

A History of Dini Ya Musambwa in Bungoma County, Kenya: 1940-2017

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8.1 Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the detailed history of Dini ya Musambwa in Bungoma County from inception in 1940 to 2017 in Kenya. The researcher sought to find out the origin and background of Dini ya Musambwa, establish the challenges faced by the sect in promoting its activities and establish the influence of the sect on the communities of Bungoma since colonial times. The study location was in Bungoma County, Kenya. The investigation remained flexible in the effort to follow up the history and survival of the Dini ya Musambwa to details. The study took 1940 as the beginning point and we followed the sect all through to 2017. The significance of 1940 is serving as the beginning of the second nationalism among the Babukusu which was synonymous with the rise of Elijah Masinde and the Dini ya Musambwa in Bungoma County. 2017 on the other hand served as the convenient date to end the investigation and analysis given the humble time frame and the fact that it was an electioneering year. The study was informed by two integrated theoretical frameworks: - namely the social movement and the social conflict theory of change, as advanced by Karl Marx. These are largely sociological theories with a common denominator in that they are primarily theories of social change. As the study unfolds, the perspectives of the two theories mutually reinforce each other and whenever need arises, either of them is effectively found relevant. The social conflict theory was used across the board to analyze all aspects pertaining the study by combining with the social movement theory as derived from consensus movement and the cooptation of civic and state infrastructures by John Mc Carthy and Mark Wolfson (1987). The study focused on the origin, development and decline in the spread and vibrancy of the Dini ya Musambwa in Kenya since inception in 1940 up to 2017. Several scholars have looked at the History of Elijah Masinde the founder of Dini ya Musambwa and his prophecies. The rise and vibrancy of the Dini ya Musambwa has also been well documented. However, little has been done about the challenges faced by the Dini ya Musambwa, a problem that this study sought to address. Qualitative methods were used to collect, analyze and present data. Primary data was obtained from focus group and discussions, oral interviews, Government Reports and archival materials from selected organizations that held Dini ya Musambwa information. Secondary data was obtained from the internet and libraries of higher institutions of learning where the researcher accessed published and unpublished materials. The respondents were briefed about the objectives of the study before the data collection process. The study findings are of significance to the community of Bungoma County, religious bodies, members of Dini ya Musambwa and will also inspire other scholars and researchers to carry out related studies. The study proposed the historical study of the Dini ya Musambwa as a good base upon which future resolutions, and references would be made concerning the Babukusu, Bungoma County and Africa's indigenous religious organizations.

Key terms: Nationalism, Imperialism, Colonialism, Independence, Musambwa

8.2 Introduction

The connection between missionaries and colonial expansion has been a subject of scrutiny in many history classes. It must be pointed out that the missionaries that came to Kenya and Africa as a whole were not trained in theology. Some of them sided with the brutal oppressive political systems like slavery, colonialism and apartheid. The missionaries were a means of establishing and strengthening the colonial system, Nell (1996).

According to Ochieng (1990), the establishment of British colonial rule in Kenya was mainly through force. This was after the British administration realized that the African groups were not willing to forego their age old independence without some form of military show. Between 1895 and 1914 the British organized a series of military expeditions against what they called “recalcitrant tribes” in Kenya. Among the ethnic groups were the Giriama, Nandi (1895-1905), the Babukusu (1894-1895), the Aembu (1905), the Abagusii (1905, 1908 and 1914), the Kipsigis (1905) and the Kabras (1907). The case of Babukusu early nationalism was disastrous and came to be known as the *Lumboka* and *Chetambe* massacres, Makila (1982).

After the defeat of the Babukusu in the *Lumboka* and *Chetambe* wars, the years between 1896 and 1918 witnessed the effective establishment of the British authority in their land and in Baluhya land generally. With the establishment of the colonial rule, the Babukusu became subject to a number of forces working towards change. Their incorporation into a new and very large political entity, which threw together many formerly independent African nations and which also attracted European and Asian immigrants, created an entirely new political context which had far reaching effects on them. More specifically, there followed colonial policies which sought to marginalize and control their nationalistic spirit and assimilate the people into colonial systems, Ochieng (1990).

The traditional setting; the prophets, medicine men, council of elders were no more, community support and care vanished, the community had no leaders. There was a vacuum. As this was going on, missionaries, mostly from Europe and England continued spreading the message of a loving, caring and invisible God. Many people had embraced the message of missionaries but then, started resenting it with the emergency of the brutality of colonialism, also propagated by the white man from Europe.

The *Dini ya Musambwa* was founded by one Elijah Masinde who rose to be a renowned prophet at Maeni village, Kimilili Sub-County, Bungoma County in Kenya during World War II. *Dini ya Musambwa (DYM)*, proposed a return to veneration of ancestors. The founder of *Dini ya Musambwa*, Elijah Masinde (1910-1987), believed in *one God but not in one Bible*. Masinde rose both as an independent preacher and agitator against colonialism in Kenya. He urged his people to resist colonial ways and not to enlist their youths to fight the *Mzungu* war, Wakhongola; Wangamati (OI.,2017).

Both oral and documentary sources agree that, *Dini ya Musambwa* centered on pilgrimage to Mount Elgon, which was equated with Mount Zion (*Sayoni* in local speech). Here, traditional sacrifices were offered and prayers made. Masinde was notably very selective in his use of traditional religion. He emphasized that the ancestral tradition and religion in many respects resembled Christian teachings and practices. He taught his followers to pray more to *Wele*, the Most High God. The call and works of Elijah were very vibrant. His followers likened his call to that of Moses, Jesus and Mohammed. To some, he was a messianic figure and they followed him passionately, Were (1972); Wakhongola (OI.,2017).

It can therefore, be emphasized that *Dini ya Musambwa* rose as an alternative to the mainstream churches which had banned polygamy and female circumcision. By then, colonial oppression was at its peak. The white colonial rulers had no respect for the elders and women (Were, 1978).

Dini ya Musambwa which started in the 1940"s was vibrant and vocal right from its foundation. The *Musambwa* founder, Elijah Masinde *Wanameme* led members of the sect to fight against colonial oppression. Masinde"s message attracted a lot of following in Kenya and Uganda. He continued fighting oppression of citizens and corruption in Kenya even after independence. Because of its activities and vibrancy, he was detained several times by Kenyatta and Moi regimes in Kenya and by Milton Obote in Uganda. Several scholars have looked at the history of Elijah Masinde, the founder of *Dini Ya Musambwa* and his prophecies, Nandi (2007).

The rise and vibrancy of the *Dini Ya Musambwa* has also been looked at by scholars like Alembi (2000), Shimanyula (1998) and Wandiba (2004). However, after the demise of Elijah Masinde (1987), very little is heard about *Dini ya Musambwa*. The critical voice previously heard from members of the sect about oppression and corruption has also continued to drift into oblivion. This study therefore, offers a critical assessment of the rise and fall of *Dini ya Musambwa*.

This is a study of religion, politics and nationalism. It is a subject that has been extensively dealt with by both historians and political scientists. In the Kenyan scenario, this has been done through a general orientation; either by examining protest against the European rule at a national and continental level, or by looking and focusing on particular areas and communities almost to the exclusion and expense of others, Wekesa (2000).

Ogola (2016) observes that *White* domination or rather colonialism manifested itself in different methods in Africa, it affected societies in diverse ways and this, therefore means that African societies responded differently to the establishment of colonial rule, depending on the magnitude and intensity of policies involved. This study therefore, contends that the manner in which African societies reacted to colonial invasion remains a major theme in African historiography. The study asserts that, for most Africans, it was the locality and local issues which dominated their concerns all through the years of colonial rule. The study was focused on the *Dini ya Musambwa*, a very classic case of African response to colonial rule. It was a reactionary movement that rose to challenge implementation of European colonial policies.

The study has examined the patterns of colonial and post-colonial injustices that have tended to be ignored by elitist studies that stressed the extent to which the nationalistic movement was revolutionary. By this, the study contributes to a fuller understanding of the nationalist historiography in Kenya, shedding light on the happenings in *Bukusu land* generally and the *Dini ya Musambwa* in particular. The study looks at the historical growth and development of the sect since inception, hence contributing to the prevailing literature on views related to the *Dini ya Musambwa* in detail. The study contributes to the body of knowledge that exists on the interaction between traditional religious movements and colonialism. Besides, it underscores the contribution of the Babukusu people in the making of Kenya's colonial history. In this way, it removes them from historical oblivion. Most importantly it highlights the contribution of Elijah Masinde as a personality in the socio-political history of Kenya. Lastly, the study was expected to inspire other scholars and researchers to carry out related studies on the subject. The study confined itself to Bungoma County in Western Kenya. Bungoma is the home county of Elijah Masinde who is regarded as the undisputed leader of *Dini ya Musambwa* movement in Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

In order to analyze and give a detailed history of the *Dini ya Musambwa* in Bungoma County, this study employed two integrated theoretical frameworks – namely the *Social Movement* and the *Conflict Theory*, also called *Sociological Theory of Change*, as advanced by Karl Marx; an outstanding Hebrew scholar and German citizen who asserted that, any society is made of groups with divergent interests, goals, objectives. As a result, the groups compete for the scarce resources like money, jobs, land, sacred objects, power and ideas (K. Singh, 1996).

The conflict theory helps us to understand that the *Dini ya Musambwa* was founded due to conflict between Christian cultures as brought by European Missionaries and the *Luhya* culture. This is largely a sociological theory. However, its sociological orientation is offloaded to give allowance for inclusion of historical imperatives and discourse in its scope by bringing on board the Social Movement theory.

The Social Movement theory can be understood as a complex set of many actions by many different collective actors, all oriented towards some very broad issue or goal. These interconnections between events

are directly tied to cycles of protest. It therefore refers to the study of *social mobilization* including its social, cultural and political manifestations and consequences, Sidney (1994); Tilley (2004).

Proponents of this theory state that it has three main concepts, namely; *Relative Deprivation*, *Collective Behavior* and *Resource Mobilization*. They view social movements as large scale informal groupings of individuals or organizations, which are connected through their shared interests to focus on specific political or social issues in order to carry out *some social* change. These characteristics are generally associated with sects or religious protest movements, and the *Dini ya Musambwa* easily fits into that characterization.

As noted by Scroggs (1999), *Musambwa* was embraced widely due to its open protest against relative deprivation. The DYM faithful came together not only to express their desire to get rid of relative deprivation but also to form a new world order where they could find acceptance and value among themselves. *Musambwa* was born in protest to economic oppression, exploitation and political dominance by the *Whites*. It emerged to offer spiritual chaplaincy that addressed the deprivation challenge.

As such, the *Social Conflict* theory was effectively used across the board to analyze all aspects pertaining to the study by combining with the *Social Movement* to investigate the detailed history of the *Dini ya Musambwa* in Bungoma County, Kenya.

8.3 Methodology

The research design used was descriptive or qualitative analysis. The study mainly depended upon two complementary sources:- Primary and Secondary sources. Archival and oral interviews constituted the primary sources. Archival sources were mainly obtained from the Kenya National Archives in Bungoma and Kakamega. Documents ranging from District annual reports, Provincial Administration hand over reports for both colonial and post-colonial periods were analyzed. From these documents, the historical data on *Ababukusu* trade, land tenure and land policies, labor policies, taxation and agricultural policies was obtained. These were instrumental in analyzing the history of the *Dini ya Musambwa* in details.

The researcher used linear snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, where existing study subjects recruited future subjects from among their acquaintances. This is a respondent-driven sampling and was appropriate for the particular study as it allowed a network to the hidden population; it was simple and cost efficient, Mugenda (2003); Kothari (1995). The researcher used questionnaires, structured interviews, open ended oral interviews and Focused group interviews that were organized with four to ten respondents. The questionnaires were employed to obtain the required primary data.

The use of oral data as a primary source called for the carrying out interview schedules in the Sub-Counties of Bungoma spinning from Kimilili headquarters of the sect at Maeni. Oral interviews were used because some members claimed that they did not have time to fill the questionnaires, others said they did not know how to read nor write, and that they were not sure for what purpose the research was intended. Notably, in line with *Musambwa* regulations (*Maayi Namakanda*), women were not permitted into the FGD"s that were held, hence necessitating the oral interviews with a number of elderly women faithful of the sect.

Secondary data was the other category of resources used in this study. This included written sources like books, journals, magazines, articles, unpublished theses, seminar papers and periodicals which had relevant information to the study. These were derived from libraries like the Kibabii University library, Kimilili Town Community library, the Margaret Thatcher Library of Moi University and the Bungoma Boys High School library. The written material from these libraries constituted important secondary data for the research. We scrutinized and sieved this data to minimize any subjectivity. In addition, an extensive use of the internet was made, enabling the researcher to access electronically stored information on *Musambwa* and other *New Religious Movements* (NRMs). Here, a variety of the most current information about the sect was accessed. This included Newspapers articles, electronic journals, books and other related literature on

the subject of the study. The secondary data provided useful interpretation of scholarly data on religious independency in East Africa generally and in Kenya specifically. Secondary data was found vital in corroborating of the primary data.

As expected in qualitative research design, data collection and analysis were carried out concurrently. Data was collected from a variety of sources leading to appropriate conclusion at the end of the study. In the actual process of analyzing and interpreting data, the researcher used the logical historical method, which was found quite useful to the study. This method entails the analysis and explanation of the harnessed data logically as well as historically, Onimonde (1985). It involves the critical investigation of events, developments and experiences of the past, the careful weighing of evidence of the validity of sources of information and the interpretation of a researcher's weighed evidence, Peter (1996).

The historical methods of data analysis were necessitated by the fact that the historical inquiry into social phenomenon needed more than a mere knowledge of the facts and events in their chronological order. The facts must be applied to establish the historical specification of the social phenomenon in terms of its particular elements and the relations between these elements which determine the structure of the phenomenon and give it some coherence, Aseka (1989). The researcher rigorously applied this method in an attempt to produce a truly historical piece of work.

8.5 Findings

The study attempted to explore the history and survival of the *Dini ya Musambwa* from inception in Kenya generally and in Bungoma particularly. The study validated the assumption that indeed the DYM faced tremendous challenges from inception to 2017. The challenges ranged from government policies, leadership, and religious to environmental.

We observed that the DYM was effectively used as a voice by the people of North Nyanza in general and Bungoma District (County) in particular to articulate their grievances. The movement stood on the roots and foundation of the Bukusu early *nationalism* displayed in the years 1894 and 1895 at the *Lumboka* and *Chetambe* wars. It is the motivation from this history that enabled the Babukusu to yearn for their traditional ways of worship, to confront the foreigners for freedom. The sect, we observed, rested on Elijah Masinde as the leader although the fire was kept burning by his disciples even when he was imprisoned. The exploits of *Musambwa* among the *Suk (Pokot)* people of Baringo by one Lukas Pkiech can't go unmentioned. Lukas effectively preached and spread the doctrines of *Musambwa* to his people. The *Suk* people of Baringo District confronted the colonialists and hundreds of them were brutally killed in the *Kolloa (Kollowa)* Massacre of 1950, Kipkokorir(1972).

The study pointed out that, the DYM as a vehicle carried not only the Babukusu people of Bungoma but spread all over Western Province to the Rift Valley around Lake Baringo, to parts of Eastern Uganda and Tanzania. It is important to recall that, before the coming of colonial rule, the people of Kenya co-existed. As such, Elijah Masinde via the DYM had a downhill task of uniting the African people to fight for their independence. The DYM easily worked with the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), the Bukusu Union B.U., the African Elected Members Organization (AEMO) and other organizations as they all had one mission, to drive away the colonial oppressors. It was observed that the Bukusu political consciousness was, therefore, inevitable given their brutal encounter with the colonizers in 1894-1895 that left a vacuum in their ranks. The encounter disrupted their old order and also worsened by constant use of brutal force. Through a synthesized approach, the study has examined the several themes right from the coming of DYM, its reception, survival and challenges to its very existence.

The study has demonstrated that the economic and political processes that shaped the pattern of authority at the level of the government and state had far reaching effects on the Africans generally and among the people of North Nyanza specifically. We pointed out that the factors that engendered racial inequality blocked economic opportunities for the Babukusu and hence fostered social discrimination, which was openly detested in various forms, including the rise of *Dini a Musambwa*. The analysis in this study

extrapolated the connections between different forms of production and dominations. This in essence vindicated the fact that the Babukusu resistance was on, with or without the rise of *Dini ya Musambwa*. The study has pointed out that the DYM; contrary on the popular belief fought for education. The founder, Elijah Masinde wanted education to be universal, free and not attached to religion. He forged for an education that would liberate the people. He proposed technical education as opposed to the theoretical trainings that would lead Africans in Kenya to work as clerks for the colonialists. We are humbled to demonstrate that truly, the founder of DYM fought for a liberating education.

A step further reveals that he led his fellow DYM leaders to establish the Matili Village Polytechnic in Kimilili, Bungoma County. This institution has grown into what is Matili National Polytechnic today. We further established that Elijah Masinde led the DYM to establish Bituyu Primary School near Kimilili (1946), the emphasis being to offer free Primary School Education. In 1948, he started Buema Primary School near Kanduyi in Bungoma South, a clear indication that DYM was for education.

More precisely was the presence of St. Walumoli Primary School, a modern day primary school in Bungoma Central, near Bokoli, established by the DYM in honor of the movements' co-founder, Mzee Walumoli. The school, started in 2007 by 2017 had reportedly sent several learners to high schools around Kenya. It was getting teachers from the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and they did not necessarily belong to the DYM. The study established that DYM from the onset came from revelation, and had the great impact it had because of the able leadership of one Elijah Masinde, a prophet and diviner priest. Having survived the harsh treatment by the colonial and post-colonial governments in Kenya, Elijah propelled himself to a higher position than average preachers.

It was established that one of the many challenges facing the DYM was legality of the sect itself. The movement was first proscribed in 1948 after the Malakisi Massacre in which some 11 people died. The survivors were either jailed or heavily fined. Elijah Masinde and four other leaders were put in prison and remained imprisoned till the eve of Kenya's independence.

In the year 1968, the DYM was once again banned after its leader Elijah Masinde was accused of inciting people against the government. On this occasion, the Attorney General Charles Njonjo issued a Kenyan Gazette notice banning the sect, describing it as *a society dangerous to the good government of the Republic of Kenya*. As a result, DYM remains a proscribed organization to date, operating only based on the lifeline given by the 2010 New Constitution of Kenya that guaranteed Kenyans the freedom of worship. Interestingly, most of the DYM followers think that the government has very little help to give to their movement. They believe theirs is more than a religion and can't be contained by a registration. Other challenges faced by the sect, it was established include the passing on of Elijah Masinde *Wanameme*, the founder and undisputed leader, which dealt a major blow to the otherwise vibrant sect. It was established that, to date, the sect has no specific (overall) leader due to the effects of Elijah's teachings that rebuked those that appeared poised for "earthly leadership".

In addition, the study established that *Musambwa* membership and vibrancy was on a downward trend owing to modernization, evangelization by other NRMs and several other factors. The study established that due to the colonial set up rules that have remained unchanged in the DYM, the sect was no more attractive to women and youth.

8.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The study offered a glimpse of the *Babukusu* traditional political institutions with their interrelations to the people's social, culture and economic spheres, how they fostered the functioning and perpetuation of the people. The study noted the dynamism of the Bukusu traditional institutions which was reflected in its blending of new developments arising from both internal and external sources. Clearly, the study has demonstrated the rise of DYM as a manifestation of the foregoing Bukusu anti-colonial uprising. It was

pointed out how through the DYM the Babukusu and other Africans like the Pokot, Nandi, Batachoni etc. who practiced DYM articulated their grievances and challenged the colonial status quo. The DYM's association with the Bukusu Union (B.U), KCA, KAU, Bagishu Union and later the Mau Mau intensified the process of change in the political economy of the colony.

In light of the foregoing summary and far from the belief by diffusionism theorists that *nationalism* as an ideology had its roots in Europe, African Nationalism, as demonstrated in the rise of DYM, was fashioned by its own special conditions which in many important respects were different from Europe's. The rise and coming of DYM as force involved a people's history, a vision, a culture, a solidarity and a policy that responded to particular ideological, cultural, socio-economic and political aspirations and needs of the people for independence from colonialist forces.

The study has demonstrated that *Dini ya Musambwa* was consistent and focused to ensure the welfare of the people (Africans); a position that brought several partners who joined them to push for Kenya's independence and earned the movement a total ban that has dented its survival even in the independent Kenya. This vantage point in Kenya's nationalist historiography, the study recommends, should clearly lay the basis for understanding the input of the Abaluhya in general and the *Dini ya Musambwa* specifically towards the decolonization process in Kenya as a whole.

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