



EXAMINE THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR NGITURKANA CHRISTIAN CONVERSION TO ISLAM

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Abstract:

In places that were formerly unfriendly to Muslims, the number of converts has risen dramatically in recent years. Numerous examples may be cited, including the conversion of Christians in South Korea to Islam, as well as native-born Britons. Igboland, the Christian core of Nigeria, is also experiencing this trend, as seen by the proliferation of Islamic schools/institutions, Mosques, and well-off Igbo converts to Islam. While it was formerly thought that the economic motive was driving the majority of Igbo converts to Islam, recent research has shown that this is no longer true. According to Lines Kevin, the intellectual element of Islam is a major draw for Igbo converts today.ⁱⁱ Since it is often held that the Igbo are concerned with money, it is also commonly held that they converted to Islam to earn more wealth; nevertheless, the findings of the present study would contradict this belief. The practice of people changing their religious affiliation has been going on for centuries, and it remains a fascinating and relevant issue in the modern world. As an example, consider the Ngiturkana people's shift from Christianity to Islam. The purpose of this research is to look at the difficulties and potential benefits of this occurrence, particularly as they pertain to the Ngiturkana people of Kenya. Ngiturkana Christians' decisions to convert to Islam provide several obstacles and possibilities, and it's crucial to have a full picture of the situation. Converting to Islam, on the one hand, may open doors to new spiritual communities and give people a renewed sense of purpose in life.ⁱⁱⁱ On the other side, converts may face hostility and rejection from loved ones and the public, as well as challenges in locating a welcoming religious group and

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ⁱⁱ Lines, Kevin P. *Who Do the Ngimurok Say that They Are?: A Phenomenological Study of Turkana Traditional Religious Specialists in Turkana, Kenya*. Vol. 35. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018.

ⁱⁱⁱ Akubor, Emmanuel Osewe, and Chinedu Ayogu. "The church in northern Nigeria in the face of religious fundamentalism, and the re-interpretation of the doctrine of church suffering: a reflection." *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa* 65, no. 1 (2020): 1-20.

obtaining necessary religious materials.^{iv} The goal of this research is to offer a thorough analysis of the difficulties and potential benefits of the Ngiturkana people's decision to convert from Christianity to Islam. The research will look at why people convert, how converts feel, and how the public views conversion. The research aspires to add to the continuing discourse on religious tolerance and variety by providing greater knowledge of this significant phenomenon.

Keywords: challenges and opportunities, Ngiturkana Christians, Islam

1. Introduction: Islam in Kenya

The Ngiturkana is a Kenyan ethnic minority, and the pace at which the number of Muslims in Kenya is increasing is one trend that has not slowed down much. Despite the country's already sizable Muslim population, Islam is rapidly expanding in Kenya. Due to the increasing visibility of Islam in Kenya, members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church there feel impelled to reach out to Muslims and share the gospel with them.^v Many Adventists are convinced that the church must be prepared to approach Muslims. Evangelizing Muslims presents a unique set of circumstances. The potential lies in the shared beliefs of the two religions. Both of these faiths assert that their theology rests on unwavering confidence in the veracity of divine revelation. Both Adventists and Muslims believe that their revelations came directly from God. Thus, the truth has been revealed by God/Allah.^{vi} However, despite this shared history, tensions between the two religions in modern-day Kenya remain high.

This hostility is reasonable, given the difficulties both Adventism, as well as Islam, have in tolerating followers of other faiths. Both faiths have a broad appeal and welcome members from all walks of life. Both Adventism, as well as Islam, have adapted to different cultural contexts and continue to actively seek new converts throughout the nation.^{vii} However, regardless of how Adventists feel about Islam, they will not be able to avoid interacting with Muslims in Kenya. They have integrated into every facet of Kenyan society, from the secular to the religious to the political. Islam, more than any other faith, has managed to penetrate local culture and customs. Moreover, no major religion has resisted the impact of Christianity in Kenya as noticeably as Islam has, and because of this, many Adventists consider it beyond their grasp.

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^v Chemelil, Philip Kipkemboi. "The Contribution of Voluntary, Faith Based and Non-Governmental Organizations to Socio-Economic Development in Turkana County, Kenya 1986-2006." *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies* (2018).

^{vi} Meinema, Erik. "Is Giriama Traditionalism a Religion? Negotiating Indigenous African Religiosity in 'Interfaith' Cooperation in Coastal Kenya." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 50, no. 3-4 (2021): 344-372.

^{vii} Chimininge, Vengesai. *Myths and Rituals: The Adaptation and Adoption of Karanga Religiosity in the Zion Christian Church of Samuel Mutendi in Zimbabwe*. AuthorHouse, 2019.

Despite the Muslim population's obvious progress, some people have chosen to disregard them. In Kenya, for instance, Adventist strongholds have concentrated on economically productive industries. Reaching out to Muslims for Christ is a mission that a small percentage of people are actively pursuing. The biggest difficulty for Adventists as well as other Christians is, therefore, the Muslim world. No matter what the church decides to do, taking a combative approach is unlikely to achieve positive results. Despite this, Islam has been present among the Ngiturkana people for many decades, and its popularity has risen in recent years. While Christians make up the vast majority of the Ngiturkana population today, a sizable number of Ngiturkana have converted to Islam, creating a thriving Muslim community.^{viii} The Ngiturkana people's Islam is distinguished by its dedication to social justice and morality, as well as by its strong focus on community and togetherness. The Muslims of Ngiturkana are committed to spreading knowledge about Islam and fostering understanding among adherents of diverse faiths.

While the Muslim community in Ngiturkana has grown, it still confronts numerous obstacles. Social stigma, a lack of access to religious resources, and a general lack of community understanding, and support are all examples.^{ix} The Muslims of Ngiturkana are tough and committed to their religion despite all of their difficulties. They are contributing to the region's rich religious variety and building a more peaceful society through their devotion to their faith and their work to foster mutual understanding and collaboration.

2. Background

Ngiturkana people have been converting in large numbers from Christianity to Islam for many years. The Ngiturkana is a Kenyan ethnic group that has been devout Christians for a very long time. However, in recent years, a sizable portion of the Ngiturkana population has converted to Islam, prompting heated discussion and conflict. A person may convert from Christianity for a variety of reasons, including a search for a more meaningful spiritual connection or a rejection of the church's beliefs and practices. A person may be attracted to Islam for a variety of reasons, including its focus on community as well as solidarity and its teachings on morality and justice. Converting to Islam, however, is not without its difficulties.^x Many people who convert encounter hostility and rejection from those closest to them. Since there is not yet a sizable Muslim population in Ngiturkana, they may also have trouble locating a welcoming group of

^{viii} Wafula, Cornelius Sangura. "The Socio-Economic Environment among Pastoral Communities in West Pokot and Turkana Counties in Kenya." *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention* 8, no. 10 (2021): 6579-6608.

^{ix} Mohammad, Hauwa Gimba. "Impact Of Faith Based Organizations on Community Development Activities in Gwale Local Government Area, Kano State, Nigeria, (2021)."

^x Mbandi, Antony Musyoki, and Mary Nyawira Mwenda. "Influence of Project Implementation Strategies by Religious Organizations on Rural Development: A Case of Kitui Catholic Diocese, Kitui County, Kenya: A Case of Kitui Catholic Diocese, Kitui County, Kenya." *European Journal of Business and Management Research* 6, no. 1 (2021): 38-50.

people and gaining access to religious materials.^{xi} Converting to Islam is on the rise among the Ngiturkana people despite the difficulties they face. It's a fascinating occurrence that shows how many different faiths there are in this part of the world and how vital it is to foster mutual respect and understanding among them.

3. Literature Review

Understanding the history of Islam's arrival in East Africa including Kenya is crucial to this study. Islam is said to have spread into sub-Saharan Africa from the east as well as the north, respectively, across the Indian Ocean and the Sahara Desert. Further, "*Islam made its initial influence via trade interactions between Africans and Muslims...*" suggests that Islam eventually reached the eastern coast of Africa through the Indian Ocean. In addition to the fact that jihad never became the major tool of conversion and enforcement in East Africa. By 1500 and as early as 1200 in certain regions, Islam had become the main religion of coastal peoples due to calm and steady conversion and commerce expansion. Also, by the year 1500, Islam had become integral to Swahili culture and identity everywhere. According to Wafula, the Muslim towns that were constructed along the coast such as Mombasa, Lamu, Kilwa, Malindi, and Pate, and the Island of Zanzibar (tunguja), and Pemba, prospered during the 13th and 15th centuries. Consequently, Islam became deeply ingrained in the coastal population.^{xii} Nonetheless, it must be stressed that the growth of Islam was mostly peaceful and nonconfrontational, unlike its counterpart in Africa to the west of the Sahara.

While urban Kenya was impacted by Islam in the twentieth century, over the previous twelve centuries rural Kenya remained mainly unaffected by the religion. So, the influence of Islam in the immediate hinterland and the interior was negligible, barely extending beyond the outskirts of the coastal towns before the nineteenth century. For this reason, Sperling said that the spread of Islam into the countryside began in those localities where non-Muslims had especially intimate contacts with Muslims, consequently either Muslim agricultural expansion into rural areas or lengthy and intensive trading with Muslims. Thus, we may argue that the shift from other faiths to Islam, including Christianity in rural Kenya, is a phenomenon of the nineteenth century and afterward. In brief, Islam arrived in modern-day Kenya from the Arabian Peninsula through the East African coast and thereafter spread inland. Agriculture and commercial commerce were the primary tools. Considering this, Wafula's conclusion that most Muslims are concentrated in parts of Kenya, which gives them political weight in those

^{xi} Akubor, Emmanuel Osewe, and Chinedu Ayogu. "The church in northern Nigeria in the face of religious fundamentalism, and the re-interpretation of the doctrine of church suffering: a reflection." *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa* 65, no. 1 (2020): 1-20.

^{xii} Wafula, Cornelius Sangura. "The Socio-Economic Environment among Pastoral Communities in West Pokot and Turkana Counties in Kenya." *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention* 8, no. 10 (2021): 6579-6608.

areas is correct.^{xiii} These days, you may find most Muslims in Nairobi and other large cities in Kenya.

4. Christianity in East Africa and Kenya

As the sea of Alexandria was established by St. Mark the Evangelist, murdered in AD 68, one may argue that Christianity in Africa dates to the first century. Key figures like Athanasius emerged from the cities of Alexandria and Carthage, both of which played an important part in the early development of the Christian church. Also, the Coptic Church had already been widely spread by the seventh century. This occurred long before Muhammad's arrival in the years 570-632. After many failed military campaigns, Islam finally succeeded in conquering Egypt about 641, nine years after Muhammad's death.^{xiv} As a result, we may claim that Christianity spread over Africa much before Islam did. Christianity, however, seems to have vanished with Islamic conquest, except for the Coptic Church, which still exists today in Egypt and Ethiopia. Therefore, Islam conquered North Africa, and as we discussed previously, it was via this corridor that Islam almost dominated the whole continent of Africa.

Islam had already established a firm foothold in East Africa, particularly on the "Muslim-dominated Island of Zanzibar as well as its coastal hinterland," when Christianity made its way there again. Seven mission organisations, including those founded by the Anglicans as well as the Catholics, were created in East Africa between 1863 and 1888, with communities erected along the coast in the same manner as they had in West Africa. Our prior exploration showed that this coastline will eventually include the cities of Mombasa, Malindi, Kilwa, Pate, Lamu, and Pemba. Comparable to the role played by the Indian Ocean in the dissemination of Islam, the Indian Ocean was essential in the propagation of Christianity in East Africa and, more especially, in Kenya as missionary activity increased.

After some early efforts at Meru failed in 1896, there was later success between 1900 and 1916, but the protestant community in Mombasa was the largest beachhead of Christian presence that helped expand Christianity throughout Kenya. However, the entrance of British Imperialists gave the necessary access to Christianity needed to make it to the heartland of Kenya. The Kamba people facilitated connectivity between the coast and the highlands and eventually built the railway to Lake Victoria. By 1920, Kenya had become a crown colony after the territory between the coast and Nairobi had constituted a protectorate in 1895.^{xv} The British East African Company, established in 1888, was the central actor in this play, and it encouraged the Anglican CMS to create stations along the

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^{xiv} Meinema, Erik. "Is Giriama Traditionalism a Religion? Negotiating Indigenous African Religiosity in 'Interfaith' Cooperation in Coastal Kenya." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 50, no. 3-4 (2021): 344-372.

^{xv} Mohammad, Hauwa Gimba. "Impact Of Faith Based Organizations on Community Development Activities in Gwale Local Government Area, Kano State, Nigeria, (2021)."

new road to the interior, which explains why the missionary occupation of Kenya was tied to British imperialism and commercial activity. Christianity flourished under the watchful eye of colonial imperialists, spread to every corner of Kenya, and survived the country's protracted fight for independence. It seems that this was a key factor in the church's rise to power in Kenyan society.

5. Colonialism Aided the Spread of Islam in Kenya

Although colonialism and colonialists helped the expansion of Christianity in Kenya, they also promoted the spread of Islam there, which is a contradiction. Similar trends can be seen in West Africa, with Triand arguing that the colonial era played a significant role in the history of Islam in French Speaking Africa; it was the time of the largest growth of the Muslim presence in Africa. As a result, Muslims in Kenya were given a leg up by the country's adoption of indirect rule and by an agreement reached between the Sultan of Zanzibar as well as Kenya's colonial masters in the early 1960s regarding the ten-mile strip, which allowed them to secure a prominent place in the country's legal framework and eventually spread into the country's interior. Therefore, it was natural via the freedom of religion as well as worship that Islam made its way into the Kenyan interior beyond the coastal ten-mile strip through commerce, agriculture, and evangelism (da'wah). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that not only Christianity but also Islam benefited from colonialism in Africa, and in Kenya in particular.

Despite the lack of data, it is generally accepted that Muslims make up a small percentage of Kenya's population. The majority of Kenya's estimated 10%-20% Muslim population lives in major cities like Mombasa, Nairobi, Kisumu, and Nakuru ^{xvi} Interestingly, the percentage range of the Muslim population in Kenya that was mentioned above hasn't changed significantly since the last census was taken in 2010. The estimated overall population of Kenya is 38,610,09723. Of that number, 4,304,798 (11.15%) are Muslims. When viewed in the context of this study, it is easy to see that Islamic expansionism has been a consistent feature of the religion's development. It makes no secret of its ambition to rule the international stage. Therefore, it is evident that Islam strives to expand its population in every location it exists, which is why it is so eager to convert as many people as possible. Assumptions are being made that they will try new strategies. Since democracy is a numbers game, we may assume that Muslims in Kenya are utilising different ways to increase their numbers in light of the recent constitutional discussion and the Church's objection to the inclusion of the Khadi Courts in the constitution. Therefore, the church needs to be aware of these tactics and respond accordingly.

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6. African Christians and Muslims

A Historical Perspective Studying the relationship between Christianity and Islam in East Africa, and Kenya in particular, will provide light on the phenomenon of religious conversion. Relationships between Christians and Muslims in Africa need a basic introduction to the topic. About fourteen centuries have passed since Islam and Christianity first made contact with one another. Conflict and collaboration have both been present along this journey. Nonetheless, the prevalent pattern of connection between the two religions has been antagonism, hostility, and prejudice rather than friendship and understanding, as the argument puts it. The same author said that the theological similarities between the two faiths (both preach exclusivity), the inability of authorities to rein in the excesses of its people (Jihad and the Crusades), and the missionary aspect of both religions all contributed to their strained relationship.

Consequently, it is clear that both Christianity and Islam actively want converts. From the Muslim perspective, the close cooperation between missionaries and the colonial powers was the fact that most colonised Muslim peoples have become bitter about and suspicious of all missionary work, regardless of its motives.^{xvii} This is just one issue that has shaped the Christian-Muslim relationship. That's why Muslims see missionary work as an assault on their religion. Christianity is still considered the faith of European colonisers who want to see Islam destroyed, hence this attitude persists even now. However, we have already shown that Islam benefited from colonialism as well.

Concerns about Islamic expansionism stem from the religion's bloody conquest of Christian lands at the hands of occupying armies. This sets the stage for the antagonistic conversion relationship that prevails between them. Apostasy, or *Irtidad*, is considered when a Muslim abandons Islam and embraces Christianity, whereas apostasy, or renunciation of Christ, is considered when a Christian abandons Islam and embraces Islam. This, especially in the context of Africa, is the setting in which conversion between the two faiths occurs. The texts of both faiths play a significant role in determining how members of the two communities should interact. Just as Muslims interpret words like *sura 9:29*, some Christians understand passages like *2 Corinthians 6:14*, which speaks of an unequal burden with unbelievers, to mean something quite different. For example, in Kenya, where Christians are the majority, Muslims have a far less political voice than they have in Kenya. What if this becomes the foundation for Muslims to convert Christians in Kenya? However, it's important to keep in mind that although conversion from Islam to Christianity is fraught with difficulty in nations where Christians are a minority, it's rather benign in countries where Christians are a majority. This may be an Islamic tactic. It would be interesting to examine and contrast conversion techniques in places where Muslims are a minority and in places where they are a majority. This research was conducted in a region where Muslims make up a small percentage of the total population.

^{xvii} Mohammad, Hauwa Gimba. "Impact Of Faith Based Organizations on Community Development Activities in Gwale Local Government Area, Kano State, Nigeria, (2021)."

7. Nature of Conversion

This study sought to answer why Christians convert to Islam and how Muslims attempt to convert Christians, but it is also vital to have a clear understanding of what specialists consider to be conversion and its nature. The many facets of conversion are studied by experts in a wide variety of disciplines. Handbook of Religious Conversion, published in 1992, is one such book that covers many facets of conversion. As a result of space constraints, we will only be able to discuss and address those aspects of conversion that we consider important to our investigation. However, it is reasonable to assume that psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have all taken an interest in the topic of conversion. Strahler's groundbreaking research highlights the significance of considering a conversion from the perspectives of psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

7.1 Definition of the Issue

Although the Ngiturkana people of Kenya have a long and storied Christian history, many in recent years have opted to instead follow Islam. Some advantages and disadvantages have arisen as a consequence of this conversion phenomenon, both for the converts themselves and for society at large. However, there is little knowledge of the factors that lead to conversion, the experiences of converts, and the general public's perspective on the topic. The issue, therefore, is to learn more about the risks and rewards of Ngiturkana Christians converting to Islam. The purpose of this research is to shed light on this issue by exploring the factors that lead to conversion, the experiences of converts, and the perspectives of the public. Ultimately, this research aims to add to the continuing conversation about religious variety and tolerance by painting a fuller picture of this multifaceted issue.

7.2 Significance

The Ngiturkana people's decision to convert from Christianity to Islam is an example of the wide variety of faiths present in the area and the need to foster mutual respect and tolerance among them. Implications for Society and Culture: It is crucial to understand the social and cultural ramifications of a person's decision to convert to Islam to foster peaceful and harmonious interactions among people of various faiths. The choice to convert to Islam is typically intensely personal and motivated by a variety of factors. This research opens a window into the thoughts and feelings that lead people to convert. While a person who has converted to Islam may have easier access to religious materials, they may also have a more difficult time finding a religious community that would support them. The purpose of this research is to investigate these problems and potential solutions. The Ngiturkana people's shift in religious affiliation from Christianity to Islam has significant policy ramifications, especially in the realm of religious liberty and tolerance. It is hoped that the findings of this research will help shape laws that encourage religious pluralism and acceptance. In sum, this research is important because it adds to the continuing conversation about religious variety and tolerance by shedding light on

the difficulties and possibilities involved in the Ngiturkana people's transition from Christianity to Islam.

7.3 Challenges for Ngiturkana Christian Conversion to Islam

There has been significant discussion and study into the delicate and sensitive topic of Christian Ngiturkana converting to Islam. There are several difficulties inherent in trying to understand this phenomenon. The absence of trustworthy data is one of the major obstacles to studying the Ngiturkana people's shift from Christianity to Islam in the context of their history and culture. The exact scope of the problem is frequently hard to ascertain because of discrepancies between official statistics and the actual number of conversions. Investigators pursuing this line of inquiry should proceed with caution and consider the topic's cultural context at every stage. Researchers need to be conscious of the concerns of potentially upsetting people of any faith and act accordingly. The area is highly polarised along religious lines, making it challenging for researchers to interview people who have changed from one faith to another. Individuals may be hesitant to discuss their experiences freely because of this polarisation, which may introduce bias into the study findings. It might be challenging for people to convert to a new faith when they come from more conservative cultural backgrounds. Social pressure, cultural standards, and persecution anxiety are all examples of contexts in which this resistance manifests itself.^{xviii} Inaccurate data collection may be hampered by the political nature of religious conversions. Because of the potential for heightened societal tensions, governments as well as other political institutions may be hesitant to permit study on religious conversions. Still, despite the obstacles, research on the Ngiturkana people's shift from Christianity to Islam must go. Because of this, not only will we have a better grasp of the factors driving these conversions, but we will also see more communication and collaboration among people of various faiths.

7.4 Opportunities for Ngiturkana Christian Conversion to Islam

The difficulties caused by the Ngiturkana people's shift in religion from Christianity to Islam are significant, yet possibilities also exist because of this trend. Converts from one faith to another may help broaden society's recognition of the value of religious diversity. This has the potential to increase acceptance of other faiths and respect for their traditions. Ngiturkana people's shift from Christianity to Islam may pave the way for better relations between the faiths.^{xix} People of many faiths may gain valuable insights from one another and foster more harmonious relationships via candid and respectful communication. Some people who convert from Christianity to Islam do so because they

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believe Islam offers them a path to greater spiritual satisfaction. Some people experience renewed meaning and spiritual fulfillment after deciding to convert. A person who converts to Islam may have access to a new network of religious leaders, scholars, and scholars. That may mean having the opportunity to connect with and learn from religious leaders and groups from other traditions. Those who convert to Islam may feel that they are part of a broader, more universal community of believers. This has the potential to alleviate feelings of alienation and provide a sense of community and significance. Despite the difficulties, the Ngiturkana's decision to convert from Christianity to Islam has opened up numerous possibilities for the community, including deeper religious knowledge and interfaith understanding, greater spiritual fulfillment, expanded spiritual resources, and a stronger sense of community. These occasions have the potential to foster better collaboration and understanding among the world's many religious groups, leading to a more peaceful and harmonious society as a whole.

8. Conclusion

There are several factors at play in the process of Ngiturkana Christian converts to Muslim, and these factors all have a significant bearing on the lives of individual converts as well as on the larger Ngiturkana community and public policy. This research has shed light on the benefits and drawbacks of this phenomenon by investigating the factors that lead to conversion, the experiences of converts, and the perspectives of the general public. Converting to Islam may help people feel more connected to God and provide them access to new religious materials, but it can also cause friction with loved ones and society at large and make it difficult to locate a welcoming group of believers. The results of this research underline the need of fostering understanding and respect between various religious groups and add to the continuing discourse on religious diversity and tolerance. The findings of this study should stimulate further inquiry and promote the formulation of policies that safeguard the rights of all people to practice their religions freely and without persecution. The aim is to foster a society where everyone is safe in expressing their faith of choice without fear of violence or prejudice.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declared no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research authorship and/or publication.

About the Author

I'm Dr. Lochodo Malcom Charles (lochodomalcom@gmail.com) A passionate scholar, teacher, and researcher, with a blend of academic excellence and spiritual insight. My greatest joy is in serving people through knowledge and empowering them to discover their potential. A 17-year veteran of public & humanitarian service, dedicated to making a real difference in the Republic of Kenya and beyond. Dedicated Chief Officer with 17 years of experience leading teams to success. Making critical decisions, managing

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