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TRANSFORMATION OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE  
IN THE KENYAN COASTAL REGION:  
TRADITIONAL HEALING, WITCHCRAFT AND WITCH HUNTS  
IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT\*

INTRODUCTION: FROM THE KAYAS

The coastal region of Kenya is inhabited by various peoples, descending from different tribes and cultures, both indigenous and those originating in foreign lands. They include those with Swahili roots, white Kenyans, Hindus that trace their lineage to the Indian subcontinent, those of Arabian descent, the Mijikenda, and the many mixtures among them. This paper focuses on the Mijikenda, a Bantu speaking proto-group, in order to scrutinize the transformation of their mostly intangible cultural heritage.

First appearing, according to varying oral histories, in the Taita Hills near Kilimanjaro,<sup>1</sup> the Mijikende came to what is now the Kenyan coastal region from Shungwaya (Singwaya), a mythical province between the Tana and Juba rivers in Somalia's southern hinterland. Lacking the written word, some traditions mark the date of this second migration of the peoples known to

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\* This article was created within the TPAAE project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 872718. It is the research output that is a part of an international project co-financed by the programme of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education entitled "PMW" in 2020-2023; contract No. 5109/H2020/2020/2.

<sup>1</sup> George W. B. HUNTINGFORD, "The Peopling of the Interior of East Africa by its Modern Inhabitants," in *History of East Africa*, vol. 1, ed. Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 58–89.

outsiders as “Kashur” at the turn of 17th century.<sup>2</sup> Called “Nyika”, a pejorative meaning “bush people”, they settled in *kayas*—villages in the bush that provide important significance for each tribe’s cultural identity.<sup>3</sup> Created in 1940s, the name Mijikenda signifies “nine tribes”—“The Nine Kayas or Makayachenda”.<sup>4</sup> They include: Chonyi, Digo, Duruma, Giriama, Jibana Kambe, Kauma, Rabai, and Ribe.

The myths about why and how the Mijikenda left Shungwaya are retold by tribal elders. They regularly gather at the Malindi Cultural District Association (MCDA), a community center that takes as its aim maintaining Mijikenda cultural heritage. Rather than creating open-air museums for the preservation of untouchable traditions, MCDA members prefer spreading the old knowledge within contemporary society, using the best of the past and adapting it to present-day life and challenges.

The Mijikenda were hunters and farmers that lived as slaves in Shungwaya, where tribute exacted by the native Galla people extended from the dinner table to the marital bed. The Galla were provided maize harvested by Mijikenda and Galla men forcing the *jus primae noctis* with newly married Mijikenda wives. The war that broke out after a Mijikenda man disobeyed his Galla master and denied him that right began the gradual dispersion.<sup>5</sup> Mijikenda people took to the sea as fishermen when they finally reached the coast.

As befits the fastest growing economy in Africa, Kenyans are breaking from their largely agrarian past and taking up residence in cities. Figures from the World Bank show that some people lived in rural areas, while in 2017 the figure was 73%, down from 93% in the years preceding the ebbing of colonial rule.<sup>6</sup> Along with the capital, Nairobi (3,375,000), population centers can be found in the west, where is the city of Kisumu (1,118,000) on the shores of Lake Victoria. And in the east, where Mombasa (1,200,000) lies on the Indian Ocean coast that is the home of Mijikenda and Swahili people. Urbanization and economic development are transforming everyday

<sup>2</sup> Wanguhu NG’ANG’A, *Kenya’s Ethnic Communities. Foundations of the Nation* (Nairobi: Gathundu Publishing, 2006), 288.

<sup>3</sup> Celia NYAMWERU, Staline KIBET, Mohamed PAKIA, and John A. COOKE, “The Kaya Forests of Coastal Kenya,” in *African Sacred Groves. Ecological Dynamics & Social Change*, ed. Michael J. Sheridan and Celia Nyamweru (Athens, OH–Pretoria: Ohio University Press, Unisa Press, 2008.).

<sup>4</sup> J. A. MWANGUDZA, *Mijikenda. Kenya’s People* (London: Evans Brothers, 1983), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas T. SPEAR, *Traditions of Origin and Their Interpretation. The Mijikenda of Kenya* (Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1982), xi.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank data from 2018.

life, with technology and an increased presence of political and cultural institutions altering traditions, opinions and worldviews through new modes of communication. Both positive and negative, the unambiguous nature of the changes make plain the failings of modernist ideals of technological progress and assumptions about development being good for its own sake, I am far from condemning these changes in the name of maintaining an invariable tradition. This problem refers to the debate on authenticity, where the tendency in the Global North to equate preservation with maintaining cultural heritage is unchanged.<sup>7</sup> However, if a lived cultural heritage of a community is being transformed—and the community has a right to such transformations—there is no reason why what they produce and perform should be considered something other than original and authentic.

The *real* Mijikenda culture, too, should not be approached only through the past, but with the knowledge of the past, adjusted to the present day. Thinking otherwise marks European presuppositions that the West is progressive, while indigenous non-European cultures like African or Aboriginal are not, so that to describe them as authentic they must be unchanged. This mapping is unnecessary, restrictive, and oppressive. The Mijikenda people should not be forced to prove ethnographic authenticity. Rather, they should participate in cultural and economic growth of their country, reconfiguring their common future.<sup>8</sup> It should be recognized then that transformation of cultural practices is a “natural phenomenon”.

These transformations, together with the use of language and tools with which they are connected, are essential for emergence and development of human societies. Their transformations occur due to changes in historical, social, and economic conditions. It is important to understand them and see their impact, either positive, negative, or neutral, to be able to monitor them.

Therefore, we must find the middle way between radical assumptions that either progress is good as such or inherently bad. The effects of transformations may be confusing sometimes, but the approach is the researcher’s and without the claim of full objectivity. That is because each researcher is from a cultural and educational background that affects the process of re-

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<sup>7</sup> I followed this discussion in reference to the authenticity of contemporary culture and art of Aboriginal people in Australia, and it is retold in my paper “Contemporary Aboriginal Art from Australia’s Desert: Context, Debates, and Analysis,” *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 6, no. 4 (2019): 345–66, <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha/v6i4>.

<sup>8</sup> Similar arguments are taken up by Barbara Glowaczewski for Aboriginal people in Australia in her “Dynamic Cosmologies and Aboriginal Heritage,” *Anthropology Today* 15, no. 1 (February 1999): 3–9.

search and interpretation. Therefore, it is advisable to make such considerations the visible point of departure for a research exercise.

My point of departure is immersion in Mijikenda culture, which I experienced due to the participation in the international research project TPAAE (Transcultural Perspective in Art and Art Education).<sup>9</sup> As a central-European theorist in culture and art, I possess an inherently transcultural perspective, searching for interrelations between cultures, and not just stating multiculturalism, which no longer is theoretically fruitful.<sup>10</sup> My methodology included field research in more or less traditional villages, making friends with locals, discussing with elders in settlements and in official foundations and associations (such as MCDA and CICC).

Of course, I could not get to know everything in four months on the Kenyan coast. Yet I managed to explore some of the customs, beliefs, and practices, that are in place. Here, I would like to focus most on the practices related with traditional healing, witchcraft, and witch hunts.

## 1. TRADITIONAL HEALING AND WITCHCRAFT

It is important, though not obvious for outsiders, that activities termed as witchcraft in Mijekende cultures can be seen as a very diverse category. The simplification of the use of one term obscures the picture of the phenomena and implies the general and negative view on witches taken from Western and Christian culture. In the last decades, the general use of the term is critically analyzed and interpreted as one of the reasons for creating a negative image of a witch. In the social imagination of the West, witches are presented as toothless old women with messy grey hair, a cold, piercing gaze, and strange animals in and around their houses. They mix potions and cast spells, making trouble for their enemies, causing illness or death. They can bring famine, drought, and flood. Their creation in popular consciousness was strongly influenced by image such as Albrecht Durer's "The Four Witches" (1497, engraving), Hans Baldung Grien's "The Weather Witches" (1523, canvas), "The

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<sup>9</sup> TPAAE is funded by the European Union Research Executive Agency, representing the European Commission within the framework of Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions—Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (2020–2024) on the basis of the Grant Agreement No. 872718.

<sup>10</sup> The importance of trespassing the simple recognition of the mutual coexistence towards intercultural dialogue and communication is stressed by for example in Nasar MEER and Tariq MODOOD, "How Does Interculturalism Contrast with Multiculturalism," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 33, no. 2 (2011).

Witches” (1510, chiaroscuro woodcut) and others or later, in 17th century, by Salvator Rosa’s “Witches at Their Incantations” (1646, canvas).<sup>11</sup>

In Europe the search for witches took place mostly in the 15th–17th centuries, during the Renaissance, when first universities were formed, and professionalization of medicine started. The education of doctors, who were Christian men required, taking over control of human life, health, and death, from traditional pagan practices. The development of medicine at universities went hand in hand with the devaluing of natural medicine practiced mostly by women.<sup>12</sup> The effect of this situation was that there was little tradition left on healing practices in Europe. Nevertheless, this knowledge is regaining popularity. It is visible in social groups that take as their aim going back to their cultural roots, gathering in squads, circles, and teams; practicing Slavic gymnastics for women and supporting themselves in herbalism.<sup>13</sup>

The contemporary situation on the Kenyan coast is different, though there are also: the disregard to natural, traditional knowledge; economic issues and the struggle for power.<sup>14</sup> Similar situations can be observed in other African countries, with some variations. However, there also appears an interest in one’s own traditions, for example, causing that the image of a traditional healer is losing its negative connotations in the Republic of South Africa. It is reflected in the TV series *Ubizo: The Calling*, directed by Krijay Governdo in 2007 and shown by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), that featured a biochemist who is suddenly called to become a *sangoma* (diviner). The series differentiates between a witch practicing to harm or kill and traditional healing, or *ubungoma*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Broader research on the creation of image of a witch in West is presented in the Master’s Degree Thesis by Katarzyna TSYNKIEL, “A well-established of witches in medieval, modern and contemporary European art” (Szczecin: Academy of Art in Szczecin, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Barbara EHRENREICH and Deirdre ENGLISH, *Witches, Midwives, & Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Aleksandra LUKASZEWICZ, Priscilla GITONGA, and Kiryl SHYLINHOUSKI, “Transcultural Identity of Twerking. A Cultural Evolution Study of the Women’s Bodily Practices of the Slavic and East African Communities,” *Social Epistemology Journal* (in print).

<sup>14</sup> This characteristic appears also on another continent, that is in North America, as in the famous case of processes of the Witches from Salem. Professionalism of medicine in Europe has got its strong economic dimension and there is the power in play. See, e.g., Laura JEFFERSON, Karen BLOOR, and Alan MAYNARD, “Women in Medicine: Historical Perspectives and Recent Trends,” *British Medical Bulletin* 114, no. 1 (June 2015): 5–15, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bmb/ldv007>.

<sup>15</sup> Noluvuyo MJOLI, “Negotiating the Representation of Ubizo (Divine Calling) in the South African Television Series *Ubizo: The Calling*,” in *Visuality from Intercultural Perspectives: Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art and Social Science*, ed. Michael Fleming and Aleksandra Lukaszewicz Alcaraz (Szczecin–London: PUNO Press, 2018): 168–84.

In Mijikenda groups, as for example in the Girima tribe, there are many medicine men, *aganga* or *mganga*, who also do not practice witchcraft, *utsai*. They are either diviners (seers), superdiviners (sensitives), or they “make charms for protecting life and property, attracting the opposite sex, healing the sick and a hundred other functions, which are harmless and perhaps even beneficial”.<sup>16</sup> These activities continue today, though the impact of colonialism on the Kenyan healthcare system discriminates against such skills. Political and religious forces combined to impose an outright ban on local medicines and practitioners, who came to be labeled as witches. “This reflected the general view of Africa as the ‘Dark Continent’ and Africans as primitive, backwards, and inherently evil, worthy of the combined efforts of Christianity and the British colonizers to sanitize and civilize.”<sup>17</sup> Similar bans in other African countries caused the “depression in African spirituality”, according to South African artist and researcher Noluvuyo Mjoli.<sup>18</sup>

In Kenya, the ban on practicing traditional knowledge was never fully effective. Rather, it moved such applications from public view to clandestine operations, making more difficult to pass the knowledge from elders to younger generations. After gaining independence in 1963, the new government opposed even harder the healing practices than its colonial predecessor, dividing Western medicine and traditional healing arts according to 1910 ordinance on Medical Practitioners and Dentists. President Jomo Kenyatta condemned traditional healers describing them in 1968 as “lazy cheats who want to live off the sweat of others”. The situation began to change in 1978, when the World Health Organization’s Alma-Ata Declaration recognized the role of traditional healing practices in healthcare. In 2005, a National Policy on Traditional Medicine and Medical Plants stressed the importance of promoting nurseries and herb gardens. The country’s 2010 Constitution established a traditional healers’ council, while its Article 11 recognized the contribution of indigenous technologies to national development.

Today, it is common to see hand-painted adverts in Swahili for the services of *mganga* on Kenyan roadsides. Written in Swahili, these offers may

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur M. CHAMPION, *The Agiryama of Kenya* (London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain & Ireland, 1967), 38.

<sup>17</sup> Steven OWINO, “Parks (city parks, public beaches), streets/roads (with names, without names), squares (town centers, open fields). Analysis of photographs contained in Visual Document Analysis Cards according to H. D. Lasswell: 2/1-1 – 2/1-20.” In *Technologies of Imaging in Urban Communication: Report 2 from Kenya (Kilifi)*, ed. Elżbieta Perzycka and Aleksandra Lukaszewicz Alcaraz (Szczecin: Academy of Art in Szczecin, 2019), 52, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4036096>.

<sup>18</sup> MJOLI, “Negotiating the Representation,” 169.

include divination, prophecies, the treatment of diseases such as asthma or epilepsy, help with love complications, resolution of court cases, and the warding off of witches, spirits, spells, and misfortunes.<sup>19</sup>

The contemporary places to meet *mganga* are either *mzinu*, that is, caves or sites at chosen baobabs, or in their huts. Though people are abandoning traditional beliefs, they still consult the spirit world at a *mzinu* in important cases. Going to a *mzinu*, one must take some rose water—white for good wishes and red for bad wishes—some incense and little money. If a request is answered, the beneficiary must deliver a live hen, a kilogram of rice and more money lest bad luck should befall him or her and on the family or the village. These practices are very popular, though their social acceptance depends on which tribe from Mijikenda group one focuses, because tribes that have adopted Christianity are tougher in relation to them—as Giriama, then the ones that adopted Islam—as Digo, not making much deal about traditional healing and belief in ancestors. Abandoning slowly traditional beliefs, but still praying in important cases, people often break the promise and when something unfortunate happens to them or their close ones, they blame the “witch” for that. This results in abandoning the practice by some, fearing of negative behavior of compatriots, and leaving abandoned *mzinu* even inside villages.

## 2. WITCH HUNTS AND LYNCHING

Introduced by the colonial administration, the term witchdoctor created confusion in popular attitudes to traditional practices. It did so by blurring the line between the *mganga* healer and a *mutsai*; that is, a person using witchcraft to bring evil.<sup>20</sup> This confusion discredited traditional healers and

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<sup>19</sup> Jarosław LUBIAK, “Parks (City Parks, Public Beaches) Streets/Roads (with Names, without Names), Squares (Town Centres, Open Fields). Analysis of Photographs Contained in Visual Document Analysis Cards According to H. D. Lasswell: 2/1-1 – 2/1-4, 2/1-8 – 2/1-10, 2/1-14 – 2/1-20 Documenting the Visual Communication Held in Streets.” In *Technologies of Imaging in Urban Communication*, 120.

<sup>20</sup> “Due to the overlapping of the colonial government to control *utsai*, the British consequently labeled all traditional healers ‘witchdoctors’ in an attempt to discredit their skills. Since ‘witchdoctors’ or *waganga* are actually the people who *fight utsai*, the system of belief continued, only now in a state of utter malfunction and chaos”—Micah HAHN, *Kiraho vs. Gavel. The Role of the State in Utsai Accusations*. Research project at School for International Training, Kenya – Development, Health and Society, Academic Advisors: Peter and Charlotte Blessing, 2005, 10.

made the elderly easy targets for accusations of witchcraft. As opposed to the public practices of *mganga*, witchcraft is practiced in secret, usually in the bush. For this, a witch “is recognized by everyone as an enemy of the community”<sup>21</sup> and “the administration of ... secret spells is punishable before the *kambi*”—a Giriama council of elders.<sup>22</sup> Also, the Witchcraft Act (Laws of Kenya, Chapter 67) prohibits the use of witchcraft and aiding bewitching. It requires citizens to inform the authorities when they suspect someone of being a witch. The law opened the door for easy accusations of witchcraft,<sup>23</sup> so that by 2013, 80% of people in Kenyan jails were there in relation to the practices of witchcraft, both for unjust accusations and for participating in lynching.<sup>24</sup>

Violence is the most drastic way of discrediting and discriminating against traditional healers, guardians of sacred places and diviners. This violence often occurs for economic reasons, and the ones who attack elders are often their kin. The targeted are those caring for a piece of land that can be sold, no matter how sacred it is to the community. Sometimes this is *kaya*, the sacred forest of Mijikenda,<sup>25</sup> which young generation do not always esteem or respect. To get rid of the obstacle, they sometimes take the easy route of accusation of witchcraft but not in a formal or traditional jurisdictional setting. Instead, they gather with peers and commit murder.

With the support of community organizations and the Malindi District Cultural Association (MDCA) Mangi Mitsanze in 2008 established Kaya Godoma in Mrima wa Ndege to safeguard the elderly. During its first ten years, the organizations saved lives of about 100 people, while there are currently eleven elders—ten men and one woman. At the center, elders find

<sup>21</sup> CHAMPION, *The Agiryama of Kenya*, 38.

<sup>22</sup> CHAMPION, 37.

<sup>23</sup> The Witchcraft Act, Chapter 67, Laws of Kenya; Article 3 states: “Any person professing a knowledge of so-called witchcraft or the use of charms, who advises any person applying to him how to bewitch or injure persons, animals or property, or who supplies any person with any article purporting to be a means of witchcraft, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years.”

In Chapter 67 of the Laws of Kenya, Article 6 says: “Any person who accuses or threatens to accuse any person with being a witch or with practicing witchcraft shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding Sh500,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years: Provided that this section shall not apply to any person who makes an accusation to a DC, police officer, a chief or any other person in authority.”

<sup>24</sup> *Kiuye Uye. The Magic Come Back*, directed by Simone Grassi. MDCA in collaboration with Pwani University, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> NYAMWERU et al., “The Kaya Forests.”



peace and often reconciliation with their families. The center is supported by goat rearing and donations, including from researchers who can get to know the history and situation of the place and must contribute for sharing stories. Apart from everyday work, elders from Kaya Godoma organize annual peace talks in the Coast region introducing culture topics in them, what is of great importance, because still the elders are being killed. In Ganze in 2019 there was a list of ninety-nine elders who were to be killed and representatives of Kaya Godoma supported by Malindi District Cultural Association are trying to reverse this trend scheduling several peace forums in Palakumi in Ganze.

The murder of supposed witches is so common nowadays because the tradition is not popularly respected, which may sound surprising to Westerners, because they usually connect tradition with discriminative practices and the witch-chasing is perceived through European history, leading nearly always to the death of the accused.<sup>26</sup> In Kenyan context, the situation is very different, because it is the abandonment of traditional witch-chasing that leads to the death of the accused.

In tribal tradition, witch hunts follow standardized processes composed of several steps. First, a suspect is accused before the *kambi* of practicing witchcraft. Then, the *kambi* decides to ask a diviner—someone with intuitive sensitivities and insights—for help in determining whether there is a witch in the village. If the answer is positive, a superdiviner that enters a trance before entering the village is summoned. They enter the village from outside, passing through each household. Upon sensing negative energy in a household, the superdiviner stops there and the inhabitants are asked to gather. The person indicated as a witch is taken to the following stage of the procedure, to a trial.

Two kinds of trials are used to determine whether the accused is a witch. The first is practiced with a superheated axe blade which is passed through the palm of the accused several times. If the skin comes off instantly, this proves the person is a witch. The second features a special kind of hard sugar cane, which must be chewed by the accused and the accuser. Either the witch or their accuser will soon have bloody, swollen tongue. Although these practices bringing suffering, they are not aimed at killing. This is different than in European and colonial witch trials of watering or passing on the top of pillories. In these instances, only death was proving the innocence

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<sup>26</sup> Aron Iakovlevich GUREVICH, *Problemy genizisa feodalizma v zapadnoi Evrope* [Problems of the Genesis of Feudalism in Western Europe] (Moscow, 1970), 224.

of the accused and with it the redemption of a Christian burial. That is because it was believed that if the person survived the trial, it was due to the devil's help and death thus was deserved. In Mijikenda groups, a person proved a witch does not deserve instant death. His or her head is shaved and painted, and he or she must take an oath, promising to cease the practice of witchcraft once and for all. Failure ensures that the death will come for them.

The major aim of the witch hunt and the following trial is not punishment, but reconciliation of the community, as it is also in other the sentences issued by traditional courts, like by Joseph Mwarandu, MDCA member and lawyer in both law and tribal courts. Mwarandu defends witchcraft cases in traditional court, where sentences are respected also by criminal courts and laws.<sup>27</sup> Decisions taken in traditional courts comprised of councils of elders enjoy official sanction. This is the case of elders in Kaloleni region, too, who meet on each Monday under a tree in Rabai, and commonly hear cases of adultery and theft. Like with witchcraft, punishment is not the goal. Rather, it is the satisfaction of the abused, who should receive the symbolic repayment. Only in severe cases or when no compromise is possible is the case referred to the civil legal system.

### 3. LIVING UNDER A SPELL

Influenced as much by various religions as by the pursuit of economic livelihood, the complex system of Mijikenda beliefs can be illustrated with two examples regarding spells put on people.

The first is the case of a man who wanders along the road from Kilifi Town to the Giriama villages of Seahorse and Fumbini. Dirty, in shaggy cloths, his hair glued with dust and sweat, and with empty eyes, he walks slowly there and back, not speaking a word and not greeting anyone. This is striking, because in Kenya, everyone greets everyone, even if they don't know each other, raising a hand and saying *Jambo* 'Hello'. After weeks of seeing him, I eventually asked a driver about his history, which he willingly told me. This man, called Azizi, was once very handsome and attractive, and he was dating a lady from a fellow Mijikenda tribe (Digo) south of Mombasa. The lady got pregnant and wanted to Azizi to marry her, but he opposed.

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<sup>27</sup> *Kiuye Uye. The Magic Come Back*, directed by Simone Grassi (MDCA in collaboration with Pwani University, 2014).

Azizi did not want that kind of obligation, he wanted to go on with his single life, dating here and there with various women. The lady insisted and even came with her family to Azizi's family to plead for marriage. Azizi's family was agreeable, but he was stubborn and rejected the proposal. Then woman's father went to a witch and paid to put the spell on Azizi so that he would lose his senses. This was possible because the Digo people are Muslim, and Islam is much more tolerant to witches, healers, diviners and ghosts than are the Christian Giriama. Eventually, Azizi lost his senses; he does not know how to speak, how to work, to behave, to eat, and he does not remember anything. He cannot eat with others, because he does not wash, not even his hands, and eating in Kenyan society is a communal activity, usually with food taken by hand from a serving dishes. Aziz's family wanted the lady's father to remove the spell because only the person who put the spell on, can take it off. However, only Azizi knew the location of the woman's village and he cannot remember anything nor even communicate. I asked the driver what then can save him, and he told me only the Christian god. It is so, because as I noticed in various cases that the Christian faith is usually taken and practiced to secure the one against ghosts and spells, which are considered to be real and effective.

The effectiveness of the spell put on Azizi can be understood at least in the terms of symbolism. If a spell has been cast, it has to be proved effective, even by the one hexed, who internalizes it and manifests its effects in life. Above all, this story connects traditional Mijikenda beliefs, with Islam and Christianity on a psychological level.

The other case is of a man chained to a log for decades in a village in the bush between Malindi and Bungale in Magarini sub-county. This is the place where Mekatilili wa Menza, leader of the Giriama uprising of 1913–1914, is laid to rest. My source for this story is Emmanuel Munyaya, the MDCA chairman. He says the man to be found in such a poor condition is a son the village diviner. As a boy, he was showing off uncommon divining abilities. People were coming to him when he was still in the fifth grade of the primary school and to ask for advice due to his deep and sharp visions. They offered him chicken parts usually reserved only for the village elders and this made his father jealous. Because he could not stop people from asking his son for advice, he put a spell on his son so that he lost his senses and started to behave absurdly and aggressively, causing threat to the village. The elders decided then to chain him to the log in the middle of the village to prevent him harming anyone or himself. After some years, the father died and there

was no possibility to remove the spell. So the man stayed for many years being fed as an animal; as a dog in a kennel. A few years ago, Munyaya, as the representative of MDCA, and Digo tribesman Dr. Tsawe-Munga Chidongo, a professor at the Pwani University working in religious politics and interreligious dialogue and active in the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC), tried to restore the man's senses, because simply freeing him would not be the best solution. (He might escape into the bush and never return.) At first, they tried traditional healing practices and without much effect. They then looked to the Western psychiatric practices for treating schizophrenia. When I spoke to Munyaya, treatment had yet to begin. Meanwhile, the private nature of traditional healing makes it difficult to find the information on the effects of the second treatment. Towards the decision to accompany traditional practices with Western ones brought the Italian director Simone Grassi who cooperated with the Pwani University to produce the unreleased yet film *Kiuye Uye. The Magic Come Back* in 2014. The recorded visual material contains the story of the poor enchanted and/or insane man, whose treatment combines traditional and Western practices, administered by non-governmental organizations and with artistic and academic engagement, all in pursuit of a common goal.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Transformation of tradition and its perception in the eyes of the ones pertaining the community in question, is of course a much broader issue than I could lay out in such a small paper, and it needs further scrutiny, leaving aside superstitions and basic assumptions, which are obvious when referring to Western history. However, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. First, traditions and the cultural practices springing from them are not permanent—they evolve over time, due to historical, social, religious, and economic conditions. As such, this intangible heritage is a hybrid resulting from various influences. Secondly, it is neither good nor desirable to reject the whole tradition at once, because it is never fully possible. The beliefs rooted in communities work from beneath, and the first things usually rejected are not beliefs themselves, but the practices accompanying them, which sometimes bring less harm to individuals and communities than their rejection. The best options link layers and processes, from the history to the contemporary, accompanied with the consciousness of one's heritage and tradition.

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TRANSFORMATION OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE  
IN THE KENYAN COASTAL REGION:  
TRADITIONAL HEALING, WITCHCRAFT AND WITCH HUNTS  
IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Summary

The intangible heritage of Coastal Kenya pertains in great part to the Mijikenda people and consists of ceremonies, rituals, beliefs, forms of healing, prayer, and adjudication of disputes, which are subject to various cultural and religious factors that affect their perception and transform them. The younger generation's perception of them, influenced by modern life's technologized approach to culture, hugely contributes to such transformations. As a result, cultural roots fall into oblivion, which sometimes has dramatic effects, for example, the abandonment of witch hutching, paradoxically causing negative social effects. Not following traditional practices is not equal to disbelief in witches. Therefore, it often occurs that someone is accused of witchcraft to kill them without any possibility of reconciliation with the community, because the rejection of traditional practices causes the lack of any remediation for an instance of witchcraft, and elicits the easiest solution: the death of the accused. Such events happen to be combined with economic reasons, like the desire of some members of the youngest generation to sell the family land or even the sacred forest, in the care of the elders, who are then usually the ones accused as witches. This kind of cultural knot, appearing in the last 150 years due to interference of various cultures and religions, especially Christianity, requires careful consideration, also given the importance of interfaith dialogue, supported by the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics Trust (CICC), among others. This investigation on transformation of cultural practices in Coastal Kenya is based on in-depth interviews with representatives of Malindi District Cultural Association (MADCA), field research and conversations with elders, and a review of research materials provided by the National Museums of Kenya Library in Malindi, and the Pwani University Library in Kilifi, Kenya.

**Keywords:** cultural heritage; traditional healing; witchcraft; witch hunts

TRANSFORMACJA NIEMATERIALNEGO DZIEDZICTWA KULTUROWEGO  
NA WYBRZEŻU KENIJSKIM – TRADYCYJNE FORMY UZDRAWIANIA,  
CZARÓW I POLOWAŃ NA CZAROWNICE WE WSPÓŁCZESNYM KONTEKŚCIE

Streszczenie

Dziedzictwo niematerialne na wybrzeżu Kenii jest związane w znacznej mierze z historią ludu Mijikenda. Składają się na nie między innymi ceremonie, rytuały i wierzenia, a także formy uzdrawiania, modlitwy i rozstrzygnięcia sporów. Różne czynniki kulturowe i religijne wpływają na ich współczesną percepcję i je przekształcają. Poznawanie tradycji przez młodsze pokolenia,

które następuje pod wpływem stechnicyzowanego podejścia do kultury, jest znaczącym źródłem takich przemian. Rezultatem jest zapomnienie o korzeniach kulturowych, które czasami niesie ze sobą dramatyczne skutki, jak w przypadku porzucania polowań na czarownice i czarowników oraz sądów nad nimi, paradoksalnie powodując negatywne skutki społeczne. Nieprzestrzeganie tradycyjnych praktyk nie jest równoznaczne z niewiarą w czarownice, dlatego często dochodzi do oskarżenia kogoś o czary w celu zabicia go bez zaoferowania mu możliwości pojednania ze społecznością, co było podstawowym celem tradycyjnych sądów w takich przypadkach. Odrzucenie tradycyjnych praktyk powoduje odrzucenie znanego remedium na przypadek czarów i prowadzi często do wyboru najprostszego rozwiązania, którym jest zabicie oskarżonej czy oskarżonego. Zdarza się, że takie przypadki mają także podłoże ekonomiczne, na przykład chęć sprzedaży przez niektórych z najmłodszego pokolenia rodzinnej ziemi, a nawet świętego lasu, którym opiekują się osoby należące do starszyzny, zwykle oskarżane wtedy o czary. Mamy zatem do czynienia ze swoistym splątaniem wierzeń, przekonań i motywacji, które pojawiło się w efekcie interferencji różnych kultur i religii, zwłaszcza chrześcijaństwa. Wymaga ono głębokiego prze-myślenia, co jest podnoszone m.in. przez członków Międzywyznaniowej Rady Wybrzeża Clerics Trust (CICC), będących propagatorami idei dialogu międzywyznaniowego.

Niniejsze badanie transformacji praktyk kulturowych na wybrzeżu Kenii opiera się na pogłębionych wywiadach z przedstawicielami Malidni District Cultural Association (MADCA) oraz na badaniach terenowych i rozmowach ze starszyzną, a także na przeglądzie materiałów badawczych znalezionych w Bibliotece Muzeów Narodowych Kenii w Malindi i Bibliotece Uniwersytetu Pwani w Kilifi, k. Mombasy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dziedzictwo kulturowe; tradycyjne uzdrawianie; czary; polowania na czarownice