

CULTURAL PRACTICE OF THE MIDZICHENDA* AT CROSS ROADS: DIVINATION, HEALING, WITCHCRAFT AND THE STATUTORY LAW

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This paper discusses the conflicts between some cultural practices of the Midzichenda (i.e., divination, healing and witchcraft) and the Kenyan Law. For decades, diviners and healers have been misconceived and condemned wholesale as "witchdoctors", "wizards" or "witches". This misconception has seen many innocent diviners and healers mercilessly arrested, hurriedly arraigned in court, heavily fined and (or) eventually imprisoned, and their paraphernalia confiscated and finally destroyed by the state. The paper calls for proper understanding of the intricate belief in and practise of divination and healing vis-à-vis witchcraft and proposes ways which could help solve the conflicts

The Midzichenda are nine Bantu speaking communities with common histo-cultural traits. They comprise the Agiriama, Akauma, Achonyi, Adzihana, Akambe, Arihe, and Arahai; Aduruma and Adigo. They claim to have originated from Singwaya, an unknown place probably in the North of Tana River or around the Southern part of Somalia. Owing to consistent conflicts with the Oromo pastoralists, they trekked Southwards and established settlements called *makaya* (sing *kaya*) mostly located on fortified forest hill-tops or ridges behind the immediate interior of Mombasa around the sixteenth century (Spear 1978, Brantley 1978). Besides the residential function, the *makaya* were also the magico-religious, socio-political, economical and ceremonial nerve centres of the Midzichenda (Mutoro 1987, Abungu 1995). Each *kaya* was governed by a powerful group of elders who were either identified by kinship or age-sets. Leadership was achieved through initiation into an age-set (*rika*) and subsequent elevation into a ruling generation-set that provided the ruling council of elders called *kambi* or Ngambi (Spear 1978, Brantley 1978). The *kambi* had knowledge and control of all the activities of the Midzichenda including divination, healing and witchcraft.

Later, around the nineteenth century, the Midzichenda trickled out of the *makaya* and by the mid-twentieth century, only a few men remained. This dispersal had adverse effects on the absolute monopoly of the *kambi* over the community. The traditional authoritarian system started waning as people became more liberal; young men started acquiring wealth and traded with their neighbours like the Swahili, Taita, Pokomo, Oromo and Kamba; they could even

* Editors' note: Commonly the ethnonym is known as Mijikenda. Furthermore, the author has chosen the following spellings: Agiriama (Sw.: Wagiriama, also Giriama), Akauma (Sw. Wakauma, also Kauma), Achonyi (Wachonyi, Chonyi), Adzihana (Wajibana?, Jibana), Akambe (Wakambe, Kambe), Arihe (Waribe, Ribe), Arahai (Warabai, Rabai), Aduruma (Waduruma, Duruma), Adigo (Wadigo, Digo)

decide who to dispense justice for them. It was not, therefore, easy for the scattered powerless *Kambi* to control the socio-economic and political behaviour of the community.

Consequently, there developed among the Midzichenda community a laissez-faire situation whose effects were worrying to the conservative elders and unwelcome to the economically unproductive populace; this tendency gave birth to socio-economic-jealousy. As the jealousy permeated deeper into the social fabric, the practise of and belief in witchcraft became more common. As this situation worsened, the community sought protection and control through traditional mediums (i.e. divination and healing). Lastly, the *kaya* system was revisited - aggrieved parties sought for justice from the *kaya* elders who administered oaths as a form of identification of the wrongdoers and as justice to the complainants.

The escalation of the fear of and belief in witchcraft alarmed and prompted the colonial government to enact a law aimed at discrediting and removing witchcraft from the Midzichenda community. However, the colonial law ended up implicating diviners and healers as "witchdoctors" and therefore potential "wizards" and "witches" practising "witchcraft".

Over the years, this delicate issue has taken an extremely sad dimension. In most cases, the real culprits go scot-free while innocent diviners and healers end up in the gallows, their paraphernalia confiscated and then destroyed by the state. Frustrated and disparate for justice, many witchcraft victims or their relatives resort to administering their own justice by taking the law into their own hands: torturing alleged wizards or witches, burning their houses and even lynching suspect *atsai*. What, then, should be done in order to solve this conflict?

This paper analyses what the Midzichenda community perceive as divination, healing and witchcraft; how they control witchcraft and what the government policy is concerning this volatile issue. The paper proposes possible solutions that will harmonise the Midzichenda community and the Kenya government, and the country at large as regards witchcraft.

Divination, Healing and Witchcraft: Explanations

Sources of Illness

The Midzichenda believe in a supreme God, *Mulungu*, as the creator of Heaven and Earth, who lives in Heaven, *Mulunguni*. They also believe in the spirits of their departed ancestors, *k'oma*, as a medium of communication with God. The *k'oma* are not deities but the Midzichenda strive to appease them that misfortunes may not befall the relatives who are still living (Champion 1967). They make memorial shrines of grave posts known as *k'oma* or *misala ya k'oma* for the late uninitiated members of the community and *vigango* (sing. *kigango*), decorated memorial posts for the initiated senior male ancestors. Both the *misala ya k'oma* and *vigango* are collectively called *k'oma*. The Midzichenda quite often appease the *k'oma* by paying libation in front of the ancestral shrines. Usually, when paying libation the opening prayers start thus:

*K'oma tsi, Mulungu dzulu,
Enwi k'oma zosi za mashehe na masharifu,
funavoya vidzo navidze, vii vishuke na k'anda*

O you earthly spirits, (and) heavenly God,
All you great spirits of Sheikhs and Sheriffs,
We seek the good things, (and) let them come,
(and) the bad things be at bay...

In prayer, the Midzichenda equate the power of their ancestral spirits with those of Muslim Sheikhs and Sheriffs, and they frequently appease them in order to avoid their wrath against the community or against respective family members

Living closely with the *k'oma* are the demons, *p'ep'o* (pl. *map'ep'o*), which are thought to wander within the earth and often times enter into human beings causing illness and diseases. When this happens, the demons must be induced to depart by propitiation and exorcism. Evil spirits are believed to be a big contribution to man's suffering and misfortunes. They are thought to reside in big trees (e.g. figs and baobabs), caves, lakes, rivers and swamps; erosion scarps and abandoned structures like Mosques, pillars and wells (Abungu 1995)

Another source of illness that the Midzichenda fear most is witchcraft, *utsai*. This is the power of causing mental, spiritual and physical fear, suffering, injury and (or) destruction to a person or their property, including death, by the use of black magic or supernatural media like *jinnis* (*majini*). Witchcraft is usually employed by a witch (*mtsai, mwanga*), a wizard (*mtsai*) or through a second party who may not necessarily be a witch/wizard but acting under instructions from a *mtsai*. It must be clearly understood that owing to various socio-economic and political demands and requirements, people turn to diviners and healers for consultation and assistance. Under this category are problems like lost love where charms are sought and employed, medicine charms for academic excellence, charms for securing new jobs, promotions and wealth. Despite some side effects associated with such practises (e.g. it is believed that in order to prosper through the power of *jinnis*, one must sacrifice certain things like a beloved person), magic or medicine employed for such purposes is generally not considered by the Midzichenda as witchcraft practise; in fact, it is regarded as healthy so long as it does not harm anybody.

On the other hand, the Midzichenda consider diseases like malaria, small pox, chicken pox, measles, polio, tuberculosis, leprosy etc., as natural problems - *makongo ga Mulungu Mwenye*, illness from God Himself; they are thus normal. However, it is believed that these too can be induced through witchcraft, and so, unless the nature and source is identified first through divination, the ailment is assumed to be a result of or associated with witchcraft. More often than not, the identification falls on one of the three sources, at times two sources acting concurrently. Of the three major sources - ancestral spirits, demons and witchcraft, the former is not normally very unkind to man. Furthermore, they are thought to be highly appreciative of whatever sacrifice due to them. Lastly the lifespan of ancestral spirits is considerably short, in

fact, less than three decades (Champion 1967) This makes ancestral spirits more tame and friendly than anything else, demons and witchcraft included

Conversely, demons and witchcraft are arguably the predominant problem causing factors among many Midzichenda families, the latter commands an enormously wide berth. Even in these days when diseases like hypertension, diabetes, cancer and the dreadful Aids scourge are riding high on the chart, witchcraft still holds the reigns among the Midzichenda community.

Divination and Healing

Once a person falls sick, the patient, their immediate relative(s) or friend(s) consult a diviner (*mganga wa kitswa, mganga wa mburuga, mpiga ramli*), who, through the force of supernatural powers, diagnoses the problem and also identifies its source. If the problem is an ancestral spirit oriented one, the diviner may prescribe the sacrificial process to be conducted thereof. Likewise, should the problem have roots in demons (also called spirits), the diviner may give first aid, largely in form of herbal concoctions and if necessary, refer the patient for further treatment by a healer. Parkin (1970, 1972) refers to the diviner as a spirit medium: one who can only divine or diagnose, or recommend a doctor, but cannot effect cures himself. This is normally followed by a spirit propitiation or exorcism ceremony which is conducted by master diviners or healers through a vigorous ritual of song and dance.

This ritual could result into two significant developments: (1) complete restoration of the patients' health (2) recurrent bouts of the problem that would eventually force the victim to succumb to the powerful invasion of the spirits thereby finally becoming a diviner. All this depends on the population of the spirits and how well established they are in the victim. Fewer and amateuristic spirits can be easily exorcised and rid of than otherwise. Whichever the resultant development could be a big relief to the victim and the society in general.

Conversely, if the illness is witchcraft oriented, the diviner gives prescriptions and then refers the patient for further attention by a healer or medicine person (*mganga wa k'umbo, mganga wa kuhundula, mganga wa kuzikiha*). The healer is therefore one who restores the health of a patient through the use of herbs and related herbal concoctions and charms. The majority of healers are not diviners, similarly, many diviners are not healers.

Diviners learn the trade through a rigorous process of spirit possession, propitiation and exorcism; they undergo laborious stages of training until the final graduation, while healers learn the art through apprenticeship. At most, apprenticeship is done through kinship, although any interested persons are free to train.

The highest status that one can attain is to become a *mganga wa kuvoyera* or *mganga wa kuzuza*. Both are master diviner/healer, however, the former is one whose specific trade is to physically identify the wizard/witch responsible for a person's suffering or death. The latter is one who evokes divine powers to solve a mystery that is believed to bedevil an individual or a

family. The mystery may be linked to a malevolent object (*chombo*) thought to have been buried by a wizard/witch at the complainant's homestead as may have earlier been divined. The *mganga* hunts down the *chombo*, exhumes and destroys its potency by applying magic or desecrating on it. Ultimately, he buries a device, *finjo*, at the homestead as a protection against wizards and witches. It is believed that each Midzichenda group brought a *finjo*, a magic pot from Singwaya and buried it at the centre of each respective *kaya* as protection against enemies. Over time, master diviners/healers have designed their *mafingo* but, wizards and witches are thought to have gone high-tech; they sometimes destroy the *finjo* and continue bewitching people with impunity.

Normally, consultation fees are very negligible, in the rural areas for example, diviners currently charge less than Ksh 10/= for each appearance. On the contrary, healers' charges are usually high, sometimes running to hundreds or thousands of shillings depending on the nature of illness, the duration of treatment and reputation of the medicine person (Parkin 1970). This lucrative disparity between diviners and healers has recently caused a drastic change among the former: many diviners strive to become healers as well, so that they can diagnose, prescribe treatment as well as provide medical services to the patient, and thus, earn an extra shilling and enhance their social status.

Witchcraft control

When the sickness or symptoms of the illness persist, and more so, considering that the initial consultative missions to diviners will have identified the witch or wizard responsible, the victim's relatives seek to quench their curiosity and suspicions further by consulting a total of ten different famous diviners from far and wide. If all or the majority of the information gathered from the diviners tallies, that it agreeably pin-points a certain person as the villain, the issue is immediately reported to the local chief. At this stage the patient's relatives seek for permission from the District Officer or District Commissioner to organise a dance, *ngoma za kuvoyera*, conducted by a master diviner, *mganga wa kuvoyera*, to finally identify and name the villain in public. Having been named thus, the alleged witch or wizard will be obliged to cleanse the ailing person and restore his health on the spot, which, they often do, under the watchful eyes of the public, including the local chief.

More often than not, further action is taken against the *mtsai* especially if he denies any knowledge of witchcraft or involvement in bewitching the ailing person or worse still, if he denies having caused the death of an alleged person through witchcraft. With permission from the District or Provincial Commissioner, the aggrieved family seeks final justice from the *kaya* leadership, particularly if the victim finally died. Brantley (1979) mentions that

the Giriama had four secret societies, three of which placed medicines and oaths in the charge of designated *aganga* (medicine men, sing *muganga*) who developed the skill and power to administer them. The most significant of these was the oath of the *vaya*, a secret society whose membership was drawn from the *kambi*. The *vaya* was sometimes

allowed to make judicial decisions in secret when the full *kambi* could not decide. The *vaya* oath and the *aganga* of *vaya* were called *fisi* (hyena). The medicine, called *mbare*, was known to kill if not instantly, then rapidly. The *fisi* oath had at least two major purposes: it was used as an ordeal between the accuser and accused, and the final appeal for justice. Since this was the only oath and medicine combination which was expected to kill, the Giriama have always regarded it with extreme seriousness. Several other ordeals were available to the Giriama, primarily as a means of detecting witches. [.] These ordeals included the hot axes or rocks placed in the palm of the hand, hot needles passed through the upper lip, treated pawpaw which caused the face and mouth to swell, or treated bread which stuck in the throat of the guilty. Every ordeal was conducted publicly. The witch had to confess, or his lying would kill him. Having confessed, he was given a cleansing medicine which negated his witchcraft (Brantley 1979:115)

Thus, through their monopoly of the use of these ordeals the *Kaya* elders, or *Kambi*, kept witchcraft effectively under control.

After the abandonment of the *makaya*, the disintegration of the age-set system and the eventual dispersal of the Midzichenda, only a few elders resident on the periphery of the *kaya* occasionally return to the *kaya* mainly to perform important ritual ceremonies. Some of the ceremonies include rain prayers and dispensation of justice to conflicting parties. The latter involves the administration of oaths. As there no longer exist qualified elders to administer the dreadful *fisi* ordeal, the most effective ordeal for detecting witches/wizards, especially in *kaya* Giriama is the treated pawpaw.

Outside the *kaya* the hot axe is mostly administered by blacksmiths (see Kusimba 1993); significant examples of such administrators are at the late Kabwere Wanje's home at Msabaha near Malindi, where the ordeal is administered by a group of medicinemen (Brantley 1978) and Ngelekele the medicineman of Kokotoni near Mariakani. Another famous oath administrator is Mwasamani of Kinango (Kwale District), who uses pieces of treated pawpaw and bread.

If found guilty of causing the death of a person, the witch/wizard must pay *k'ore* compensation, to the victim's family. The *k'ore* includes all the costs incurred since the first divination consultation made by the family of the deceased person and the funeral costs as well.

While this would appear to be the end of the problem, it is not always the case. Some witches/wizards are believed to influence the detection ordeal by manipulating the oath administrators with hefty presents some days prior to the ritual function. Consequently the ordeal turns against the accuser while the accused comes out unscathed. Alternately, instead of compensating the aggrieved family, the witch/wizard decides to spread more fear by fatally bewitching yet another person from the same family. Both circumstances have proven to be good recipe for the merciless destruction of the villain's property, such as burning of their houses by the affected family in retaliation. Additionally, wizards and witches have lost their dear lives through lynching for such reasons. Unfortunately, the latter has since the 1970's become increasingly common place. Most often than not, suspected witches/wizards are brutally murdered without the benefit of any traditional or secular trial.

The Governments' Effort in Witchcraft control

Having sensed the worrisome trend caused by witchcraft, the colonial government set forth the Witchcraft Act, commencement: 12th November, 1925, revised 1981 (62) Sections of the Act states that:

2 Any person who holds himself out as a witchdoctor able to cause fear, annoyance or injury to another in mind, person or property, or who pretends to exercise any kind of supernatural power, witchcraft, sorcery or enchantment calculated to cause such fear, annoyance or injury, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to an imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years

3 Any person professing knowledge of so-called witchcraft or the use of charms, who advised any person applying to him how to bewitch or injure persons, animals or other property, or who supplies any person with any article purporting to be means of witchcraft, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years.

4 Any person who, of his pretended knowledge of so-called witchcraft, with intent to injure, uses or assists to use or causes to be put into operation such means or processes as may be calculated to cause fear, annoyance or injury in mind, person or property to any person shall be guilty of an offence and liable to the same punishment as is provided in section 3

According to the foregoing sections, the legislative Act was effectively meant to eradicate the primitive practice of witchcraft. In effecting this Act, people were arrested on the mere suspicion of being witchdoctors. Essentially, there was no clear distinction between a diviner, healer and witch or wizard. As long as one fitted the definition of the witchcraft Act irrespective of their specific affiliation, they met the wrath of the law. According to the law, diviners, healers and witches/wizards were potential witchdoctors practising witchcraft; they were thus arrested, hastily arraigned in court without proper legal representation, charged under the witchcraft Act and imprisoned. Their paraphernalia was confiscated and finally destroyed by the state.

There were also various witchcraft eradication movements that cropped up (see Brantley 1978), these were led by infamous personalities like Wanje Wa Mwadori (Isawe Konde) who was succeeded by his son Mulanda wa Wanje (Kabwere) and Tsuma Washe (Kajiwe). They hunted down witches and wizards, desecrated on their tradewares and handed them over to the administration for further action by the courts.

An analysis of ethnographic materials collected in 1995 by the author from the Kaloleni Law Court in the interior of Mombasa, which had been confiscated from "witchdoctors" show that out of 75 items, 21 were directly related to divination, 35 healing, 6 were either related to divination or witchcraft; 4 were for domestic use; 3 were unidentified while only 5 items or 6% of the objects were directly related to witchcraft.

Accordingly, the 6 items that fitted both divination and witchcraft were interestingly of domestic and religious significance. They were two clay bowls normally used as utensils but

could also serve as receptacles for making both malevolent or benevolent powder, a mirror that master diviners/healers use for identifying the source of an ailment (i.e. witch/wizard/spirit) but could also be used by a wizard to sermon the “image” of an intended victim; it could serve the same purpose if used by a master diviner/healer on request from a witch/wizard. In both cases, the result could be instant if not rapid death of the victim whose “image” is thus “summoned” and “cut”

The fourth item was a copy of the Holy Qur’an which, it is believed, is sometimes used by some Muslim diviners/healers in evoking Arab related spirits. Likewise, it is believed that some verses (i.e. Al-Badri) could also be applied punitively in retaliation against wrongdoers like thieves. The fifth object was a small Qur’anic booklet that is thought to serve similar functions as the Holy Qur’an

What emerges here is a scenario where diviners/healers are sometimes accused of applying double standards by using their skill and power against the same people they are supposed to assist or protect. Indeed, it is widely believed that before bewitching an intended person, the wizards/witches consult diviners first in order to find out how well protected the fellow is, and that the diviners even advise them how to defray the potency of any protective device that the would be victim might have. Nevertheless, the Midzichenda have never been known to hate diviners and healers the way they loathe wizards and witches

Thus, the majority of the victims of the witchcraft Act are diviners and healers who normally perform their work in public as opposed to witches/wizards who perform their miracles under the cover of darkness or in extreme secrecy. The witchcraft Act was therefore not explicit and it only helped to spread fear among innocent diviners and healers while the real culprits went untouched. This tendency was worsened by colonial Askaris who raided homes and arrested “witchdoctors”, especially when a suspected wizard/witch was lynched or if their property was destroyed. It is interesting to note that ever since the witchcraft Act was enacted, both the colonial and post colonial governments have failed to eradicate witchcraft. If anything, the community has become more aggressive than ever before: there is an alarming escalation of cases of witchcraft, more diviners and healers, and an ever-increasing rate of lynching cases against suspected atsai

Recent Development

Recently, there have been two significant developments:

- 1 Through government initiatives, diviners and healers are being licensed to operate as traditional herbalists under the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. However, certificates of local registration indicate that “registered persons are entitled to cultural activities for entertainment, income generation or whatever under the supervision of the District Cultural Officers”. Additionally one must get permission from the area chief or District Officer or else the certificate is invalid

2 An organisation, the National Association of Herbalists was formed basically to protect the rights and interest of Kenyan herbalists, including diviners. This association falls under the portfolio of the above mentioned ministry

Consequently, a few diviners and healers have been registered under this association as this is mandatory. However, the majority of diviners and healers are not even aware of its existence, and so, they register with the local certificate. The certificate is nonetheless, only helpful to local dancing troupes, concerts etc, intending to perform at given venues. Herbal practitioners and diviners are not entertainers and thus, cannot be protected by the local certificates. The weakness of the certificates of registration can (and are often times) be exploited to frustrate innocent healers and diviners.

In both cases, healers and diviners are plagued by the fear of the witchcraft Act as they are frequently harassed by Law enforcement officers. At most, they are compelled to pay their way out or else face the wrath of the Law. Despite the several efforts to protect the traditional herbal practitioners and diviners, difficulties still linger as there is no comprehensive legislative policy that protects the rights and interests of diviners, healers/herbalists.

The Way Forward

The problems of witchcraft could be resolved successfully by adopting two methods: a conservative approach, and a liberal or modern approach.

The Conservative Approach

In recent years, there has been immense interest in the conservation of the biodiversity. The National Museums of Kenya which is the custodian of Kenya's Heritage, established the Coast Forest Conservation Unit (C.F.C.U), specifically charged with the protection of the ethno-biodiversity of the ancient Midzichenda settlements, the *makaya*. This development rekindled what many a Midzichenda people had been nursing, namely: the revival of their traditional practices in the *makaya*. Already, the Agiriamu, Akauma, Arahai, Aduruma and Adigo had shown considerable interest of reviving their ancient settlements by occasionally conducting ritual activities there. To date, the conservation unit is working closely with the respective *kaya* elders in order to meet the goals and objectives envisaged by both parties. However, in order to achieve the objectives, there is pertinent need for the recognition, understanding, appreciation of and respect for the fundamental rights and cultural values of the Midzichenda. This could be achieved through thorough anthropological research on each Midzichenda group. Of particular significance should be the ethnographic significance of each *kaya*.

Similarly, each Midzichenda group should be left to appoint elders who should be the traditional custodians of their respective *kaya*. Finally the *kaya* elders should be vested with semi-autonomous power to adjudicate matters paramount to their traditional social behaviour,

this should include the power to dispense justice to aggrieved persons without interference from the local administration.

The government should also establish comprehensive legislative policies to protect the rights, freedoms and interests of diviners and healers or traditional herbal practitioners. Such policies should harmonise contemporary medicine with traditional medicine practice by formulating and implementing workable structures that can enable a symbiotic relationship among modern medical practitioners and traditional herbalists. Such policies would empower contemporary or secular medical experts and traditional practitioners in conducting research together and using their findings in hospitals in order to develop a sustainable healthy nation.

Moreover, the existing witchcraft Act should be scrapped and replaced by one that clearly defines a diviner, healer, witch/wizard; and protects diviners and healers from undue accusations and harassment. This would eliminate the concept that collectively groups together all these people as "witchdoctors" practising "witchcraft".

Finally, the new witchcraft Act should incorporate the contemporary law with the cultural law: once a wizard or witch is found guilty of causing the death of a person through witchcraft and thus traditionally obliged to pay the compensation, *k'ore*, the villain should also be charged with the murder of the said person(s) in a court of law. This move will greatly enhance the chances of effectively controlling witchcraft if not eradicating it.

The Liberal or Modern Approach

This approach is three faceted, based on common fundamental issues that have for decades overwhelmed coastal communities, the Midzichenda included. These pertinent issues are that:

1. Academically they have not progressed yet. This is due mainly to poor quality of education at primary and secondary school level caused by underdeveloped educational infrastructure - most schools in the countryside are dilapidated, with inadequate teaching facilities. Worse still, teachers are either untrained or poorly remunerated. For a large province covering 83,040 km² of land with an estimated population of 2.2 million people, there is only one teachers' training college offering certificate courses to primary school teachers. As a state institution, the college serves candidates from all over the country. There is only one diploma polytechnic college and not even a single university. Owing to the foregoing, learning for the very successful students is a nightmare as finding institutions of higher learning far away from one's own district or province is normally financially constraining. Those who finally attain tertiary academic and professional excellence are considerably negligible compared to the illiterates and semi-illiterates.

2. The standard of economic development among the Midzichenda is still very negligible despite the rich diverse natural resources like land, forests and water bodies. The resources have not been fully exploited to the benefit of the coastal communities. Likewise, there is a

very large economic disparity between the few economically prosperous and the majority who live below the poverty line. This situation has been exasperated by the non-implementation and inadequate or poor implementation of development policies. The Midzichenda and indeed coastal communities in general, are thus economically less productive. This large economic injustice is therefore good fodder for jealousy that is undeniably the nerve centre of witchcraft.

3. The Midzichenda are mostly Traditionalists, Muslims or Christians. Of the three religious affiliations, Islam and Christianity have an upper hand over the community. Nevertheless, these contemporary religions have not yet met the needs and aspirations of the Midzichenda. Initially, Muslim leaders impressed upon their new converts to attend Madrassa (Islamic Schools) as the surest way of achieving spiritual literacy and complete submission. Sadly enough, other important issues like secular education, modern methods of farming and commerce etc, were not addressed explicitly. That situation has persisted until fairly recently. It is not uncommon to find such a situation still prevalent among the Muslim Midzichenda, what with the expensive education in Kenyan academic institutions!

On the other hand, Christian missionaries and the colonial government considered traditional African beliefs and practices as barbaric and primitive; and Christianity as the only way forward. The earliest missionary stations were therefore established in the proximity of the *makaya* (e.g. St Paul's Church built by Ludwig Krapf and Rebmann at Rahai in the interior of Mombasa and the missionary church at Jilore in the interior of Malindi) ostensibly to educate and promote Christianity among the primitive tribespeople. Owing to this approach which collectively regarded everything African as primitive or savage, devilish and unchristian, Christianity was heavily rejected. It is only in recent years that Christianity has started gaining its lost glory. Thus it is unsurprising that many a Muslim and Christian Midzichenda consult diviners and healers at the slightest suspicion of evil motives directed to them by either malevolent spirits or witches and wizards.

The foregoing discussion is a clear manifestation that government, Islam and Christianity have not yet produced among the Midzichenda community what they should really produce - a literate, economically progressive and a spiritually stable society. The result is an extreme socio-economic backlash. This situation does not auger well for the Midzichenda and indeed, for the progress of modern Kenya.

Conclusion

The Midzichenda have had a long history of belief in and fear of witchcraft. Both the British colonial and post colonial governments have attempted to resolve this practice through the enactment of the witchcraft Act. Unfortunately, this Act was not definitive - it turned out to be oppressive and thus, unsuccessful. Several alternatives like traditional witchcraft control movements were sought and applied but these too were unfruitful. As a result the complications multiplied. Through government policies, bodies like the Ministry of Culture and

Social Services have been licensing and monitoring cultural activities like those practised by traditional herbalists. Owing to the poor ministerial policy as regards the rights and freedom of traditional herbalists, an organisation, the National Association of herbalists was formed to protect the rights and interests of Kenyan herbalists, including diviners. This association has been largely successful even though members are sometimes harassed by law enforcers due mainly to the prevalence of the archaic witchcraft Act.

Despite all the efforts of trying to eradicate witchcraft and protect traditional herbalists, multiple problems still abound, the community has therefore become very aggressive to suspected witches/wizards.

The paper has examined the root causes of witchcraft and proposed methods that could successfully help resolve the prevailing problems, that unless the witchcraft Act is scrapped and replaced by a definitive law incorporating the Midzichenda customary Law and the enactment of a comprehensive legislative policy to protect the rights, freedom and interest of traditional diviners and healers; and that until the high rate of illiteracy, economic under-development and religious malnourishment are seriously addressed, the Midzichenda community will ever live under the fear of witchcraft.

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