

UNDERSTANDING WITCHCRAFT AMONG THE DIGO MUSLIMS ON THE COAST OF KENYA: IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSION

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ABSTRACT: *This paper is about understanding Witchcraft among Digo Muslims on the Coast of Kenya. The question of whether witchcraft is real or not has been a concern to many people Worldwide. It is true sometimes that innocent people are accused of witchcraft, but among the people living along the coastal regions, witchcraft is a common practice. They have reasons why they practise witchcraft, the types and forms of witchcraft they practise and how they practise them. This paper seeks to examine witchcraft practice among the Digo people, 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 reveals that despite being over 90% Muslims, Digo people still associate most calamities and problems with witchcraft and they also seek traditional methods of solving socio-economic problems. It also establishes that the Islamic religion does not provide solutions to problems faced by the Digo Muslims, forcing them to 'Digonize' 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. Since this research needed interaction with people in order to get the information that led to understanding witchcraft among the Digo Muslims of the Coast of Kenya, an ethnographic research design was employed within the context of qualitative research methodology. The researcher went to the field to seek the information that led to the understanding of Witchcraft among the Digo Muslims on the Coast of Kenya. The research was conducted on the South Coast of Kenya among the Digo Muslims. In order to understand Witchcraft among the Digo on the South Coast of Kenya, the researcher analyzed the ethnographic data and interpreted the findings.*

KEYWORDS: Witchcraft, Muslim, Digo, Culture, Mosque, Qur'an

INTRODUCTION

"Is witchcraft real?" This question implies doubt over the existence of witchcraft. This might be because of the varied views from Anthropologists, Philosophers and scholars who have conducted ethnographic research on witchcraft among different groups of people worldwide. As a result of their studies, the scholars have taken four main positions: "[1] Witchcraft [beliefs] are real, [2] There are no witches, only the belief in them, [3] Witches may or may not be real, and further research may shed light on the issue, [4]. For the study of witchcraft, the above positions are irrelevant" (Bond & Diane, 2001, p. 6). Digo people and many Africans follow most of their anthropologists and philosophers as per the opinion that witchcraft beliefs are very real.

However, as Bond and Diane argue, whichever conclusion one arrives at as to whether witches [and I add Witchcraft] exist or not, depends on the mindset of the ethnographic researcher (Bond & Diane, 2001, p. 7). Therefore, I opine that, any convincing conclusion whether witchcraft is real or not depends on the mindset of the researcher sometimes

controlled by the researcher's biasness.

For example, one day when I was being served in a bank at Karen, I heard a man at the counter next to me firmly and strongly say to the lady serving him, "witchcraft is real". The lady exclaimed, "How do you know?" The man gave a story of how his friend's car was recovered a week ago by them. "A thief hijacked my friend ... about two kilometres away, bees filled in the car, and the car stopped by itself beside the road. The thief was found unconscious, covered with bees, but the car was intact. That was witchcraft". I do not know how the story started, but at least, I heard that bit of it.

Again, when I was doing my study among Digo Muslims, the Imam (Islam is Religious leader) in my village graciously accompanied my husband and I. He introduced us to the villagers, and helped with translation. From time to time, my husband could make appointments to interview the Imam outside the mosque. On one such occasion, on a Friday and just before time for Muslim usual prayers at the Mosque, the Imam seemed reluctant to enter the mosque to lead the prayers. I was so concerned about it that I interrupted the interview and asked him whether he would not lead prayers at the mosque but he declined and argued that he had instructed one of the young men to stand in for him that day. We continued with the interview until 4:30 pm.

On another occasion, with the same Imam on a Thursday, I saw seven Digo people; men and women, hurrying in one direction. All of a sudden, the Imam paused and said, "*Kuna atsai angi ambao anachoendelea chijijini na unatakiwa atuaende utu fulani*", meaning, "There is a lot of witchcraft going on in this village and we have to do something". This declaration from the Imam surprised me. So I asked him "What do you mean by saying that there is a lot of witchcraft in this village? Do Muslims believe in witchcraft?" The Imam seemingly surprised by my question responded:

All Digo people believe in witchcraft. You see these people passing! ... Mr. Msamiati (not his real name) is having a lot of health problems. A witch planted witchcraft ... village elder has called a witchdoctor ... uproot the witchcraft ... I have to go right now. Can we meet tomorrow?

He stood up quickly, bid us bye, and left. I turned to my husband and asked him, "Which is which for the Digo people? Islam or traditions" Most of the Muslims and non-Muslims living in the East African coast live in this syncretism, giving their traditional beliefs and practices priority, followed by Islam or Christianity.

This paper thus deals with understanding witchcraft among Digo Muslims on the South Coast of Kenya. The Digo Muslims are described briefly here. The concepts of witchcraft, witchcraft in the Qu'ran and in the Hadith, are discussed. Reasons and effects of witchcraft are also looked at in this paper and suggestions for a Christian response to witchcraft among the Digo of the Coast of Kenya are given.

The problem addressed in this paper is that, Digo people, though claiming to be 99% Muslims, (Joshua's project II, 2002) have continued to connect life threatening issues with witchcraft as part of their belief system. This has made it hard for the Christians living among them to share the love of God that may lead them to Christ. It has also created fear among these Christians, making it very hard for them to take Jesus' commission in Mat. 28:18-20 and make Jesus' disciples among these Digo Muslims. This paper limits itself to discussing

witchcraft among the Digo, and only giving a few examples of other groups on the coast termed as ‘sisters’ to Digo people e.g. the Giriama. The knowledge obtained in this paper is intended to help and equip the missionaries working or anticipating to work among the Digo Muslims of the South Coast of Kenya. It also proposes some approaches that Christians can use to share the love of God with the Muslims, so as to change their worldview on witchcraft. Furthermore, it adds knowledge to the academia in the area of missiology and anthropology.

The Digo People of the Coast of Kenya

The Digo are Bantus, belonging to *Mijikenda* (nine sub-tribes) people found along the South Coast of Kenya and Tanzania. The other eight sub-tribes are the Duruma, Giriama, Chonyi, Jibana, Kombe, Rabai, Kauma and Ribe. However, among the nine sub-tribes, Digo have the highest population of Muslims with very few Christians among them (Trimingham, 1964, p. 38), 0.10% according to Joshua Project (2018). According to Sesi (2003), the Digo had contact with Muslims as early as 1050-1150 C.E. However, this long period of encounter has not made them to practice Orthodox Islam (Kim, 2013, p. 179). Although the first Digo converted to Islam between the late 1840’s and early 1850’s, the movement to conversion did not gather momentum until the 1880’s (Sperling, 1970, p. 6; Sesi, 2003). Majority of the Digo Muslims are Sunni. They are expected to follow the Shafi’i school of *Sunni* Islamic teachings which dominate the region. Shaffites teach that witchcraft is caused by witches (in Swahili *Mchawi*). According to the findings of this research, witches are believed to largely determine the life of a Digo person in all social subsystems including economic, social, political, spiritual, and technology.

Among the nine sub-tribes, Digo people are the only tribe that converted to Islam as a community (Trimingham, 1980, p. 39). Many Digo people have not studied Islam as a religion, neither do they know the Arabic language, nor pay allegiance to it as to their traditional beliefs and they still maintain their unity. Therefore, to make a decision as an individual is not an easy thing to do for a Digo Muslim. Digo conversion to Islam was not necessarily through teachings of Islamic faith but as a result of social and economic pressures within the society. This shows that the Islam practised among the Digo is based on convenience, not on faith in Allah as such. Such a brand of Islam practised by Digo people is called ‘Folk Islam’ (Hartnell, 1969; Sesi, 2003, pp. 77-78). This was affirmed by a District Commissioner (DC) in Mombasa in 1915 who reported to his senior about the Digo laws and customs that Digo people were folk Muslims. The district commissioner describing a headman in Nyika, his area of jurisdiction, indicated that the man was “*Islam u kwa nguo*” [literally meaning Islam is just like a dress that can be removed or exchanged any time], and could always exchange his *kanzu* [Muslim men’s formal dressing] for a blanket from the government” (Letter from District Commissioner of Nyika to Provincial Commissioner of Mombasa, 1915 July). The headman was responding after being asked whether he was Mahomedan or traditional Digo. This description about the Digo has not changed much.

There are about 372,000 Digo people in Kenya and 236,000 in Tanzania (Joshua Project, 2018). It is a curious fact that although they do not practice Islam as prescribed in the Qur’an and Traditions of Muhammad, they believe that they are all Muslims (Sesi, 2003). However, they have resisted the teachings of Islam. Sesi observes that, “While the Digo constantly resist Islamic teaching and practices, they use Islam for identity purposes, as an acquired additional to their religion” (Sesi, 2003, p. 78). This means Digo people ‘Africanized’ Islam among them, culminating to what they practise (The Joshua Project, 2018). According to the Joshua project:

Islam is more widely accepted among the Digo than among any of the other tribes. Nevertheless, ties with traditional practices (such as animism and ancestor worship) still have more influence on the Digo community than does Islam ... Spiritism is their use of blood sacrifices. Such sacrifices are very significant to the Digo, especially in the exorcism of evil spirits. Witchdoctors are also consulted regularly (Joshua Project, 2018).

The sense of communal life among the Digo people in early years of infiltration by Islam led them to live a syncretic religious life; as traditional Digo and as Muslims. However, according to my observations, the traditional part of it surfaces more than the Islamic religion. For the Digo, embracing Islam at that time was due to reasons other than spiritual fulfilment. Indeed, Islam was only outwardly expressed through names, clothes, and rituals, but inwardly they were traditional Digo (Marchant, n.d., p. 208). As early as the second decade of the 20th century, this confession was made by a headman that he is 'Islam u kwa nguo' and could always exchange his kanzu for a blanket from the government (Commissioner of Nyika to Commissioner of Mombasa, 1915). This implies that to the Digo, Islam was not a religion but something else (probably a fashionable identity that appeals to them).

Since Islamic teachings did not play much influence in their conversion to Islam, the Islam among the Digo was 'Digonized'. This is to say, Digo people "... continue to settle their affairs by their traditional customs that are contrary to Islamic law" especially when faced with life-threatening challenges (Sesi, 2003, p. 78). Thus, witchcraft that has occupied the heart of almost all Digo people is one of these traditional customs they have to deal with on daily basis making sure the family is well protected and occasionally by appeasing good spirits and exorcizing evil spirits among them. It is a real burdening excise for the Digo and especially women, who are termed as custodians of the family spirits.

Definition of a Witch and Witchcraft

Witch (Chidigo: *Gwama*) is "a person, now especially a woman, who professes or is supposed to practise magic, especially black magic or the black art; sorceress" (Stein 1973, p. 1639). Witchcraft (Chidigo: *Utsai*) is "the art or practices of a witch; sorcery; magic". Witchdoctor (*Mnganga* in *Swahili*) is "a man in some primitive societies who attempts to cure sickness and exorcise evil spirits by the use of magic" (Stein, 1973, p. 1639). Among the Digo, both men and women can fall to the category of a witch/sorcerer (*mchawi*). Women are believed to have more types of witchcraft especially the 'evil eye'.

According to the Digo Muslims, witchcraft (*Utsai*) is an act beyond human explanation. It is so real that no one can take a chance of leaving themselves and their properties unprotected against the witch (*Gwama*). The witch uses spiritual forces or special medicine with different designs from special stores or from herbs of different types. The different sources of powers determine their strength; some are more powerful than others. In Digo worldview, the spirits behind witchcraft are so powerful that only Witchdoctors have the powers and solutions over the witches and witchcraft. Not all witchdoctors can deal with every kind of witchcraft. This is because each kind of witchcraft is assigned to a certain witchdoctor depending on its intensity and the position of the witchdoctor in the hierarchy of the witchdoctors. This discussion on witches and witchcraft thus suggests that Digo people still cling to the traditional ways of giving solutions to problems, despite being Muslims. This understanding makes it important to explore the orthodox Islamic teaching about witchcraft, in order to

compare it with the understanding and practices of Digo Muslims. This will help in suggesting Christian response to witchcraft among the Digo people at the end of this paper.

Witchcraft in the Qur'an and Hadith

Muslims are not an exemption when it comes to dealing with the unseen world as discussed later in this paper. They too have records of witchcraft in both the Qur'an and Hadith, however not much is mentioned in the latter. In the Qur'an, the second Sura mentions witchcraft or sorcery. Sura Al-Baqarah 2: 102 and also 113:4 are the famous verses (*ayat*) that refer to witchcraft. This Medinan Sura narrates how Allah's Prophet, Muhammad, got a revelation of the history of magic. Two angels, *Harut* and *Marut* brought a deceiving message to mankind during the reign of King Solomon, from Babylon (where magic was practised). It is believed that it was a message that could lead to *shirk* (idolatry) among the Israelites. Only those who accepted this lie practised magic (according to interpretation of the *ayat*) and have passed it on to succeeding generations (Hafiz, 2000, pp. 313-318).

Kim (2013), commenting on Al-Bukhari's narration concerning an episode where the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have been bewitched, agrees that there was witchcraft or sorcery during the time of the Prophet. The prophet's experience of a psychological confusion was diagnosed as bewitchment when he met with two men (presumably angels) in his dream, and his problem was solved through Allah's intervention without recourse to any pagan healing method. This episode shows that the prophet actually hinted at the possibility that anyone could be bewitched; witchcraft is real (Kim, 2013, p. 90).

However, Islam believes that Solomon was the only prophet who could defeat Jinn (*mashetani*). The Jinn did not gain root during his time in power. He is reported to have collected all the books that were written on magic and devil's deceitful acts and buried them under his throne. Burying them constrained and made them powerless. Whenever the devil came around, it could be burnt. But the evil powers once again became powerful after the death of Solomon. It is reported that those who came to power after Solomon were deceived by Satan who appeared in a human form, that, those books that Solomon had buried under his throne were treasures that they could use. In the attempt to gain these treasures, the evil powers were made loose and could not be controlled any longer (Kim, 2013, p. 313). This interpretation suggests that magic or witchcraft is associated with Babylonians. However, Allah did not send magic to the world but the devil did after disobeying Allah. The devil then taught people magic (Kim, 2013, p. 315). Kim further argues that, in Zanzibar, magic which is *sihir* or *sihiri* (in Swahili) comes from devils; even healing power (*uganga*) can be obtained by contacting jinn; mostly the malevolent jinn (2013, p. 98).

According to Hadith, Muhammad believed that he was bewitched.

Narrated Aisha: Magic was worked on the Prophet [literal translation – “the prophet was bewitched”] so that he began to fancy that he was doing a thing which he was not actually doing ... ‘He has been bewitched,’ ... ‘Who has bewitched him?’ The ... ‘What material has he used?’ ... ‘A comb, the hair gathered on it, and the outer skin of the pollen of the male date- palm.’... (Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukharī, Vol. 4, p. 490).

It is a common practice among the Muslims to identify themselves with their prophet Muhammad. Thus it is my conclusion that Muslims also believe in witchcraft like Muhammad did as shown in the excerpt.

How Muslims Deal with Witchcraft

The Qur'an and Hadith do not advocate for witchcraft. Therefore, if a Muslim is bewitched, then "they ought not to resort to any heathen method to deal with bewitchment but to observe Allah's commandments and guidance as taught in the Qur'an and Hadith" (Kim, 2013, p. 92). Kim states that "in order to prevent and protect from any witchcraft, a Muslim must recite the Qur'an. Approaching any sorcerer to resolve problems is only inviting more evil spirits to worsen the existing situation (Kim, 2013, p. 92). Head cupping and reciting the Qur'an among the Muslims, are seen as therapeutic ways of handling witchcraft.

Sura Al-Bagharah is used to cure attacks of evil spirits through reciting, despite bearing details of the origin of magic and evil spirits. It is believed that if a Muslim recites this *sura* either at night or during the day, Satan departs from his/her house for 3 nights or days depending on the time the recitation was done. Kim (2013, p. 23) is very categorical that for the recitation to be successful, one begins reciting the first 4 verses, then verse 255, then 256-257, and then the last 3. It is also believed that this *sura* cannot be recited by sorcerers, thus giving it the power to deal with witchcraft (Kim, 2013, p. 98).

Sura 20: 56-76 also mentions witchcraft and magic. This entire passage covers the story of Moses (*Musa*) and Pharaoh (*Fir'awn*). According to Qur'an, Moses showed *suras* concerning Allah's intention for the children of Israel leaving Egypt but Pharaoh denied, calling Moses' signs magic. Pharaoh arranged for a meeting for his magicians to battle in power with Moses' 'magic' after which Egyptian magicians were defeated. Prior to this magic exhibition, Moses had clearly told Pharaoh that what he was doing was from God and those signs were to prove who God was. For example, *ayat* 54 states "... Verily in this is *ayat* for men of understanding" whose *tafsir* is proofs, signs, and evidence (Hafiz, 2000, p. 351). After the battle, Egyptian magicians believed in God and left witchcraft (verse 71-76). This is clear evidence that the Qur'an does not allow Muslims to involve themselves with any form of witchcraft.

Witchcraft is also mentioned in the Hadith. Sahih al-Bukhari's Chapter 50 is titled as witchcraft. Here, it is narrated that Aisha had a conversation with her husband, Allah's apostle, Muhammad, regarding his sickness. Muhammad is reported to have had an answer from Allah regarding his sickness from two men who told him that he had been bewitched with the use of pieces of hair in a comb and pollen of male date plant (Al-Bukhari, 1979, p. 444). The treatment for this kind of witchcraft is found in Al-Bukhari chapter 50 verses 663-664 where he was prescribed to take dates - fruits (*Ajwa*) every morning because they have the power to defer magic or poison harm (Al-Bukhari, 1979, p. 447). According to Kim (2013, p. 92), Muhammad gave "a model" as to how Muslims should deal with witchcraft. They ought not to resort to any heathen method to deal with bewitchment but to observe Allah's commandments and guidance as taught in the Qur'an and Hadith. Therefore, Muslims are not supposed to practice witchcraft. Practicing it means disobedience to Allah whom the Muslims believe gave the instructions in the Qur'an to all Muslims to follow.

The Concept of Witchcraft among the Digo Muslims

Diène and Burrell (1999, p. 16), writing about the African culture, argues that “There is an African ‘core culture’ that basically decides the forms of expression for Christianity and Islam, as well as the dynamics of their progress or decline on the continent of Africa”. The Digo, like any other African tribe, follow African beliefs and practices even after converting to Islam. That is why the Islam among Digo and basically in Africa is African Islam. A Digo person faced with a challenge seeks culture as the first solution – to see a witchdoctor. That is why even after embracing Islam, Digo’s way of addressing life threatening issues is guided by their traditional cosmological viewpoint. This has made them, even after embracing Islam as a group, to continue with the *Chidigo* tradition that associates any life threatening issue with witchcraft.

Digo look at witchcraft in two ways; positively and negatively. On one side, it is viewed as one that promotes social-economic growth through jinn who is believed to enrich people with lots of wealth. From my field research, this wealth is believed to be stolen from rich people who have not protected their property with the help of witchdoctors or from super markets (Mzee Kovi (not his real name), Jan. 2018). On the other hand, it is viewed as one that hinders growth in almost all areas of life. According to them, the jinn (*Majini*) is good while witch (*Mchawi*) and witchcraft (*uchawi*) sometimes known as *urogi*, are bad. Some of the bad effects of witchcraft I gathered from the field are: school drop outs that has brought about high level of illiteracy, poverty, child pregnancies, early marriages, joblessness, and many other failures. Every evil and bad omen is associated with witchcraft. This belief has brought about to the Digo increased fear that renders them lazy, low literacy level, and unmotivated to develop.

The Digo Muslim traditional belief has to come first in their daily lives, followed by the Islamic belief. For example, when a child is born, a witchdoctor is called to protect the child from evil eye, followed by the Imam to bless the child and lead the child to the faith of Islam through pronouncing the *Shahada* (to declare the belief in the oneness of God and in Muhammad as his final prophet) to the baby. This traditional belief supersedes the religious belief making the Digo Muslims more Digo traditional than Muslim believers.

Types of Witchcraft among the Digo Muslims

Although witchcraft (caused by jinn) is believed to bring wealth to a person among the Digo, they also consider it a source of all evil. This is confirmed by the Giriama’s belief in witchcraft. Just like the Digo Muslims, Giriama who are part of the *Mijikenda* people, consider witchcraft to be the source of all evil and misfortune (Brantley, 1979, p. 117). Yet, as mentioned earlier, witchcraft has continued to be nurtured among the Digo Muslims. One would wonder why the Digo Muslims continue in such beliefs and practices. This is answered by looking at the types of witchcraft the Digo Muslims practise, reasons for practising it, and its effects.

Major Types of witchcraft Practised among the Digo People

There are three types of witches: Witches that use the “books” (written in Arabic but not the Qur’an); that use Calabash; and that use certain trees and herbs e.g. from the baobab tree. My description will not differentiate which one uses books, or Calabash, or certain trees and

herbs. However, all these witches use the witchcraft as listed below, but in different ways according to their expertise.

Mtsamuro: This is a type of witchcraft mostly intended to separate people who work in union, and who always co-operate in official duties to achieve their intended goal. The instruments for *mtsamuro* type of witchcraft are a brain from a chicken with standing feathers, a piece of paper, and some words from the Qu'ran. As one of the *Maalimu* (spiritual leader) explained to me: the chicken is slaughtered, Qur'anic words are written on a paper; and the paper burnt together with the chicken's brain. The ash is buried under a special tree that has dried by itself or in an old grave that has been neglected. It is believed that, as soon as the ash is buried, the group dissolves itself immediately.

Riza: This is a type of witchcraft that is believed to hide one's identity, and it is mostly used in war. It is a deception that someone could become invisible spiritually yet he or she is actually present. *Riza* was applied to the Digo youth during *Kayambombo* (Digo Youth Revolution between 1992 and 1997 on the coast of Kenya). Unfortunately, this did not work for them and as a result, many Digo youth lost their lives during that revolution. Up to now there is so much cry among the Digo due to the loss experienced that time, yet amazingly, Digo still strongly believe in this type of witchcraft. This shows how much Digo are deeply affected by their traditions and practices.

Finiko: This is another type of witchcraft involving obstructing or even killing someone so that the person who went for this type of witchcraft gets whatever he or she wants. Mtuma (not his real name) explains, "When someone has a case or conflict of any kind, he or she might decide to visit a wizard who will help him get the case dissolved either by killing the opponent in his or her own ways which are not easily understood . . ." (Mtuma, March, 2017). Instrument used in this kind of witchcraft is *kisimrima* (old *jembe* that is overused), *kisirima* (spoiled coconut fruit), *fuwe* (mature red roster), and *kaniki* (black piece of unsewn cloth). The chicken is slaughtered by a person believed to have been bewitched, and then left to die. The voices heard as the chicken dies determine if things are good or bad for the person who sought the treatment" (Mtuma, March, 2017).

Mbayumbayu is another type of witchcraft among the Digo Muslims. Someone who is bewitched with this kind of witchcraft will never settle in one place; s/he will move from one place to another for the rest of his or her life unless treated by a witchdoctor. The items used for this treatment are, "A chicken with standing feathers, three eggs from a black chicken, and an old cloth that belongs to the enemy. The *mchawi* (witch) cuts a small part of the finger of the chicken, get few drops of blood, and smears it on the eggs, then says/reads some words holding the eggs and the piece of cloth. The eggs and the piece of cloth will then be given back to the customer with instructions from the witch as follows: to throw the eggs in garbage place and take the cloth to the owner secretly. At a certain time, the enemy will start behaving crazily and will not settle at one place (Mgwasa, March, 2017).

Nene is another type of witchcraft that makes one feel very tired or lazy. It is mostly used during competition such as football to weaken the opponent. The items used are similar to that of *mbayumbayu*.

Dzongo/ Dege (Bad Eye): This happens when one eats in an open place or in social gatherings such as wedding or funerals. If watched by bad/evil eye, s/he may be struck with stomach upsets including expanding stomach and aches with abnormal and unbearable pain

that eventually causes death. Its treatment is hot charcoal in a cup of water. The mixture is then cut across using a knife and given to the victim to drink.

Wanga/kuwanga: This is a form of witchcraft act where one is taken magically away from his or her bed. For example, one can be taken to work in someone's field for the whole night while his or her physical body is still in the bed. S/he often wakes up feeling very tired. Again, someone may find himself/herself at a certain place without going there personally. For example, a well-known story among the Digo is told, about an Imam from Middle East sent to minister among the Digo. He refused to consult the witchdoctor for protection, contrary to the Digo elders' wish. Digo elders were disappointed and decided to bewitch the Imam that night. The Imam found himself the next morning on top of a very tall and thin coconut tree nude, confused and his cloths were kept under the coconut tree. A crane was used to bring him down from the coconut tree and a specialist in witchcraft read the Quran verses (Not really from the Qur'an, but words written in Arabic) to the Imam, for him to get healed. After that, the Imam could not stand the act of witchcraft among the Digo, so he decided to abandon the mission work.

Minor Examples of acts of Witchcraft

Kuminywa: This involves torturing a person while still sleeping. The bewitched often wakes up from sleep making loud and scary noise or even crying.

Kutsorera: Taking someone's wealth or even harvest in a supernatural way. The enemy may find himself or herself conducting a business full of losses or with little or no profit.

Snake Witchcraft: One may be set to get a snake bite from an abnormal snake but the one who experiences the bite will not know if it's not a normal or abnormal snake. This kind of witchcraft is mostly practised by the Digo, Duruma, Kambe and Giriama communities.

Wende: A Mijikenda word that is used to explain a kind of wicked act where one will get one's beloved and gain fame in the eye of the public. It is commonly used by the Digo and Giriama community. Digo Muslims use it for the purpose of making their spouses, or someone's spouse give more love and attention to the one that has gone for the *wende* witchcraft. Young people also use *wende* to get love that is not based on the principles of love.

Kukatakivuli (shade cutting): This is a type of witchcraft that aims at eliminating the opponent through sacrificing him or her to the evil powers. This is done through cutting somebody's shade - meaning to kill that person. The witch uses *kuwanga* (take the victim magically from his/her bed) and *kuminwa* (impose torture to a person while still sleeping in his/her house). This happens a lot during the political campaigns.

Difference between Major and Minor Witchcrafts

Witchcraft is a common act among Digo people, but not every type is commonly practised daily. The major witchcrafts are commonly and often practised by many witches. The minor ones are not commonly used and whenever used, they are performed by experts. Although the minor ones are not commonly used, they are said to be the most destructive.

Reasons for Practising Witchcraft

As a protection mechanism: Digo and Giriama people believe that people can become wealthy through evil powers, and the same wealth can be destroyed through higher evil powers. To protect their wealthy status, they seek a witchdoctor whose medicine gives them protection (Brantley, 1979, p. 113).

Weapon of destruction: The Digo community uses witchcraft as their weapon to harm other people or to take people's things in a crafty way. During campaign period, some very influential politicians seek powers from the witches to win elections. They pay the witches well and hence the witches become very wealthy. Accumulation of such wealth through witchcraft thus gives them a sense of pride.

Inheritance: According to Digo belief, witchcraft is a weapon that has to be passed on to family members, maintained and protected within the family. Although the Digo will say someone can/may be born as a witch, I do not think this is the case. I believe it is through assimilation and induction into it when the child is born; a feature of inheritance deemed important among the Digo people. The dilemma here is how to deal with the cases of witchcraft among the Digo people, especially given their strong beliefs about it. However, Christian workers among Muslims and Digo people must develop missiological approaches that combat this belief.

To explain the unknown: Digo use witchcraft to describe anything that is hard to understand. In 2000, I travelled from the United States of America to my home village on the coast where many people did not know anything about HIV/AIDS. People were dying; they had no hope because of the high mortality rate caused by HIV/AIDS and no one wanted to talk about it. The village elders claimed that witchcraft had invaded their village. Through this, it can be deduced that witchcraft among the Digo people has been, and continues to be used as a way of explaining what is beyond their understanding.

Spiritual or physical wellbeing: Traditionally, the Digo people practise witchcraft for their spiritual or physical wellbeing. Others seek medicine men to eliminate those who pose threat to their lives in one way or another, or as an act of expressing supremacy over the unseen world. It is said that even young men resort to witchcraft to better their future family lives. "Before marrying, every Mdigo consults a medicine man who tells him the exact day and hour when he should be married" (Marchant, n.d., p. 202). Some medicine men would also show their powers by controlling nature. Some would, for instance, stop rains from falling on the land.

Dealing with Witches among the Digo People

As Sunni Muslims, Digo people are supposed to be guided by the teachings of the Shafi'i school of the Sunni Islam, on how to deal with witches and witchcraft. If someone is suspected of witchcraft, the person who suspects him or owing to the death of one of his relatives, reports to the village elders. These elders invite all the other elders from neighbouring villages, and two elders from each village are chosen to go to a diviner. The diviner seats them in a circle or semi-circle. The diviner then snuffs his medicine and goes around them holding the tail of an ox or buffalo. If one of the elders' relatives is a wizard, the diviner drops the tail on the elder's hips and tells him that one of his relatives is a wizard and identifies him. The elders then return and arrest the suspect as a wizard who is responsible for

the deceased's death. If he denies the claims, he is taken to a blacksmith to take an oath. At the blacksmith's place, a hot iron is placed on the palm of the suspected wizard, and he recites, "If I am a wizard let this hot iron burn my palm, if I am not it shall not burn me". If this hot iron does not burn his palm, the process is repeated three times. If finally, he is not burned, the man who accused him of witchcraft is fined 3 cattle (2 cows and 1 ox). The 2 cows are paid to the suspected person and the ox is killed and eaten by the villagers. These 3 cattle are called "*mkomolausawi*" which means "remove the witchcraft from the falsely accused person". On the other hand, if the palm of the accused person is burned by the hot iron, he is beaten to death. But if his relatives save him he is ordered to pay '*kore*' (compensation for the murdered person) which is made of 1 free nephew and 1 free niece (Kayamba, December, 1928).

Also, among the Digo, once found out, the witch is forced to leave the community or be killed as ordered by a *Mwanatsi* (witchdoctor)-*Mganga wa kuzuza* (witchdoctor specialized in removing witchcraft planted in homestead in order to cause problems to the family members). Sesi comments:

... the community used that as evidence against the witch and forced him or her to leave the *Kaya* (community) or be killed by stoning the next time she or he will be blamed of bewitching another person (2007, pp. 106-107).

However, some of the witches are believed to have very strong spiritual powers that make it hard for the community to deal with. This shows that the Islam practised among the Digo is based on convenience, not on faith in Islam. Thus, all Digo are supposed to protect themselves from the evil people and spirits. Digo Muslims will hardly kill a fellow Digo if converted to Christianity, but they will kill a witch among them. This confirms my argument, supported by other scholars that, Digo hold firmly their traditions than the Islamic belief.

Digo Ways of Dealing with Witchcraft

To deal with witchcraft or witches, the Digo, just like Giriama, had medicine men (witchdoctors) who administered *fisi* oath that was made to kill the witch. The medicine used in *fisi* oath was known as *mbare*. Apart from this oath, other means were used to deal with witches. Hot axes or rocks were placed in the palm of witch's hand or treated bread which was made to stick in the throat of the guilty. If the witch did not confess he/she would die. If he/she did confess, a cleansing medicine was given which negated his witchcraft (Brantley, 1979, p. 115).

During the colonial times in Kenya, the British administration also felt that "witchcraft was the main cause of their lack of administrative success" among the Giriama (Brantley, 1979, p. 119). In response to this failure, the British administration in Giriama land demanded that the Giriama swear an oath of allegiance to British using the *fisi* oath that was anti-witchcraft. This meant that they couldn't bewitch or harm anyone. It is also said that some British officials joined the *Vaya* elders class of the Giriama in order to be allowed to practice *fisi* oath with Giriama elders, but they had to pay some fee for acceptance (pp. 114-115). At some point, a man who was believed to deal with witchcraft was given government pass to conduct witch-cleansing among Giriama by the British government.

Negative effects of Witchcraft among the Digo Muslims

Although Digo Muslims use some witchcraft to enrich themselves, it negatively affects both the individual and the community in most cases. Some of the effects are:

It Creates Fear: It is also believed that witchcraft can cause diseases to people and harm them. A case was reported by a District Commissioner in Malindi in 1925 when there were many cases of syphilis, that the main cause was witchcraft. In his report, he said that the natives said that a man with a grudge with his neighbour would visit a witch to tega (trick) the wife of his rival who in turn would transmit the disease to her husband or lover. According to the letter from District Commissioner of Malindi (1925, August 24), the cure for this disease would work in the same way for the witch to reverse or stop the spell. Other remedies to witchcraft act include visiting a professional witchdoctor who offers incantations in the name of Allah and gives charms.

Brantley (1979, p. 117) further posits that Muslims, just like the Giriama people, believe that Muslim culture that infiltrated Digo traditional culture brought another source of evil; alien spirits or mapepo exclusively regarded as Muslim spirits. These spirits are known as Mwarabu Mume among the Digo and are feared by the Digo women. They can bring devastation among women as they are believed to demand sexual relations with them just like what is said to have happened to Muhammad (Al-Bukharī Vol. 7:660).

Poor Relationships, Divisions and Suspicion: Brantley observes that “the Giriama believe not only that some members of the society are witches, but that all are potential witches”. Due to this belief, people are suspicious of each other, have poor relationships and are divided among themselves.

Under-development: Digo land is under-developed even today; not because Digo cannot get money, but because the Digo people do not want to work. Digo people seat on titanium. In 2008-2010, the Kenyan government through foreign investors started digging titanium. The Digo people who had land covered by the titanium were moved out of the zone and compensated with an expectation that they would buy another land elsewhere and settle. However, they did squander the money and some ventured into small businesses. This was because they do not want to develop for fear of witchcraft. As a result, there is a lot of poverty among the Digo Muslims (Joshua Project, 2013).

Implication to Research and Practice

This study reveals the types of witchcraft practised by the Digo Muslims, why they practise them and the effects of such practice on both individual and the community. The light into this knowledge is therefore paramount in dealing with witchcraft by Christians and other stakeholders so that the misfortunes of the practice are combated. This knowledge is important too as it helps parties interested in researching and learning about cultures of the people living along the coast region of Kenya. They can use it as a basis of their research as it explicitly provides basic information about the Digo Muslims and their religious and traditional practices. The knowledge is also important as it helps Missionaries and Christians committed to Jesus' commission in Mathew 28:19 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations . . .”

Christian Response to the Concept of witchcraft among Digo Muslims

Love (2000), affirming Charles Taber, underlines the following vital questions “What usable concepts and symbols does this religion provide for the approach of the gospel? ... What particular obstacles does it place in the way of a true understanding of the gospel?” According to Taber (1991), Christian discipleship process should make use of Islamic concepts and symbols that are appropriate and relevant to Muslims so that Christianity will not be seen as a “western” religion, but this approach should be void of syncretism which makes the Gospel lose its power in ministering to the Muslims.

Hiebert comments “No matter how hard they [missionaries] try, they cannot completely ‘go native,’ since the earlier culture of their childhood can never be fully erased. While the bi-cultural missionary borrows from different cultures of its participants, it is more than the sum or synthesis of those cultures (Hiebert, 1985, p. 228). It is true here that the outcome might go to any extreme. Not only do the fact that Digo Muslims belief in witchcraft to protect them from all troubles indicates how much they value it and that they are folk Muslims, but also the fact that the witchdoctors use verses of the Qur’an to treat different sicknesses, shows that they have some elements of official Islam. This is also an indication that Islam has had little impact on Digo Muslims’ lives. Thus it can be concluded that Digo Muslims put their faith in witchcraft because there is a lack of solution in their new religion (Islam). This conclusion, therefore, calls for Christian missionaries to trust the Lord to provide an option that can lead Digo Muslims to put their faith in God rather than witchcraft.

Despite over 90% of Digo people being Muslims, they are viewed as still clinging to their African cultural practices. This trend brings into question what kind of influence Islam has over the Digo traditional worldview on witchcraft. Has the over 90% of Islam among the Digo permeated all aspects of Digo life in terms of Digo religious tradition and practice? If so, why do Digo people still fall back to their traditional practices, especially to seeking assistance of witchdoctors, when calamity befalls them? Does it mean that Traditional Religion offers better answers than Islam? These are pertinent questions that need to be answered as it is vivid that a Digo traditionalist and a Digo Muslim are not very different with regards to their religious practices. Christian missionaries seeking to work or working among the Digo should therefore focus on such concerns; otherwise, Christianity may be practised like they practise Islam, among the Digo people.

Christians should emphasize on contextualizing the gospel for the Digo Muslims. This contextualization should be biblically founded, culturally appealing, and contextually appropriate. This will help Digo people to understand the fundamental truths of scripture that communicate to them in the light of their cultural heritage and present circumstances (Pang, 1995). According to Saal (1991), contextualization’s goal should be the fulfilment of the Lord’s commission to make disciples of all nations, where churches formed are “culturally rooted in their society of origin”. Thus, the ultimate purpose of contextualization should simply be: to Digo people to Christ.

Christians should portray their faith in Christ. Communicating the gospel to Muslims requires an honest representation of the Christian faith as the Digo Muslims will be drawn to the person of Christ Jesus. Here, it is important to impress upon the Digo the fact and truth that embracing Christ is not synonymous with or equivalent to abandoning or renouncing their sense of belonging to their own culture. They should not be made to feel that they must become like a Westerner in order to follow a “Western” religion or any other group of people

in order to feel that they are Christians (Love, 2000). The Digo should feel that he/she is a Digo Christian, and of course be careful not to engage in syncretism.

As mentioned earlier, Digo Muslims are ordinary folk Muslims who have 'Digonized' Islam among them. According to my observation, witchcraft is an issue that troubles Digo Muslims and it seems they have no way to escape. Thus, in Christian witness to the Digo Muslim, the Gospel message should be directed to their troubled hearts so as to create faith in God (Musk, 1989, pp. 245-249).

Digo Muslims are afraid of being harmed by one another and outsiders too. They have to keep on spending a lot of wealth to protect themselves from any internal or external harm. Haggai observes that fear makes one lack influence in one's life. It can undermine personal dynamism, leading to unnecessary apologies which decrease group influence (Haggai, 1991, pp. 227-234). The only cure for this is for one to choose to love and trust God rather than fear people and get to witchcraft for protection. This will only come to Digo Muslims if Christians will purpose to take the gospel to the Digo Muslims.

When I talk about the real situations among the Digo people, it should be understood that it is in the context of the spiritual world which the Digos are operating with (Ephesians 6:10ff). Christians need to understand their deep-seated beliefs and practices that drive their lives every day. Many of the Missionaries and Christians among the Digo reach out to them within the missionaries' cultural worldview context. Digo need to be reached out within their context which is more to their beliefs and practices that are more visible than Islam beliefs.

Christians need not be conformed to the Digo culture and practices, but to be transformed to the living standards of our Lord Jesus Christ who conquered the world, and who promises us that we are more than conquerors. Christians need to trust Jesus for salvation of the Digo and take away fear and intimidation, and obey the commission – to make disciples of all nations. In addition, Christians need to understand the Muslim culture.

Christians need to understand Digo culture too before taking God's message to them. This will enable Christians to begin sharing the love of God with them from within the environs. When Paul went to Athens, he saw the city was full of idols and he was distressed. However, he did not begin with a condemnation to the Athenians. Rather, he began with saying; "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD'". Christians will be able to use some of the forms within Digo Muslims and be able to contextualize them. This can only be effective if the Christians take time to understand the Digo Muslim's culture.

Christians must be willing to accept Digo Muslims and love them unconditionally and be patient with them. Nothing wins more than love (I Corinthians 13). It is only love that will make Digo Muslims be open to us, thus be able to learn them and their culture. Accepting Muslims as important people in the eyes of God and showing them the love of God may help us win the Muslims' confidence and trust to be able to tell them about God's love.

What does the Bible Say about Witchcraft?

It is common to hear some Christians say that there is nothing wrong with being a Christian and at same time practising witchcraft. This is a deception from the devil and it is evil in the sight of God.

There are two kinds of witchcraft mentioned in the Bible that God condemns: One; giving someone bad thing or having bad thoughts towards someone for the purpose of harming that person (Galatians 5:19). Second; A Christian following philosophical teaching that negates the truth one has been taught (Galatians 3:1, 2). Galatians were guilty of these two kinds of witchcraft.

The Bible condemns witchcraft practices as supported by: 2 Chronicles 33:6; the one who consults witches for practices of witchcraft does evil to God and arouses God's anger to him; Leviticus 20:6, God says to the Israelite, 'I will set my face against anyone who turns to mediums and spirits to prostitute themselves by following them, and I will cut them off from their people'; and Revelation 21:8, "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death". The New Living Translation Bible uses the word 'witchcraft' for 'magic arts'.

Other verses supportive of the condemnation include: Deuteronomy 18:10-13; Leviticus 19:26; Micah 3:7; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8, 5:11-12; and I Samuel 15:23;

The Bible says, 'take no part in the evil deeds' (Ephesians 5:11; I Corinthians 10:21). The one who continues to do what is evil is of the devil (I John 3:8-10); and that punishment awaits those who practice witchcraft (Nahum 3:4-5; 21:8). This is the message Christians should believe and take it to the Digo people.

From the discussion, it can be inferred that Witchcraft is mentioned in the Bible, and is real. However, the Bible shows that it is evil and should not be practised by Christians at all.

CONCLUSION

The paper forms analysis of existing content and interview with a number of stakeholders in Islam religion at the south coast of Kenya and Digo community. It has found that the Digo Muslims practise witchcraft for many reasons including protection, destruction and to explain pertinent questions among others. It has been revealed that the Digo 'Digonized' Islam so that they could get solutions to the challenges and problems they faced thus forcing them to practise, in part, witchcraft despite the negative effects that it caused the individual and the community at large. This is because Islamic religion did not give such provisions. Christians who live among the Digo need not to be conformed to the Digo cultures, but to stand at the gap and give the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Digo people. In Christ, there are provisions for Digo questions. This is the truth Christians need to give to the Digo people, and this truth will set them free from the burden of witchcraft. Christians need to overcome fear and move with boldness believing, as written in the word of God, Christians ". . . have overcome them [the witches and evil spirits], because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (I John 4:4 NIV). Digo people are suffering under the burden of witchcraft beliefs and practices. Jesus is ready to set them free as it is written in the Word of God; "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). Jesus is asking:

“Whom shall I send to take my love to the Digo people so that they will be set free from witchcraft and traditional beliefs”? Pray for God’s harvesters among the Digo People.

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