

An Examination of Factors Influencing Conversion of Kalenjin People to Islam in Marigat Town in Baringo County in Kenya

Abraham Mpyana Ngoy Sanga

He is a final-year student of Masters of Arts in Mission Islamic Studies at Africa International University, Nairobi. He holds a Master's in Education degree and a Bachelor of Education from the University of Kisangani, DRC, in addition to other Diploma qualifications in

Evangelism and Missiology

Email: mpyanasanga@gmail.com

Abstract

In this study, the researcher examined the factors motivating the Kalenjin people group in Marigat town in Baringo County, Kenya, to convert to Islam. The researcher adopted a qualitative research approach and used ethnographic interviews to collect data on the factors driving these conversions. Conversion is a process that significantly influences the life of the converts, affecting the communities where they live. The findings revealed that the first contact with Islam was mostly through close personal contact with Muslims living there. Also, the study highlights theological, religious and socio-cultural factors influencing the conversions. The study suggests ways the Christian church could be more effective in Christian missions.

Keywords: Islam, Christianity, Conversion, Factors, Kalenjin people, Marigat Baringo

Introduction

Muhammad founded Islam in Mecca, South Arabia, in the 7th century, but after he died in AD 632, Islam spread to other parts of the world, including Asia, Europe, America, and Africa. Globally, conversion to Islam increased by 24% in 2015, according to Lipka and Hackett (2020). In addition, recent reports by International Religious Freedom, Kenya, announced that Islam is progressing with an 11% increase (United States Department of State, 2021). In 2017, Askar demonstrated that Islam is the fastest-growing religion globally, with 1.6 billion followers (2017, 94).



In a broader context, the percentage of conversions to Islam has been steadily growing worldwide. According to a report by the Pew Research Centre, the percentage of the world's population that identifies as Muslim was previously projected to reach 26.4% by 2020 (Pew Research Centre, 2015). In terms of numbers, the report estimated that there were approximately 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide in 2015. Regarding the growth of Islam, the same report estimated the growth of the Muslim population by 70% between 2015 and 2060, compared to an estimated global population growth rate of 32% over the same period (Pew Research Centre, 2015).

In Kenya, Islam came through the experience of the Arab Muslims with the locals along the coastal strip. Josephine M. Sesi asserts that “The earliest contact between Digo and Muslims was approximately 1050–1150 CE) when the Shirazi from Persia was established in the south coast of Kenya” (Stephen Mutuku and others, 2009, 179). Generally, Muslims interacted with the natives through trade, slavery, and intermarriage (Stephen Mutuku *et al.* 2009, 180–184). In West Africa, there was a similar experience, as stated by Mark Cartwright (2019), “following the conquest of North Africa by Muslims Arab in the 7th century CE, Islam spread through West Africa via merchants, trades, scholars, and missionaries, that is largely through peaceful means whereby African rulers either tolerated the religion or converted to it themselves.”

The researcher's interest in the Kalenjin people of Marigat town was motivated by two reasons. First, the researcher has been a missionary in that area for 13 years. He observed that historically, most Kalenjin are Christians, followed by traditionalists. During his early years in the location, there were very few Kalenjin Muslims. Second, he was surprised, observing that the Kalenjin Muslims were growing in number and becoming active in Muslim ceremonies such as funerals, weddings, and child naming. He, therefore, set out to investigate the factors influencing the Kalenjin people in Marigat town to convert to Islam.

The Kalenjin are part of the Nilotic group in East Africa. In Kenya, there are ten subgroups in the Kalenjin community: Kipsigis, Nandi, Keiyo, Tugen, Pokot, Marakwet, Sengwer, Sabaot, Okiek and Terik. Mainly, the Tugen sub-group lives in the Marigat area. The Kalenjin people group are considered one unit/community based on speaking one common language despite the different dialects in the respective sub-groups. They live in the



following Counties: Baringo, Kericho, Bomet, Elgeyo-Marakwet, Nandi, Uasin Gishu, and Mount Elgon.

According to the missionaries who studied the Kipsigis sub-group, "... the Kalenjin were worshippers of many gods, but, having one supreme being above all as were many African ethnic groups" (1995, 3). Asis (the Sun) represented the supreme being. He was considered powerful and in control, had the power to see and hear everyone, directed people's lives here on earth, and had unlimited power. He was the most visible power on which all else depended; Asis responded to the people's spiritual, moral, and physical needs (Burnette and Gerald, 1995, 5). Kalenjin worshipping in their homes and on the hills, also have three main places for traditional worship and sacrifices: Kaapkoros (worship place at the same hilltop for offering sacrifices); Mabwaita (family altar- ceremonies, prayer tree), and Sach Oran (walking and crossing through the community). Kalenjins believed that Asis was their protector and the daily security for their families (Burnette and Gerald, 1995, 25).

In Marigat town, in Baringo county, before the arrival of Muslims, there had been a significant presence of Christianity since the establishment of the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) Mission station in the 1950s. The area also has many evangelical churches such as Africa Inland Church (AIC) Kenya, Full Gospel Churches of Kenya, Anglican Churches of Kenya, Deliverance Church, Baptist Church, and Pentecostal Assemblies of God. These denominations are active in evangelism, seminars, and other ministries together and individually, targeting indigenous people but not Muslims. The Kalenjin people constitute the majority of the population of Marigat town.

Islam in Marigat was introduced by the Nubi (from the Eldama Ravine area) in 1980, who came looking for jobs in the Perkerra irrigation scheme. Their impact was not very strong in the area, but their influence has grown massively in recent years. This has accelerated their activities (businesses and agriculture) and led to converting men, women, youth and children among the Kalenjin and other tribes in this area to Islam. At the Marigat Mosque, the Muslim leaders claim that over 100 adherents are Kalenjin. This accelerated conversion has influenced community life and the people in this area.

Karsdolf argues that "conversion is personal, but it affects the community; it is expressed in vertical relation, but not without horizontal dimensions" (1980:105). According to Orji's view, religious conversion is not simply a process of becoming, say, a Christian or



Muslim, but a total and radical reorientation of one's life to God (not religion), that one surrenders, not only oneself but also unadmitted deepest pretence to absolute personal autonomy. Religious conversions help one embrace what they deem good, true, noble and true (2008,44-45). This means that the conversion experiences significantly change a person's spiritual and moral life.

Christian-Muslim Interactions in Marigat Town

Historically, from 1943/ to the 1950s, Christianity was established in this locality through evangelism, church planting, and the establishment of Bible college and Schools. More women converted to Christianity than men due to strong cultural ties. Christianity remained the dominant faith when other church denominations came to the area. In the 1980s, the Nubi people, who were Muslims, moved into the Marigat area and started to interact with the locals. The two groups co-existed peacefully because they mostly did not discuss their beliefs. However, Abdul R. Omar asserts that co-existence between Christians and Muslims has been a practice in the past,

Both Christians and Muslims have historically been implicated in spreading their faiths through word and conquests, though this is not the complete story of the growth and expansion of these world religions. More peaceful and humane methods are the predominant ways Christianity and Islam have been transmitted. However, our time demands sincere acts of contrition through apologies and forgiveness to heal the memories of our trespasses (Abu-Nimer & Augsburg, 2009b, 187).

This kind of co-existence is essential even in Christian missions. Christians must adopt appropriate strategies to communicate the gospel to Muslims. Anne Cooper argues that "Christians should avoid approaching Muslims with the attempt to show them that they are wrong but considering them like any other people and building friendship with them which is more important than winning an argument" (Cooper 1986, 29-30).

Nehls also suggests that Christians must be prepared to respond to the biblical issues Muslims oppose, like the deity of Jesus, the Trinity, and the accusation that Christians worship three Gods, among others. He adds that Christians must always be positive when dealing with Muslims, avoiding the spirit of winning a debate or a discussion but being friendly, humble in front of them, showing love, care and concern about their need and helping them where possible (Nehls 1988, 35-52).



It appears surprising that most Christians, particularly in Baringo County in Kenya, are often not concerned with understanding the Muslims, their religious identity (beliefs and practices), and context. Philemon Tanui observes that “... context is very important because some communities who have accepted and practiced Islam have integrated Islam into their cultures giving birth to folk Islam” (2018:9). It is so indispensable to know the foundations of Muslim identity when interacting with them to avoid any connection with folk practices. Peace Richard encourages Christians to know God’s word rightly and live in good testimony within people of other faiths, suggesting that Mainline Churches need to help their members to commit themselves to church activities and be able to impact their own lives and the lives of others. Again, churches must create ways for believers to grow in all aspects of faith: beliefs, commitment, service, relationships, justice, spirituality and more (Peace 2004, 9–10).

Muslims firmly agree that the source of the power and authority of their faith is rooted in the Qur’an scriptures and the Hadiths. For them, there is no other God but Allah, and their prophet Muhammad is the final messenger. It is believed that those who do not accept this claim await the judgment of Allah, their God. Abd-al-Masih adds that Muhammad’s revelation concludes all revelations in which the highest wisdom and deepest knowledge are presented to humankind. The words of Allah should be kept faithfully, never criticized or further developed (n.d.13–14). Christians should seek to understand Islam and reach out to Muslims through the development of meaningful interactions,

We are challenged when we stand before the World of Islam. But as evangelicals, we refuse to confine our mission to developing better Muslim relations or to involvement in social service on their behalf. Jesus Christ has defined our agenda, and because we love him, we are constrained to embrace the mandate he has given the church to evangelize the Muslim World through mutual interdependence (Stott 1996:13–14).

Additionally, Beyer argues that “since the middle of the 20th century, Islam has emerged as a serious challenge to the pre-eminent role of Christianity. It has become the prevalent model in countries and regions where Muslims are dominant or at least strongly present. And even in areas where Muslims are relatively minorities, they spawn movements which seek to assert ‘the Islamic way’ as the proper way of operating as a religion” (Beyer, 2006, 119).

Christians and Muslims in Marigat town are mainly part of the Kalenjii community in Baringo County. They do many things together through business, farming, and other



community development initiatives. Given these realities and religious contexts, they mostly encounter divisions or conflicts, such as doctrinal beliefs concerning Christology. In some Kalenjin families or groups, Christians and Muslims live together though divided by religion and maintaining their Kalenjin identity. They participate in the funerals of their loved ones and also in other community initiatives under the Kalenjin cultural identity.

Understanding the Meaning of Conversion

Conversion has been defined differently by different people and contexts. Christians and Muslims render this term differently, as discussed below.

Conversion in the Christian Perspective

According to Priest, the word conversion from a Christian perspective requires a radical change in the believer, "...the root word and meaning of conversion in the New Testament is turning from evil ways and returning to God in repentance and faith. As reviewed in both the Old and New Testament, the root word for conversion points to turning and returning, meaning that there is a turning away from evil weakness and unrighteousness and returning to God" (2020, 43–46). In this sense, conversion from a Christian perspective requires the believer to commit to accepting the saving power of Jesus Christ and becoming his disciple. The convert turns away from a life of sin to the way of Jesus, the new way of living in the Kingdom of God (Priest 2020, 69–70). Thus, for the Christian faith, the convert can change their heart and lifestyle, moral, and social life (Acts 26:17–18). Michael Lawrence asserts, "To be converted as a Christian is to have changed your thinking and your belief about Jesus Christ and to be changed into a person who is no longer an enemy of God" (2020). This means that there should be a manifestation of change in a person's life who believes in Christ (change of mind, heart and behaviour). As Darby notes, conversion is the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right. It is seen at its fullest in the positive response of a man to the choice set before him to the prophetic religion" (1998, 7). Thus conversion involves a change in the life of the believer (reorientation), including his whole being (Intellectual, religious, moral, and affective).



According to Simon J. Gathercole, the Jewish people claim salvation by the work of the law, as God elected them according to the scriptures (Torah, such as circumcision, Sabbath, the food Laws, etc.). Gathercole concludes that salvation is not gained by works or election by God, but justification is done by faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore, Jewish soteriology was based on both divine election and final salvation by works (2002, 133). Apostle Paul's understanding of obedience differs from his Jewish contemporaries, and the divine action is both the source and the continuous cause of obedience for the Christian (2002, 264). Paul expressed this truth according to the Scriptural foundations, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, that the righteous man shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16–17 NIV Bible) (2002, 133, 264–266).

Daniel G. Powers discussed the basis of salvation as conversion gained through the participation of the believers in 'corporate unity with Christ in early Christian soteriology, exploring the dimension of unity in two different directions: one is the solidarity of the individual believer with Christ. The second is the unity of all believers with each other. It means that both parts cooperate in the new relationship with God in Christ (identity between Christ and believers). Through his compassionate love, God has allowed his Son to be crucified, died for the sinners and was raised from the dead as their advocate before God. Powers added, "It is evident that Paul understands Jesus' death as carrying a beneficial salvific effect for those who believe in Him, to be identified with him as they receive the forgiveness of their sins" (2001, 37, 55). Indeed, believers by faith in Christ are united with Christ and can participate in his justification and rehabilitation by God. From the biblical context, God will resurrect the believers eschatologically (1 Cor 5:20–22; Rom 8:17).

Cornelis Bennema has developed the significant role of the Spirit of God in the process of salvation, investigating the Spirit and wisdom in relation to the soteriology of the four Gospels. For him, "Salvation is the possession of eternal life, the entrance into a dynamic communion of mutual knowledge and love which exists between the Father and Son" (2002, 4). The Spirit accomplishes his soteriological role precisely in his function as a life-giving cognitive agent through the mediation of saving wisdom, facilitator and provides cognitive procession, understanding, and hence life, with soteriological consequences (attitudes,



motivations, understanding of God) (2002, 28). Furthermore, the Spirit bears witness to Jesus in and out of his disciples, strengthening, and facilitating them, the mediator of life, giving wisdom, sustains people’s salvation by enabling them to demonstrate relevant discipleship with them and in the world, and love God and Jesus” (2002, 235, 244–246).

Therefore, from a Christian perspective, conversion involves turning from sin, evil and darkness to God by faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour, submitting to his orders, obeying him, and giving him allegiance. It is a complete change of life from one lifestyle to another to live a more relevant life through his faith in Christ. Sookhdeo Rosemary argues that for Christians, “the cross is central to our faith and is the symbol of sacrificed love, redemption, mercy, and compassion. Christ is the conqueror whose victories have always been won through loss, humiliation, and suffering” (2019, 2). Thus, the convert is surely victorious by faith across all circumstances.

Conversion from Islam Perspective

Sookhdeo Patrick asserts that Muslims believe the Quran replaced the Old and New Testaments. For them, the biblical text is untrustworthy because Jews and Christians have corrupted it. They believe that Mohammad replaces Jesus and is the Perfect Man, the God-given perfect example, and Islam replaces Christianity (2008, 27). So, holding to these beliefs leads Muslims to understand conversion differently from the Christian understanding of the word conversion

According to Abdurrahman Robert (2006) in the overview of Islam, “...the religion of Islam teaches that in order to achieve true peace of mind and surety of heart, one must submit to God and live according to his divinely revealed law” (Islamreligion.com). Priest argues that conversion to Islam is simply returning to the original state of sinlessness and the old original and natural religion “chosen” and “perfect by Allah.” They believe that their religion is the natural and primordial submission to the Creator, adding that conversion in Islam entails acceptance of the oneness of Allah – that there is no other God but Allah, and he has neither partners nor a son (2020, 83–84).

Qureshi Nabeel adds, “A man is Muslim if he exclusively declares that Allah is God and Muhammad is Allah’s messenger” (2014, 57). Hence, Muslims understand conversion to be the confession of faith (Shahadah). In the same perspective, Sookhdeo Patrick asserts that some Muslims believe that “the recitation of the creed, even without inner conviction, is



sufficient to convert a person to Islam” (2006, 25). The arguments from Qureshi and Patrick show how conversion in Islam perspective is so different from the Christian view and practice of this word. Muslims emphasize more on the conformity and practice of rules and rituals than the inner state of the human heart. Many Islamic scholars defend that in Islam, there is a very clearly defined procedure for converting or reversion to the faith (actions beginning with their interactions). Huda presented four steps:

1. Quietly, to yourself, make the intention to embrace Islam as your faith (firm faith and belief).
2. Say “Ash-had a la ilaha ill Allah” (I bear witness that there is no God but Allah).
3. Say “Wa ash-had ana Muhammad ar-rasullah” (and I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah).
4. Take a shower, symbolically cleansing yourself of your past life (some people prefer to shower before making the declaration of faith above; either way is acceptable) (Huda, January 26, 2019).

Therefore, Muslims believe and practice these acts as ways to enter conversion, although this seems to be more outward conformity to rituals than concern about the inner situation.

Calling Muslims to become Christians is considered an unforgivable sin or conforming simply to Western cultural, social, political, and economic systems (Reitsman, 2020, 160). And converting a Muslim to Christianity is seen as an act of apostasy in Islam. However, converts from one religion to another can always give reasons motivating them to go through the conversion process. Lofland and Skonovd, in their research (1981, 373–385), presented six motifs leading people to conversion as follows. First is the intellectual factor, where the potential converts begin with the individual and private investigation of a new religion (reading books, watching TV, attending lectures, ideologies, and ways of life of the new religion). Second, is the mystical motif, which is dramatic, sudden, and induced by voices and visions. Third is the experimental perspective, where the convert manifests a pragmatic *show-me* attitude and gives the new religion process a try, withholding judgement for a considerable length of time after taking up the lifestyle of a fully committed participant, including making significant sacrifices. Fourth is the affectional motif, where personal attachment for practising believers is central to the conversion process (personal experience of being loved, nurtured, and affirmed by a group is central to the conversion). Fifth is the



revivalist motif which refers to a managed or manipulated ecstatic arousal in a group or collective context (transforming effect on the individual). Sixth is the coercive motif that entails an extremely high degree of external pressure over a relatively long period of time, during which there is intense arousal of fear and uncertainty, culminating in empathetic identification and even love. These are common motifs that can apply to people from various religious backgrounds.

Buckser Andrew asserts that conversion to a religion is not only an individual act but also a social act. Because when a person joins a new faith, they enter into a set of new relationships with the members of the new religion. The new community of believers where the person enters must receive him, allowing him to be assimilated, or the community can give up the convert. Therefore, conversion can result in celebration or conflict (2002, 69). This means that positive or negative implications always follow religious conversion. It can affect even the previous religious community where the convert was a member because it is a social issue. Therefore, from the discussion above, many factors have contributed to the conversion of Kalenjin men, women and youth to Islam, as explained in the following section.

Findings

Factors Motivating the Conversion to Islam

1. Islam as a source of comfort to Kalenjin converts

According to the context of the Islam religion, the new believers of this faith gain significant changes (way of dressing and eating, submitting to the five pillars of Islam, doing weddings and funerals according to Islam traditions, being taught in Madrassa), allowing them to live as a Muslim. However, challenges can arise from their former religion or the Ummah (Muslim community) as the new converts adjust to the new faith morally, culturally and spiritually. It appears that conversion is a process involving both divine and human actions, as explained by Rambo, “though instantaneous conversions do occur, most conversions are gradual; a process involving complex personal, social, cultural, and religious forces (Rambo, 1992, 159). For Muslims, conversion to Islam is a new identity, through divine forces and personal decision to become genuine believers. The new believer is well received by the Ummah, who experiences consolation and compassionate assistance in various forms, such as: getting



financial help from the Ummah to meet his felt needs (school fees for children, food and even clothes, among other needs).

This strategy to attract followers has been observed in other contexts. Margari Hill asserts that the spread of Islam in West Africa progressed as a gradual and complex process where people converted to Islam due to economic motivations. Other factors include Islam's spiritual message and the influence of Arabic literacy (Hill, 2009).

Coming to the informant's reports in Marigat town, some of them argued that their conversion to Islam had changed their lives for good: enjoying the new religious changes in whole life (moral and social changes, including new beliefs, practices, behaviour, culture, relationships among others). Another informant claimed that by becoming Muslim, he could enjoy slaughtering animals during ceremonies in his area, which is a source of income for him. For others, Islam has helped them to pray five times a day and get answers from Allah, especially through the prayer at 3.00 am (Tahajud is when Allah is very near his people and can answer all requests presented to him).

Four other respondents argued that they were convinced to embrace Islam because of the lifestyle Muslims demonstrate in their seriousness to follow Allah (praying five times daily, their fear of God, love for one another, and good character in their lives, which are different from others). A former traditionalist Kalenjin man who converted to Islam remarked,

I have participated in some Muslim ceremonies and seen that they are good people; there are not many instructions, no discrimination between them, but friendship. I have the chance to make new friends, believe in, and be part of a worldwide religion with a strong brotherhood. Although my parents and siblings are Christians, their lifestyle did not attract me to convert to Christianity. So now I am happy and satisfied with Islam.

Two other respondents were women from a Christian background who converted to Islam, attracted by oneness among Muslims. Then, after their conversion, they learnt the religious teachings and learned how women should lead and guide their families in good relationships as Muslims. Another woman from a Christian background also argues that she was converted to Islam because she enjoyed Muslim culture: their cooking styles, and how they joyfully eat together. She claimed that her previous life as a Christian was not grounded in her faith as she is now in Islam. These three women claimed to be more satisfied with Islam than with Christianity.



Additionally, most of the informants in this study focused on observing Islamic rules, ethics, morals, and consistent lifestyles of Muslims (i.e. what Muslims do and what they don't), especially those Muslims converted from childhood. Here, the intellectual and Affectional motifs play a significant role (emotional feelings – credence to the theory of Lofland and Skonovod (as stated earlier).

2. The Marriage Factor

According to the Islamic foundations in the Qur'an and the Traditions, marriage is not a business domain of only the two partners but a contract to which God Himself is the first witness. Marriage is concluded in His name, requiring obedience to Him, and done according to his ordinances. The families where partners come from are also involved. Hammudah Abdalati claims that marriage is a religious duty, a moral safeguard, and a social commitment. As a religious duty, it must be fulfilled and is enjoined only upon those capable of meeting the responsibilities involved (Abdalati, 1997, 114). Also, marriage is something solemn or sacred, and it would be erroneous to define it simply in physical, material, and secular terms. In Islam, it is a means of permanent relationship and continuous harmony between men and women and God and his people. So moral clarity, spiritual elevation, social integrity, human stability, peace and mercy constitute the major elements of marriage (Abdalati, 1997, 179).

The Quran, Surah 30:21, states, “And one of his signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find comfort in them. And he has placed between your compassion and mercy.” Hellen A. Regis asserts that male privilege and dominance over their spouses is seemingly ensured with patrilineal patterns as well by Islamic legal traditions that give men the right to marry up to four wives, requiring wives to be secluded. In practice, however, women have considerable influence on their husbands and their own quality of life, living and looking for a happier marriage, building dynamic relations of sympathy, affection, and reciprocity upon which they may draw in times of need (Regis 2003, 45).

Murgor Kiprotich and Rop Kipsang, in their study, discovered that in Nandi County, the marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims led many women to convert to Islam because Nandi women were tempted, admiring those married by hardworking Muslim men, offering gifts of ornament and cloths to their wives after the wedding. Also, the dowry is given to the bride in Islamic policy (Murgor and Rop 2013, 30–32).



Among the women interviewed in Marigat town, most reported that marriage in the Islamic context is honoured and lived according to the basics of the Quran and Islamic traditions (Hadiths). These women enjoyed becoming Muslims through marriage because they have learned and observed that there are blessings in Muslim families where men and women are given their rights and that widows in Islam are supported (moral, emotional and financial assistance from the Muslim Ummah). However, from the respondents' answers and observations, the researcher's observations in some cases among Christians and widows are not well supported in some churches and areas. In this case, the reason or motif for Kalenjin women's conversion to Islam through marriage could be seen as affectional, whereby Muslims are perceived as loving, caring and affirming.

Also, Islamic ideology provides economic/financial security for the woman when she gets married. Q4:4 cites that "And give to the women (who you marry) their Mahr (obligatory bridal money)." However, in some instances, these women receive no portion of the dowry. In most African cultures, the dowry is paid to the tribal leaders in the community as compensation or a sign of respect to the parents and elders of the clan for taking care of their daughter. Nonetheless, this dowry given to a woman is considered a source of security for her. Haddad and Esposito confirmed that "Islam also gave women financial security since they received a dowry from their husband at the time of marriage" (Haddad et al., 2001, 109). In reality, Islam recommends that husbands always provide for their families.

One woman who converted from Christianity stated, "My parents are Christians (from Full Gospel Church of Kenya), but my husband and his parents influenced me so much. Before converting to Islam, my faith in Christianity was good; nothing was missing. Marriage is what pushed me to convert to Islam." This respondent expressed how she appreciated being married to a Muslim to enjoy financial security and provision for her family through her husband. Additionally, Murgor and Rop argue that Islamic teachings allowed the convert to practicing Islam along with their own traditional way of life. Christian missionaries were preaching against culture and traditions such as polygamy, traditional male circumcision, female initiation and the accompanying rituals. The Islamic policy of polygamy agrees with the Nandi culture, where they believe that having many wives results in many children, and many children are a source of wealth and security to the family (2013, 30–32).



Coming to some Kalenjin men who converted to Islam, their motif of conversion was that Islam allows polygamy. Their desire to become polygamous (seen with value in Kalenjin traditions) led them to join Islam and enjoy that privilege, claiming that Islam is a better religion as it values their culture too. On the other hand, the economic challenges have led Christian women to convert to Islam through marriage. In addition, some men and youth have joined Islam after enjoying Islamic cultural practices such as initiation, circumcision, wedding ceremonies etc.

3. Theological and Religious Factors

Muslims build their faith from Islamic doctrine and its theological principles, focusing on the Qur'an and Muslim traditions (Hadith) teachings. In this sense, Oseje, quoting Mahdi, notes that "Islamic teachings shape the everyday lives of Muslims around the globe" (Oseje, 2020, 81). The Quranic texts had deeply convinced many non-Muslims to convert to Islam, as declared in Q4:19, "O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will, and you should not treat them with harshness." From this text, men are admonished to seek consent from the women they are married to, to inherit, by not treating them with cruelty, and these men have followed this to the letter.

Some Kalenjins who converted to Islam expressed that Islamic teachings through Madrassa, online teachings, Islamic evangelism, and the reading of the Qur'an and Hadith have enabled them to become strong Muslims and be committed to their faith, adding that these teachings, which attracted them to Islam, have been beneficial. One convert declared, "Yes, I enjoy so much and learn many things, truths from Islam, such as brotherhood and worshipping one God through Mohammed the Prophet." Another convert, a former Christian, expressed, "I am satisfied by these teachings in my heart; it has touched my life." This shows that the Kalenjin Muslim converts in Marigat town are confident in the Quranic message.

Many claimed to have experienced transformation after their conversion due to Islamic teachings. The most motivating reasons for conversion were intellectual, meaning that the converts read Islamic books and materials and listened to lectures. Some expressed that they enjoy their togetherness. One woman convert said, "After working with them, I saw them as friendly people who could help." One Kalenjin girl committed to Islam and born in a Muslim family expressed her faith: "I am a Muslim from the first encounter because I was born in the *dini*. I have contended with Islam; it teaches good morals and virtues. I am



practising fasting, helping the needy, and receiving special religious teachings from the Muslim Ummah for my commitment to my daily life as a Muslim (studying the Qur'an, Hadiths, *Seerah*, *Fiqh* and *Sunnah* of the prophet Muhammad (SAW).

However, Christian conversion is the work of God. It is not the efforts of the communicator of the gospel to Muslims, but most potential converts are surely attracted by the lifestyle, fellowship, and love of Christians committed to Christ. Chew Claims, "Conversion is the work of God. God enlightens the mind, opens the heart, and quickness the total person. The triune God is the author of conversion" (Chew 1990:31). In this case, the communicators of the gospel should reach out and trust God for the conversion of Muslims, they should also as Christians be committed to prayers and reading the word of God.

4. Economic Empowerment Factors

Christianity came much earlier than Islam in most African societies, but Islam spread gradually due to Western missionaries' negative perception of African cultures. From the colonial missionaries' understanding, Western cultures were equated with God, while African religions and cultures equated with Satan. The African worldview and religions were seen as primitive (Mumo Peter Mutuku, 2018, 41).

Kalenjin converts to Islam in Marigat town attest that the "Islamic community encourages Muslims to help each other financially, morally, and to help the needy more." It has also been observed that "the Muslim religion insists on the translation of intend and conviction into concrete actions in all including humanitarian areas" (Krafess, 2005). Krafess concurs that "Acts of humanitarianism are an essential element of religious practice for the Muslim. They are either of an obligatory or an inciting nature and do not exclude non-Muslims from humanitarian aid" (Krafess, 2005). Muslims use humanitarian acts and charity projects to spread Islam and reach out even to non-Muslims.

The Muslims do these acts of obligatory help every day, believing it as a way of receiving help from heaven, known as erasing sins and meriting paradise (Krafess, 2005). According to Islamic fundamental beliefs, the help of people in distress is an obligation in the same way as prayer and fasting during the month of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca. This life of humanitarian aid or obligation for all committed Muslims expresses God's satisfaction (an act of worship and acceptance) and intensifies charity's emotional and obligatory aspects. Muslims understand that "NGOs are nowadays being requested to do



more in terms of humanitarian assistance and to plan a complementary role of advocacy, mediation, conciliation and peace assistance” (Krafess, 2005).

Abdalati argues, “The economic life of Islam is based upon solid foundations and Divine instructions such as dependence of any able person on somebody else for livelihood is a religious sin, a social stigma and disgraceful humility” (Abdalati 1997, 126). Therefore, a Muslim has to be self-supporting and avoid being a liability to others; instead, he is expected to provide for himself and his dependents and give to others. Muslim leaders encourage their members to be hospitable to each other and commit to reaching out even to non-Muslims.

Missiological Implications

The findings of this study contribute considerably to the knowledge of the Christian church in Marigat town and the mandate to reach out to the nations as stated in the Great Commission (Mathew 28:18– 20. Believers in Christ need to return to the teachings of the Bible and carry out their missional role in the world. The researcher recommends the churches in Marigat town embrace mission work within their context by reaching out to Kalenjin Muslims. Also, the church should create mission awareness by encouraging frequent interfaith dialogues.

The researcher recommends the pastors and missionaries within the churches undergo a training course on effectively reaching the Kalenjin Muslims in the Marigat location with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Also, the researcher recommends that the church of Christ know what the Qur’an says about Jesus. In his study on how to relate to people of other faiths, Ajith Fernando suggests, “In today’s society, Christians must have guiding principles about how they should interact with non-Christians. We must also have convictions about how to respond to other beliefs. Christians in both the East and the West are faced with a special challenge as the environment is not conducive to maintaining the traditional belief in the uniqueness of Christ”(2001”15). Efforts and sacrifices should be made to reach non-Christians to accept God’s revelation because salvation is rooted in the scriptures and supremely in Jesus Christ (John 3:16, Acts 26; 15–18). Nabeel Qureshi, from his long life as a devout Muslim, encountered Christianity and became a significant disciple of Christ, testifying that:

I will also honestly say, looking back ten years later, that it was the most powerful and important time of my life. It shaped me, moulded me, and changed me into a disciple of Jesus. The Holy Spirit was my



comforter, His word was my sustenance, and I would not give up that time for anything. The suffering is what made me into a true follower of Jesus. My life now, including my walk with God and my relationship with my wife, is blissful, far more wonderful than I ever could have imagined when I was a Muslim. All suffering is worth it to follow Jesus. He is that amazing (2014, 297).

Ed Stetzer emphasizes that Christians must be trained to live on a mission approach in their everyday life with a Christ-sharing mission outlook, build relationships with people, and have evangelistic conversations. Also, Christians must focus less on creating expert Gospel presenters and encourage every believer to have gospel conversations as a normal part of life (Ed Stetzer, 2020). For Ray Burkan, evangelism to Muslims and any other unreached people group must be to walk alongside the unreached, moving with them until Christians establish friendship and get opportunities to present the gospel to them. It requires cross-cultural missionaries to go and live among unreached people groups, learn their culture, and then present Christ to them through contextualization (Burkan 2018). This means that winning souls for Jesus involves sacrifice, commitment, love and patience.

Conclusion

In Marigat town, before the arrival of Muslims in the 1980s, there had been a significant presence of Christianity since the establishment of the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) in the 1950s. Later, many church denominations established churches in this locality, but with no intentionality to reach out to people of other faiths, like Muslims. In the recent past, Islam has steadily spread through conversions of the locals. The study highlighted factors that have influenced this trend. The factors at play include theological, religious, and economic empowerment and socio-cultural factors like marriage and family influence. Therefore, the church in Marigat should be equipped with the word of God and a basic understanding of Christian missions and the Islamic faith to reach out to their neighbours. The church should also engage in regular interfaith dialogues. Apart from equipping believers, the church can also consider sending missionaries trained and skilled to reach out to Muslims.



References

- Abd-Al-Masih, n.d. *Why is it Difficult for a Muslim to Become a Christian*, Ilach, Australia; Light of Life.
- Abu-Nimer, M., & Augsburg, D. (2009a). *Peace building by, between, and Beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*. Lexington Books.
- Abdalati, H. (1997). *Islam in Focus*. 2nd edition, Amana Publications.
- Ashkar, M. (2017). *Islam*. Mason Crest USA.
- Barnette, C. Fish & Gerald W. Fish (1995). *The Kalenjin Heritage. Traditional Religious and Social Practices*. Published jointly by Africa Gospel Church, Kericho, Kenya and World Gospel Mission, Marion Indiana. William Carey Library Pasadena, California.
- Beyer, P. (2006). *Religions in Global Society*. MTN
- Buckser, Andrew, and Stephen D. Glazier. 2003. *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Cartwright, Mark. *The Spread of Islam in Ancient Africa-World*. History Encyclopedia. World History Encyclopedia, 10 May 2019. <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/13:Spread-of-Islam-in-ancient-Africa/>
- Chew, John. 1990. *When You Cross Culture: Vital Issues Facing Christian Mission*, Singapore: Navigate.
- Cornelis, Bennema (2002). *The Power of Saving Wisdom. An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom in Relation to the Soteriology of the Four Gospels*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Cooper, Anne Ashley (1986). *A Harvest of Hexton*. Published by Privately, Hexton.
- Fernando, Ajith. (2001). *Sharing the Truth in Love. How to Relate with People of Other Faiths*. Discovery House Publisher.
- Gathercole, Simon J. *Where Is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response to Romans 1-5*. Grand Rapids. Michigan/ Cambridge U.K: William B. Eerdmans.
- Haddad, Y. Y., Esposito, J. L., & Esposito, (2001). *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. University Press of Florida
- Huda. (2019). *A Guide for Converting to Islam*. Learn Religions. www.learnreligion.com.
- Ikenga-Metuh, Emefie. (1987). "The Shattered Microcosm: A Critical Survey of Explanations of Conversion in Africa." In *Religion, Development, and African Identity*. Edited by Kirsten Holst Petersen, 11-27. Upsala-Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.
- Karsdolf, Hans. (1980). *Christian Conversion in Context*. Scottsdale; Herald Press.
- Kalenjin - Introduction, Location, Language, Folklore, Religion, Major Holidays, Rites of Passage*. (n.d.). <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Japan-to-Mali/Kalenjin.html>
- Kenya - United States Department of State*. (2022, June 2). United States Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kenya/>



- Krafess, J. (2005). “The Influence of the Muslim Religion in Humanitarian Aid.” *International Review of the Red Cross*, 87(858), 327–342. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1816383100181378>
- Kipruto, Tanui Philemon. (2018). *Factors Affecting Evangelical Work Among the Somali Muslims in Eastleigh in Kenya. A Case Study of Africa Inland Church (AIC) In Nairobi Central Region.*
- Lipka, M., & Hackett, C. (2020, May 30). *Why Muslims Are the World’s Fastest-Growing Religious Group.* Pew Research Centre. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/06/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group/>
- Nehls, Gerhard & Walter Eric. (2006). *Reach Out: What Every Christian Needs to Know about Islam and Muslims.* Nairobi, Life Challenge Africa.
- Nock, Arthur, Darby. (1998). *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo.* Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Seven Questions about Conversion.* (2020, September), Crossway. <http://www.crossway.org/articles/7-questions-about-conversion-laurence>.
- Stetzer Ed. *Evangelism Formation: Three Major Challenges to our Evangelism Today.* The Exchange. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020February/Evangelism-formation-the-three-major-challenges-t-evangelism-Hotmail>.
- Mahdi, N. (2016). *Islam.* National Highlights Inc.
- Margari, Hill (January 2009). *The Spread of Islam in West Africa: Containment, Mixing, And Reform from the Eighth to the Twentieth Century.* Stanford University, California.
- Mumo, P. M. (2018). *Western Christian Interpretation of African Traditional Medicine: A Case Study of Akamba Herbal Medicine.* www.Ajol.Info. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ijrs.v8i1>
- Murgor Kiprotich and Rop Kipsang (2013). *The Origin, Spread and Impact of Islam on Nandi Traditional Religion and Culture in Nandi County, Kenya from 1850 to 2012.* <https://ir.mksu.ac.ke/handle/123456780/8126>.
- Mutuku, Stephen S., Mutua A. M, Rasimussen S, Shaw M, Mutuku J., Kim Caleb (2009). *African Missiology: Contribution of Contemporary Thoughts.* Uzimo Publishing House, Nairobi, Kenya.
- Orji, Cyril. (2008). *Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa.* Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press.
- Oseje, L. (2020). “Christian Women Converting to Islam in Kendu Bay, Kenya: Implications for Witness.” *Impact: Journal of Transformation*, 3(2), 79–89.
- Peace, Richard V. (2004). “Conflicting Understanding of Christian Conversion. A Missiological Challenge.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28, no. 1:8-14.
- Powers, G. Daniel (2001). *Salvation through Participation. An Examination of the Notion of the Believers ‘Corporate Unity’ with Christ in Early Christian Soteriology.* Leuven-Paris-Sterling-Virginia.
- Priest, Chinyere Felicia (2020). *The Conversion of Igbo Christians to Islam. A Study of Religious Change in a Christian Heartland.* Langham Global Library.



- Qureshi, N. (2014). *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus, 4 Devoted Muslims Encounter Christianity*. Zondervan, Michigan.
- Rambo, L.R. (1993). *Understanding Religious Conversion*. Yale University Press.
- Ray, Burkan (Dec. 16 2018). *How to Approach Evangelism with Different Cultures, Faiths and Worldviews*. [https://ncbaptism.org / how-to-approach-evangelism-With-different-cultures-faiths-and-worldviews](https://ncbaptism.org/how-to-approach-evangelism-With-different-cultures-faiths-and-worldviews).
- Regis, Helen A. (2003). *Fulbe Voices. Marriage, Islam, and Medicine in North Cameroon*. Louisiana State University, Westview Press Books, USA.
- Reitsman, S.G. and Bernard. (2020). *Vulnerable Love, Islam, the Church and the Triune God* Langham Global Library.
- Stott, John. (1996). *Making Christ Known: Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989*

