. Gupta (1992) mention specifically, the theory of functionalism as mentioned in chapter one, which deems culture as a living organism which has capacity to reproduce, grow and die, through its organs, explains why people believe in what they do. In the bio-cultural theory: Malinowski (2003) suggested that individuals have physiological needs (reproduction, food, shelter) and that social institutions exist to meet these needs. He adds there are also culturally derived needs and four basic "instrumental needs" (economics, social control, education, and political organization), that require institutional devices. Each institution has personnel, a charter, a set of norms or rules, activities, material apparatus (technology), and a function. Malinowski argued that uniform psychological responses are correlates of physiological needs as observed by Porth (1998)

Because witchcraft is viewed as an ontological reality, different African traditions use different magic to protect themselves from the evil powers exercised through witchcraft for example in the work of Parrinder (2003) argues that "in traditional Africa an unprotected homestead is referred to as the playing ground for witches and its occupants are in danger of becoming easy targets of



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witches” He tries to pass a notion that, according to the African mind-set, witchcraft is so real that no one is ready to take a chance of not taking necessary precautions for the protection of him/herself and the family.

For instance, the *Mijikenda* (that is found along the Kenyan coast) as narrated by Dzovu, (2013) use a protective charm called *vingo*. *Vingo* is made from medicinal herbs and dry powered roots of trees that are then placed in a sacred pot. The pot may be buried at the center or in one corner of a homestead. The main purpose is to protect the homestead and the family members from evil men. This custom grew out of the practice of early *Mijikenda* settlers who lived in dense forests. They put *vingo* at the center of the homestead to protect the people against invaders. They believed that the charm made the settlement invisible to the invading enemy or could also counteract any magical powers used against them or create confusion among anyone attacking them. They further believed that the powers of the *vingo* could cause the invaders to expose their intentions by causing some form of insanity.

During the ethnographic study among the Digo people, I discovered that in times of community need, such as sickness and drought, the village elders used to visit the *vingo* with the diviner to seek spiritual advice from their ancestors. The ancestors would reveal the cause of the problem and what should be done to remove it. For the community to be healed from the calamity, the village elders would then organize a community prayer ceremony called *tambiko*. The reason for all these rituals was because of their cosmological understanding that the ancestral spirits have a direct influence on the daily affairs of the living as mentioned by Parrinder, above. Hence, the community members would call upon the ancestors to protect them from evil men and evil powers. What about the Digo in Mtongwe region, what is their story on witchcraft.

Mutuku Sesi (2018) in her work titled, “Understanding Witchcraft among the Digo Muslims on the Coast of Kenya: Implications for Mission”, noted that the question of whether witchcraft is real or not has been a concern to many people Worldwide. This is true sometimes that innocent people are accused of witchcraft, but among the people living along the coastal regions, witchcraft is a common practice. To Mutuku the Digo Muslims have reasons why they practice witchcraft, the types and forms of witchcraft they practice and how they practice them. This work sought to examine witchcraft practice among the Digo Muslims, who are believed to have been the first to convert to Islam in the coast of Kenya, and that over 90% of them are Muslims. The study revealed that despite being over 90% Muslims, Digo Muslims still associate most calamities and problems with witchcraft and they also seek traditional methods of solving socio-economic problems. It also established that the Islam does not provide solutions to problems faced by the Digo Muslims, forcing them to diagnose the religion and become ‘dual’ Muslims, mostly known as “folk” Muslims. The study therefore suggests ways through which Christianity can be used by Digo Muslims to seek for solutions to their problems without resorting to witchcraft. This study did not seek to establish why contemporary Digo Muslims.

Ndzovu (2013) noted that the belief and fear of sorcery is most prevalent that many things are explained in relation with it. Over the years, major sorcery-detection and eradication ‘crusades’ conducted by individuals alleging to be endowed with supernatural powers to detect and neutralize purported sorcerers have been witnessed among the Digo. During the eradication ‘crusades’ a considerable amount of money is collected to pay for the services of the presumed experts, indicating how serious the problem is regarded in Digo region. Yet, according to Ndzovu, Islam is the religion of majority of the Digo, which has influenced their thinking and worldview, and has specific teachings on the practice of sorcery.

Despite substantial influence of Islam on the Digo, the people continue to believe and practice sorcery leading to the development of popular religious therapy. This work demonstrated that popular Islamic rituals and talismans have been adopted by the Digo to assist the traditional healers in countering the forces of sorcery as a means to restoring health to individuals and the general well-being of society. In exploring the practice of sorcery as experienced by the Digo, this work demonstrated how the traditional techniques of countering sorcery are rooted in the indigenous belief system of the Digo. Both the traditional and the popular Islamic approaches of countering sorcery reveal the ability of the different world views in making remedies and medicines for the victims.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study sampled one hundred and twenty-five respondents and this number may appear low. However, they were the ones available for the study. To deal with this the study employed three data collection instruments (questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussions) instead of one data collection instrument. Furthermore some of the respondents might have given inaccurate information hence affecting the overall interpretation and analysis of data. We used cultural historians to cushion the study against distortions given by some respondents. The researcher went to study with a position that witchcraft is sinful. This might have affected his framing of question. The researcher attempted to be as much as possible to be objective. Future research should include more respondents and not only one twenty-five. The research should go further than Mtongwe to include Digo Muslims away from Mtongwe who might have more and relevant information.

### CONCLUSION

The present paper has demonstrated that, the coming of Islam at the East of African coast influenced the *Mijikenda* in general and the Digo in particular. The traditional religion of the Digo appeared to be similar to the new religion called Islam in many ways. One major way in which this new religion was similar to the traditional religion was the concept of sickness and treatment. The Islamic mode of treatment especially the *ruqya*, was, to many Digo, similar to the traditional Digo approach (exorcism). Many Digo

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converted to the new faith in their quest to access and utilise the Islamic *ruqya* power. This factor was consistently ignored by many studies on the introduction and spread of Islam along the East African coast, especially among the Digo. They considered trade, intermarriages with Arab or Persian Muslims and rural urban movement as major factors in the spread of Islam. Yet, witchcraft played an integral role in the introduction and expansion of Islam along the Kenyan coast.

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