

The Influence Of Gichiario On Christian-Muslim Relations In Igembe, Meru County Of Kenya

Posted on September 30, 2019

Transfer Report

During the last ten years of my mission work in the Church, as well as teaching the subject of Christian and Muslim relations at St Andrew's College, Kabare, I have experienced what I may refer to as 'segregation on religious grounds. A case in point is when I was invited to speak on Christian-Muslim relations at a Diocesan Youth Conference from the Anglican Church of Kenya, Murang'a South Diocese. Since I wore Islamic attire and concealed my name from the audience, they perceived me as an Imam. After the first presentation, one participant approached me and asked, 'Why do Muslims kill people? Although a discussion ensued between me and the participant, this served as the beginning point in my research journey into the context of Christian-Muslim relations, to understand the stereotypes and misunderstandings of Christians and Muslims and to find ways to create understanding, cooperation, and dialogue among the adherents of the two world religions who live side by side, especially in a multicultural and multiethnic society like Kenya, and Igembe, Meru in particular.

Rationale For The Research

Research Question

My research investigates the influence of *gichiario* on Christian-Muslim relations in Igembe, Meru County, Kenya. To achieve this, the main question that I seek to answer is: When *gichiario* encourages Christians and Muslims to coexist, as in Igembe Meru, what impact is there on the relationship between individuals and between religious groups? This is also broken down into two smaller subsidiary questions, which form the two main parts of the study and help direct the flow of our research. The first relates to the traditional practices of *gichiario* among the Meru community: How was *gichiario* used in the Meru community? Here, our main concern is to assess how *gichiario* was and is used by the Meru people in their daily lives. But also in the same section, we will extend the inquiry to establish how Igembe Christians and Muslims in Igembe Meru County have managed their relations from their historical and contemporary perspective in Meru. The second part deals with the question: How has *gichiario* been used in Christian-Muslim relations in Meru? Here again, my main concern is to investigate the impact of *gichiario* in Christian-Muslim relations as well as analyse how Christians and

Muslims in Igembe have used *giciaro* in religious practices to enhance their inter-faith relations between individuals and religious groups in Igembe Meru county. This will be concluded with recommendations on the findings, which we think need to be incorporated into interfaith relations.

The Rationale for the Research

In my many years of mission work and teaching, I have had the privilege of interacting with Muslims at various meetings of inter-religious relations and in conferences related to interfaith relations, as well as attending the same class with Muslims. However, what puzzles me is the misunderstanding by both Christians and Muslims of the practices, beliefs, and faith of the other religious faith, leading to what I am referring to as religious segregation. However, at the grassroots level, in Igembe Meru County, where I was privileged to visit, members from these religions interact peacefully as they perform their daily activities together. In their daily interactions, they not only have chances of being close to one another but also an opportunity to know one another. This localized peaceful coexistence fails to grab the attention of scholars, whose main focus has been on hermeneutics, mainly focusing on theological issues used to cause conflicts between Christians and Muslims.

They are also reluctant to employ traditional practices in inter-faith relations, which for centuries have been used by Indigenous communities to regulate their daily activities and for peaceful coexistence between them and their neighbours, as in Igembe, Meru County. My interest in this study is to investigate *giciaro*, a traditional practice, to know how it is used by Christians and Muslims in religious practices to regulate and influence interreligious relations between individuals and religious groups in Igembe Meru County. There is a need to move from hermeneutics and focus on communal values that control practical daily life and enable adherents of these religions at the grassroots level to coexist peacefully and have tolerance towards each other. This provides some rationale and background for this research as we investigate the role of *giciaro* on Christian-Muslim relations in Igembe Meru County.

One could also ask the question, 'Why choose such a topic?' My answer would be that when the two religions were brought into Africa, they found Africans with their own African religions. Both Christianity and Islam were received and woven within African worldviews. This African identity still persists, and people continue to identify with their kin, though they are affiliated with these religions. This identity seems to encourage interfaith relations, and if it does, what impact does *giciaro* have on interfaith relations in Igembe Meru County? With this question in mind, I investigate how *giciaro* was and is used in Igembe Meru to establish how Christians and Muslims are managing their interreligious relations today.

Most of the extant literature and courses about interreligious relations and dialogue in religious studies seem to deal with the major world religions without taking into consideration what indigenous traditional practices can offer in interreligious relations. By investigating *giciaro* in interreligious relations, we offer insight into an alternative viable Christian-Muslim interrelation that may encourage

a relationship between members of these religious faiths, breaking ground for more investigation. Thus, the topic fits well within the study of religious studies, for it investigates the three religions (African Religious 'practice', Christianity, and Islam) in trying to address a seemingly common ground for peaceful coexistence among the affiliated members.

Review of Literature

My reading has concentrated on three areas that are relevant to this study. First, those focusing on the Meru community living in Igembe and their tradition; second, those relating to Christian-Muslim relations; and third, the literature that addresses the cultural practices that enhance social and religious cooperation. Though there is extensive literature on Christian-Muslim relations in Africa, such literature is too general, meaning that it does not address specific issues, as is the aim of this study. The literature's main concern is on conflicts arising from historical injustices, political issues, theological issues, and freedom of worship. However, some literature has also focused on missions and the *da'wa* (preaching in Islam) activities of these religions, which have led to religious conflicts in Africa and, in particular, Kenya over the years. I will, therefore, highlight some of the important literature that I have read and believe is important for this study.

Two scholars are synonymous with the anthropological and historical background of the Meru community. An anthropologist, Lowenthal (1973:49-91), whose work, *Structural Dynamics of Tharaka Age-Organization*, has a unique contribution to the social life of the Tharaka people, who are a sub-group of the Meru community. He discusses their social activities as they were governed by their social organizations. He shows that clans, age sets, and kin were important in dealing with matters relating to the community, for example, security and family issues like marriage. His arguments cannot be complete without mentioning a historian, Fadiman (1993:91-96).

His book, *When We Began, There Were Witchmen: An Oral History from Mount Kenya*, is a further foundational work that deals with the history of the Meru people's migration from the coastal region of Kenya to their current settlement around Mount Kenya. In his detailed analysis, he covered the Meru social life and political organization, which enhanced cohesion among sub-groups of the Meru community. It is among the Meru sub-groups that *giciaro* is mentioned as an alliance that helped them to maintain cooperation between various sub-clans of Meru. The anthropological and historical approaches are valid for this study because they complement one another. They help rescue the memory of the past regarding the Igembe sub-group, which is relevant in laying the foundation for the current study. What lacks in these studies and is of interest to my study is how Christians and Muslims have now used *giciaro* in their religious and social activities to regulate and influence their interreligious relations in their daily interactions and cooperation between individuals and religious groups.

To broaden my understanding of African traditional religions, I have also looked at other scholars who have written about religious and cultural values in the African context. Opoku (1978:8), in his book,

West African Traditional Religion, supplies a contribution to the growing work by Africans on African traditional belief systems that offer diverse expressions when it comes to the African celebrations of cultural and religious festivals. At these festivals, people get opportunities to interact and get to know each other well. The same is echoed by Magesa (1997:26) in his book, *African Religion: Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, where he argues that African celebrations are attached to expressions that bring members of a community together, promoting their coexistence. Their studies are important to this study, especially as they relate to the understanding of the dialogue of life as enhanced by *giciaro* among the Igembe in Meru County. Their study, therefore, informs our examination of *giciaro* as used in Christian and Muslim relations in Igembe Meru in their daily and religious activities and whether it could be a source of good interreligious relations, a study that is lacking in their work.

Other scholars have also written about the changes that take place in African communities. Nyaga (1997: iii), in the book *Customs and Traditions of the Meru*, argues that Africans are experiencing serious moral, social, and political problems. Some of these experiences have led to ethnic clashes and religious tensions. Though Gifford (2009:71-81) has dealt with the impact of colonialism on the African people, which took place about 50 years ago, is instrumental in this study because colonial memories continue to divide people along ethnic and religious lines. In other words, what leads to most conflicts can be the tensions that arise from Westernization. The combined force of colonialism and Christian religious supremacy over Africans would only result in outright conflict between members of different religious backgrounds. Mazrui (1986:xviii) concludes the argument of these writers by pointing out that such challenges experienced in Africa are due to the encounter of three cultures: the indigenous African culture, Western culture, and Muslim culture. His arguments are very important to this study because any talk about interreligious relations in a local context has to address this reality. This fits well with our study because we are trying to bring in the understanding of a cultural practice that has encountered the three heritages and still seems to be felt within the Igembe Meru community. The writers have not discussed this.

Other general works on the nature of Christian-Muslim relations have also been consulted, especially those addressing tensions and even open conflicts experienced in most parts of Africa and Kenya in particular. Those resources which relate to tensions and conflicts include Kukah (2007:155-1640, Soares (2006), Ficquet (2006:39-56), Shanker (2006:89-114), and Chesworth (2006:159-186). Chesworth discusses various strategies for proselytization that go on in East Africa, which involve the use of tracts by Muslims to reach their targets. The strategies end up creating mistrust because they are released with vested interest and also in support of the doctrinal issues. These authors have contributed to the historical and social understanding of the relations between Christians and Muslims in Africa. Their works inform this study because, rather than focusing on the tensions and conflicts, it seeks to encourage Christian and Muslim relations that promote mutual coexistence among the adherents of these religions.

African hospitality has not been left aside, as some writers have argued, as it has contributed a lot to the tolerance of others. Typical of this approach is Mbillah (2004:66-79), who claims that African

religiosity is plural and tolerant, and the introduction of Christianity and Islam brought with them intolerance. However, Sanneh (1996) differs slightly from Mbillah and proposes that the Christianity and Islam we have in Africa are more tolerant because they are blended with African hospitality. This is a strong assertion because African hospitality is attached to African religion and African society, where, to be born into a community, you are born into that community's religion. Also, it is in that community where a person has kin, security, identity, and life. These arguments about African communities are an indication that people's existence depends on other members of the community. This gives some insight into our examination of the influence of *giciaro* on Christian-Muslim relations, which is lacking in these works.

The foregoing literature tries to bring together the experiences of Africans in the face of the three legacies: African tradition, Westernization, and Islamization. The three are important to scholars who sensitively and persuasively point out that in interfaith relations, hostility, isolation, competition, partnership, and dialogue play a central role in how people of different faiths relate. These attitudes have their historical origin; they also often had lasting impressions. By comparison with the current study, these works are more general and do not capture the experiences at the grassroots level. There is a need, therefore, to seek ways to build what we can call a micro-level relationship because it is here where we have the dialogue of life, and it is mostly neglected by scholars and leaders. In African life, one is first born into a community, and this means you are born into a culture that is religious before one converts to Islam or Christianity. I, therefore, argue that members actively involved in the community's daily activities, despite one's religious affiliation, would happen if members consider each other as brothers or sisters, not as members to be tolerated.

Research Report

This study involves a qualitative research approach. The study uses a snowball sampling method to identify our participants and a series of qualitative interviews with both individuals and groups. There is also a case study of three mosques and three churches. This section gives a detailed description of the completed work, as well as what is in progress and what still needs to be done. It will also give a plan for the next two years of research and the skills already obtained.

Research Progress to Date

My first task after I returned to Kenya in 2014 was to visit my study area. This gave me the opportunity to get in contact with someone who would later become my informer during my research period. However, this also enabled me to have a first-hand experience of the dialogue of life between Christians and Muslims in Igembe Meru. In the process, I was able to come up with chapters that inform the structure of the study I am working on. The final thesis will have seven chapters organized as follows:-

Completed

Chapter One. Background to the study: At this stage in the research process, the introductory chapter of the thesis is being formed. The chapter has sub-sections that include the research problem, research question, and sub-questions, objectives of the study, and selected literature. The chapter also provides general background on the information regarding Christian and Muslim relations on which my research has been based, including limitations that are

Chapter Two. The chapter examines the history of the Igembe in Meru. This provides a socio-cultural approach to the worldview of the Igembe people with a special interest in their understanding of life in relation to *giciaro*. The purpose is to find out the notion of communal life as it relates to the use of *giciaro*. The chapter will provide the background for understanding the Igembe use of *giciaro* and dialogue of life, especially in Igembe.

In Progress

Chapter Three. This focuses on the beginning and growth of Christianity and Islam in Igembe. I envision that the material discussed in this chapter will be important in understanding the planting and growth of the two religions in Igembe- how and why Igembe responded, and the eventual assimilation of the two religions. It will serve as a key to understanding how *giciaro* contributes to the relationship between the two religions in the area.

Chapter Four. This explains the methodology that was used to get raw data for this research. This includes methods that were used to solicit information from Christians and Muslims in Igembe Meru. It also explains the challenges that were encountered and how they were addressed.

Chapter Five. This Chapter deals with materials gathered from Christians and Muslims in Igembe, who are our primary informants. It discusses different understandings, perceptions, and experiences that both Christians and Muslims have had in regard to *Cicero* in their relations. This also includes how informants have experienced their close contact with members of other faiths in Igembe. In this analysis, I am interested in finding out how Christians and Muslims in Igembe Meru have been able to use *giciaro* to create a dialogue of life in Igembe Meru.

Chapter Six. This chapter deals with initiatives for promoting Christian and Muslim relations. Though there is this interrelation, the practice of *giciaro* has not been identified as a source of providing various initiatives for encouraging Christian and Muslim relations. This will be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Seven. The chapter concentrates on the conclusions of the study. I, therefore, summarize the findings, how *giciaro* practice can be used to minimize conflicts, and also the contribution of the study, and provide a new approach to future prospects.

Research Plan for the Next Period

I aim to complete my thesis by spring 2019 and be ready for the *viva voce* by June 2020. From now up to December 2019, I anticipate achieving the following as presented in the table below:

Time	Work to be done	Place of Activity
June 2017 to February 2018	To collect data from the Study area	Maua, Laare and Kangeta
March 2018 to March 2019	Period of data analysis and presentation	At St Andrew's Kabare/OCMS
April 2019 to December 2019	It's a period of writing and presentation	St Andrews-Kabare/ OCMS
By June 2020	Submission of thesis	OCMS

Research Skills Undertaken

The following are some of the skills I have been able to learn since I registered with Middlesex University.

Reading skills: – Reviewing related literature to the study was not easy at the beginning. But at the moment, I can say that I have acquired some skills that have enabled me to locate relevant literature from various reading materials I have come across. Critical reading has been so helpful in my readings. It has also helped me to learn how to retrieve information from a given chapter of interest or from a book without trying to read everything. This has been very helpful.

Interviewing skills: – In doing interviews, I had to read through several methodology books on conducting interviews. This introduced me to the type of questions I needed to develop for my interviews (appendix A) and to solicit the type of information I needed for my research. I have, therefore, developed and refined different groups of questions for the interview process. I have learned to avoid asking a leading question and to ask open questions, which would give the interviewee a chance to express themselves. However, what really helped me achieve the above skills was the chance I was given to present my proposal paper at St Paul's University, Limuru. Members of the Faculty of Theology, through their contribution to my draft, helped me in developing skills for carrying out interviews and preparing questionnaires.

Note-taking: This is a skill that has helped me keep my notes organized. There are many reading materials from books, the internet, and theses, which, if I did not have a well-organized way of note-taking and documentation, would mean that the presentation would be very disorganized. I have learned to break down my notes into the subject matter mentioned in the proposal. This has helped me to keep my notes well-organized and will be maintained until the end of this study.

Another skill important for this study is the preparation of questionnaires. The questions that guided the interviews include,

1. What is your experience and understanding regarding the Christian-Muslim Relationship in Meru? What, in general, do people say about the relationship? What is your expectation of a genuine Christian-Muslim relationship?
2. What do you see as the most and the least beneficial aspects of promoting the relationship between Christians and Muslims from the perspective of your community? What would you do differently to promote the relationship?
3. In what ways does *Gicicaro* impact the relationship between Christians and Muslims? What are the main aspects of *giciaro* that you think contribute to the relationship?
4. Who is most responsible for promoting dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Meru? Why?

I had to repeat these questions several times to make sure they were clear to the respondents. This enabled the respondents to understand me immediately without requesting that I keep on repeating myself. Asking and answering questions is an important skill that I concentrate on as I continue writing my thesis. This means I will improve my listening skills because even at the end of this work, I will be evaluated through questions and answering questions emanating from it. With this skill, I am sure I will learn to respond appropriately to any question directed to me.

Originality and Expected Contribution to Knowledge

Kateregga and Shenk say that most studies on Christian-Muslim studies have tended to focus on hermeneutical issues, focusing mainly on theological issues, Christian mission, and Muslim da'wa activities (1997:1-75, 83-165). As argued by these scholars, most studies available to this study thus far concentrate on religious violence and tensions between Christians and Muslims. This creates the impression that Christians and Muslims are often in conflict with each other. In Shenk's own words,

'[O]ften Islam is defined by ways it differs from or opposes the Christian faith. Christians resist Islam's claim to have fulfilled and gone beyond Christianity. Some Christians are troubled by political forms of Islam, which expose values antithetical to traditional Christian ones. For other Christians, Islam as a missionary religion is in competition with Christian witness' (Shenk, 1999:9).

One would, therefore, wonder when the world will be at peace if these two world religions are always

in conflict. We would expect, therefore, scholars, church, and Muslim leaders to be involved in fostering and maintaining interreligious relations, especially using locally available mechanisms, which are often avoided in matters of interreligious relations. In contrast to the violence and tension highlighted by the scholars, still, in some areas in Africa, and in particular Kenya, there is a dialogue of life and cooperation between Christians and Muslims, as observed in Igembe Meru county of Kenya which from this study has not received academic attention. I hope it will help to illuminate what I consider a distinctive approach in the study of religious studies, promote other ways of enhancing Christian-Muslim relations, narrow the gap between Christians and Muslims, and enhance interreligious tolerance. By doing so, I propose to fill some of that gap. While I cannot claim to go into any depth in this study, I, therefore, investigate the role of *cicero* on Christian-Muslim relations in Igembe Meru county of Kenya, which seems to contribute to interfaith relations in Igembe Meru.

Although efforts have been made in interfaith relations, especially between Christians and Muslims, to my knowledge, most of the work has been on hermeneutics, theological, and conflict-related works. I am therefore embarking on a different approach to the enhancement of Christian and Muslim relations by researching a traditional practice that seems to encourage interfaith relations in Igembe, which Christians and Muslims in Igembe have said enhances interreligious relations in the area. I am, therefore, not only interested in the study of the relations between Christianity and Islam but also in the Indigenous communal practices that researchers and Indigenous religious leaders continue to marginalize in their interreligious dialogue and cooperation efforts.

Finally, interfaith issues in Kenya have mainly concerned Christian and Muslim leaders. All along, indigenes have been marginalized from interfaith relations and cooperation. This study examines the role of *giciaro* in Christian-Muslim relations to sensitize the adherents as well as scholars about the relevance and place of cultural and religious practices in interfaith dialogue in the country. I hope the study will be important in benefitting people of different religious backgrounds living side by side to meet and interact personally and communally on a regular basis and still stimulate more thought and research in this field of study and related contexts elsewhere in the continent of Africa.

Part A

Interview Schedule

Study on

The Influence of *giciaro* on Christian-Muslim Relations in Igembe, Meru County of Kenya

1. What is your background?
2. Do you know much about *giciaro*? In your opinion, in what ways do you think *giciaro* plays a role

in Christian-Muslim relationships?

3. Describe your position about the fact that many people think that violent conflicts between Christians and Muslims are authorized by their own scripture.
4. In your opinion, describe how Christian-Muslim relationships have been in Igembe in Meru.
5. In what ways does *giciaro* impact the relationship between Christians and Muslims? What are the main aspects of *giciaro* that you think contribute to the relationship?

Part B

Guided Small Group Discussion Schedule

Study on

The Influence of *Giciaro* on Christian-Muslim Relations in Igembe, Meru County of Kenya

1. What is your experience and understanding regarding the Christian-Muslim Relationship in Meru? What, in general, do people say about the relationship? What is your expectation of a genuine Christian-Muslim relationship?
2. What do you see as the most and the least beneficial aspects of promoting the relationship between Christians and Muslims from the perspective of your community? What would you do differently to promote the relationship?
3. In what ways does *giciaro* impact the relationship between Christians and Muslims? What are the main aspects of *giciaro* that you think contribute to the relationship?
4. Who is the most responsible for doing dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Meru? Why?

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