

**TO ESTABLISH THE CONTRIBUTION OF MIRAA TRADE TO THE
ISLAMIZATION OF IGEMBE PEOPLE THROUGH MIRAA TRADE IN
MERU COUNTY**

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ABSTRACT

This study undertook a critical analysis of the impact of Islamization of Igembe people through miraa trade in Meru County. The research was provoked by the gradual and emerging prominence of Somali Muslims in the affairs of miraa business in the Igembe Region. The study objective was: to establish the contribution of miraa trade to the Islamization of Igembe people through miraa trade. The study drew a sample size of 383 from a target population of 126,000 miraa farmers, miraa vendors. All the thirteen-(13) miraa traders association officials formed part of the sample size as they were both miraa farmers and miraa vendors. The research used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study employed descriptive study design based upon field research. Questionnaire with both structured and unstructured questions were used under a purposive

sampling procedure. Data collected from the research location were analyzed, summarized and interpreted using the computer software SPSS (version 22), where correlation of the variables under study determined and conclusions drawn. The study concluded that the partial correlation results for the study gave p-values that was significant thus showing that the independent variable was related to the dependent variable making the study concrete and viable. The study recommends that there is need for sensitization of community, family members, business community, and community elders on solving issues amicably and embracing ethical business practices.

Key words: Islam, Imam, Islamization, Miraa production, Miraa trading, Miraa pricing.

1.1 Background of the study

Islam spread throughout Meru during the early years by way of Imams who taught Islam in Majengo. Kubai (1995) says that the month of May 1908, marked the arrival of Muslims in Meru. On 4th June, Horne and the King's African Rifles made their permanent station that came to be known as "Boma" at the edge of the surrounding forest. It is here in the "Boma" and by the occupants of these quarters that the first seeds of Muslim presence in Meru were sown. By 1912, there was a significant Asian Muslim population and a growing number of African Muslims who constituted the earliest mosque in Meru. Nearly all of them were traders, apparently trying to cash in on the new station.

Swahili men married indigenous women and at the same time influencing a few Merus to convert to Islam. The new converts were joined by other Meru families who had converted to Islam. Some Muslim converts became the Imam of the mosque and served as the teachers, even performing the duties of a Khadhi as they conducted marriages between their fellow Muslim men and local women (Alpers, 1973).

According to Gebissa (2004), East Ethiopian Muslim culture emphasizes that miraa is holy; hence, it is referred to as "the flower of paradise". Among the Muslims of Harar in Ethiopia, there was a

time no ceremony, private or religious took place without ritual chewing of miraa accompanied by much chanting and praying. The consequent religious exaltation was regarded as a gift from heaven. According to Nassim (2014), the Qur'an has not prohibited miraa chewing where he argues that Islam favors anything that is of benefit to the society. Miraa can be both prohibited and allowed at the same time and therefore depend on individual's perspective and their interpretation of the Qur'an. Salah (1997) say that Miraa falls in a grey category and it is therefore up to the individual interpretation of the Qur'an.

Gebissa (2004), states that the leafy stimulant first became popular among devout Muslims who used it as an aid to worship. In the memoirs of a 19th-Century Egyptian officer said, "We read Qur'an, and we bow to the Prophet because this plant is known to the Saints and it permits us to keep vigil long through the night to worship Allah" (Gebissa, 2004). From the preceding information, it is evident that miraa has attracted a host of people into its farming for its cultural, social and economic benefits as it confers upon its growers and the stimulant effects it gives the chewer. Miraa in Igembe region is a commodity of much significance and it is part of the social-economic fabric of the people in these regions.

As a result of the Muslims settling in Igembe, there has been a slow, gradual increase in the Islamic and Somali way of life among the indigenous Meru people. This can be attributed to the increasing numbers of indigenous people converting to Islam and other Muslims immigrating to the area. The key indicator of increasing Muslim population is the increased number of mosques in a region previously considered predominantly Christian. Mosques have been erected at Kiengu, Karama, Kangeta and Muthara. Similarly, many business premises are setting up in Maua and their owners are Islamic adherents. Likewise, in the local primary and secondary schools, there has been a surge

in the enrolment of Muslim schoolchildren. All of this is evidential that a process is in progress that is gradually Islamizing the people of Igembe.

Corcoran (2015) quoted Hassan Ole Naado, head of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) saying, “There is this fear that Muslims are stepping on other people’s toes by demanding to practice their faith in places that do not belong to them,” it's a reckoning happening worldwide with Europe, in particular, grappling with how to accommodate Muslim immigrants. But in Kenya, the presence of militants in neighboring Somalia who have vowed to retaliate for Kenya’s military intervention there adds immediacy to the problem. This has also been observed by Kenyan church leaders who feel Muslims are trying to take over the government, for instant The Rt. Rev. Robert Martin, an Englishman who leads the Anglican Diocese of Marsabit says, “There is the belief that Islam is pursuing the Islamization of Kenya” (Corcoran, 2015).

1.2 Statement of the problem

Miraa trade has attracted many traders of Somali origin to do business with Igembe people because of its economic value. The business has created an encounter between the Somalis and the Meru people. The trade takes place in several markets in Igembe region with the big markets being at Laare, Mutuati, Maili Tatu and Maua. With the miraa business, it has brought with it the Islamization of the Igembe people though its trade impact has not yet been established thus this study.

Social-economic interactions have intensified between Muslims and the indigenous people of Igembe and Islamic religious institutions have been built. A number of Mosques have been built there for over a decade now. According to Panikkar (1977), prayers and evangelizing meetings are held regularly at shopping centers freely with strong overhead public speakers. There is an encroachment of Christian dominated territories by the Muslim clerics who are trying to Islamize

the region. Further pointers are that Muslim dressing attires are slowly sneaking into the residents of Igembe. It has been observed that some of the local residents are slowly adapting to this dressing code where some are donned in kufi caps, arafat scarfs and kanzus with some changing their names to Muslim names, for example, a man from Kiegoi changed his name from ‘Francis Mutwiri’ to ‘Abdi Mutwiri’.

According to data retrieved from Maua town revenue office (2017), at Kaciongo there are many shops and hotels owned by people of Somali ethnicity. On the other hand, they rent whole estates at a double price that the Igembe’s and other town dwellers can hardly afford hence forcing them to the peripheries of the town. Their economic prowess and dominance have made it easy for the religious relationships that lead to conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. This study hence critically analyzed the religio-social impact of the Islamization of Igembe people specifically the impact on the traditionally Igembe people dressing code, culture and their religious practices.

There is increased poverty despite lucrative miraa trade. There is a gradual takeover of the miraa trade by Islamic actors, that has led to loss of income to the indigenous miraa producers. This is happening through repatriation of incomes and profits to places other than Igembe where the foreign investors choose to take away their money and invest elsewhere. This has a direct bearing on unemployment for Igembe people thus leading to an increase in poverty from where many social ills can be traced. This research therefore focused on the impact of Islamization of Igembe people through miraa trade, an area that has not been ventured into according to the available literature.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish the contribution of Islamization on Igembe people through Miraa trade in Meru County, Kenya.

1.4 Objective of the Study

Establish the contribution of miraa trade to the Islamization of Igembe people of Meru County

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The role of trade in the spread of Islam

Trade has been a significant medium upon which Islam had spread which began with religion in the 7th century. The city of Mecca was an important trading centre with a vibrant community of merchants and being Prophet Muhammad's home, and business town, this place was a valuable setting for emergence and growth of Islam. Mecca and Medina provided a vital setting for Islam's connection to trade. Since the days of the Prophet Mohammed the growth of Islam has been linked with trade. The city of Mecca is re known as a merchant and leaders in commerce. The merchants residents at that time was the Quraysh tribe, were renowned merchants and leaders in commerce. They extended their influence to other regions including Abyssinia and Syria (Simon, 1989).

Muslim traders traded beyond their borders with a record of Muslim traders in Malaysia by 1120 CE. By the 16th century, they had set up stout communities in the Malaysian, Philippine and Peninsula islands (Tibbetts, 1957; Houben, 2003). This spread was attributed to better technology like effective transportation, communication, IT, electronic and print media among others by the Islam traders and economic superiority which gave them competitive advantage thus hedging out most of the other religious groups. Trade and commerce influenced majorly on the spread of Islam in some territories more than others. For instance, in East Africa, the most evident method that led to spread of Islam within the coastal strip and into the mainland was through contacts of trade and some missionary work (Alatas, 1985).

2. 2 How trade helped to spread Islam in Kenya

As early as the middle of the 17th century some Muslims in the Lamu archipelago area, particularly the Swahili of Pate had trading contacts with the Oromo and Pokomo of the mainland. The Oromo supplied ivory to the Swahili. The Pokomo were also trading with the Swahili of Pate and Lamu, from whom they obtained cloth and iron in exchange for ivory. During the first three decades of the 19th century, the pattern of trade in the Kenya coastal region was remarkably uniform.

Trading activity dominated urban-rural relations and was the principal occasion for contacts between Muslims and non-Muslims. Political, military, social and other non-commercial contacts were relatively infrequent. Overseas demand for indigenous produce especially grains and timber came mainly from Southern Arabia, while demand for ivory and gum copal came from India. Lamu and Mombasa had direct shipping contact with Arabia and India and were centers for overseas export.

Muslim communities in the new mainland settlements found themselves living far closer to non-Muslim rural people. Swahili-Arab caravans began moving inland from Mombasa, and by the 1860s Swahili-Arab caravans had dominated the trade. Muslim traders were no longer simply content to receive goods from rural people as in the past but tried to increase their supply to have a commercial advantage at its source. As competition increased, Muslim traders sought contractual arrangements to ensure supplies and thereby their rural counterparts, in turn, acquired market power. This led to the Muslims movement and settlement to the interior. Mingling with Muslims during the exchange of goods resulted to conversion into Muslims. From these communities, Islam slowly penetrated inland.

The presence of the Muslims on the Kenyan coast was not intently to spread Islam but rather to trade. Those Africans who travelled for trade purposes with the Arabs used Swahili as lingua franca for trade and some of them returned as Muslims having converted during their escapades. Thus the Swahili language played a pivotal role in uniting the two groups from both sides of the divide. As a matter of observation, the Swahili language grew faster in adoption than the religion of Islam in many regions within the immediate interior of the coastal strip. This growth of the Swahili language helped carry Islam further into the mainland as those who enthused knowing it in depth had to delve into Arab-African traditions that brought about the language of the Swahili. It is true that even in the modern day businessmen dealing in petroleum products are Muslims of Somali

origin and they have spread to the various parts of the country and wherever they settle a simple mosque is set where as few as five adherents can congregate for prayer.

3.0 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design. According to Orodho (2005) a descriptive design involves finding out who, what, where and how of a particular phenomenon associated with a certain research problem. Descriptive design entails an assessment of the situation and is relevant when the purpose is to explain the relationship between variables. It is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (Cooper and Schindler, 2011). The study employed a simple descriptive survey method to explain numbers, figures and quantities. It focused on such as the number of miraa farmers, users, traders, sales, harvest quantities and the number of Igembe people who have been impacted by the Islamic religion. This yielded rich data that were helpful in finding out how the involvement of Muslims in miraa trade perpetuates the spread of Islam and the impact thereof to the people of Igembe that is the area of this study.

4.0 Findings of the Study

The study established that majority of the miraa traders association members 2,202 (86%) are Christians. 358 represent the Muslim minority (14%). The majority representation implies that most miraa farmers are the Igembe people, most of whom belong to Christianity.

The study sought to identify the number of miraa traders association officials in terms of their religion. The findings were presented in the following table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of miraa traders association officials in terms of their religion

Distribution of miraa traders association officials in terms of their religion	Frequency n =13	%
Christians	10	77
Muslims	3	23
Traditionalists	0	0
Others	0	0

Source: Fields Survey (2018)

The study found that majority of the miraa traders association officials 10 (77%) are Christians. It implies that the most of the officials were drawn from the majority Christians who are members of the association.

4.1 Extent of the Spread of Islam among Igembe people of Meru County

The section is in line with the first objective and is a presentation of the extent of the spread of Islam among Igembe people of Meru County. The perspectives presented here are the miraa farmers, miraa vendors and miraa traders' association officials.

The researcher sought to establish the number of years the respondents started seeing Muslims in their area and presented the findings in table 2.

Table 2: Number of Years the Respondents Started Seeing Muslims

Year	Frequency	Percent (100%)
< 5 years	0	0
6-10 years	5	2
11-15 years	19	7
16-20 years	52	19
21-25 years	97	35
25 years and above	104	37
Total	277	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Table 2 presents the number of years the respondents started seeing Muslims in Igembe. Majority of the respondents 37% (104) started seeing Muslims in the region for over 25 years. This is followed by 35% (97) of the respondents who started seeing Muslims in the area for between 21-25 years, 19% (52) respondents for 16-20 years, 7% (19) respondents for 11-15 years, 2% (5) respondents for 6-10 years, and 0% (0) respondents for less than 5 years. The study findings showed that Muslims have been in Igembe for more than 25 years. The findings confirm the study by Fadiman (1979) that the first seed of Muslim was first felt in Meru as early as 1908.

The presence of Muslims in Meru was evidenced with the construction of Mosques in the area. The researcher sought to establish from the respondents whether they had mosques in their areas. The findings were presented in the following table 3.

Table 3: Availability of Mosques in the Area

Availability of Mosque	Frequency (n=277)	Percent (%)
Yes	168	61
No	109	39

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Majority of the respondents interviewed 61% (168) stated that they had mosques in their areas while 39% (109) said they did not have mosques in their areas. Since the majority of the respondents stated that they had mosques in their areas, it is evident that Muslims are present in

Igembe as demonstrated by the 61% respondents who backed the statement. According to Nkirote (1995), a public mosque in Igembe was built at Laare in 1940, thus confirming the study findings that mosques existed in the area. This was the second mosque built after the one at Kabachi, which was built in 1927.

The study also sought to establish the number of mosques built in the area. The findings were presented in the following table 4.

Table 4: Number of Mosques in the Area

Number of Mosques	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	42	15
2	158	57
3	67	25
4	6	2
5	4	1
6	0	0
7	0	0
8	0	0
9	0	0
10	0	0
Total	277	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Most of the respondents 57% (158) cited that they had 2 mosques in their areas. This was followed by 25% (67) who had 3 mosques and 15% (42) who had one mosque. The study confirms the

findings by Nkirote (1995) who identified two mosques, one built in 1927 at Kabachi and one built at Laare in 1940.

In line with the objective of the spread of Islam in Igembe, the researcher also sought to establish whether there were Muslim of the ethnic Somali who had bought land and settled in the area. The findings of the study were presented in the following table 5.

Table 5: Muslim of the Somali Ethnic who had bought land and settled in the area

Bought land and settled	Frequency (n=277)	Percent (%)
Yes	142	51
No	135	49

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Most of the respondents 51% (142) stated that there were Muslims of the Somali ethnic who had bought land and settled in the area. The study findings confirm the findings by Nzibo (1986) that Muslims of the Somali ethnic acquired plots and settled in the trade centres with their families.

The study sought to find whether there were Igembe people who had been converted to Muslims. The findings were presented in the following table 6.

Table 6: Igembe people who had been Converted to Islam

Converted to Islam	Frequency (n=277)	Percent (%)
Yes	272	98
No	5	2

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Majority of the respondents 98% (272) agreed that there were Igembe people who had been converted to Islam. The findings are pertinent with the study by Nkirote (1995) that marriages between Muslim men and Igembe women made the women converted to Islamic.

The study sought to establish ways through which Igembe people were converted to Islam. The findings were presented in table 7.

Table 7: Ways Igembe People Were Converted to Islam

Way converted to Islam	Frequency	Percent (%)
After listening to Islam teaching	5	2
Through miraa business contacts	115	42
Through marriage and assimilation	145	52
Through free own initiatives	2	1
Through inducement and other incentives	10	3
Through force and being coerced	0	0
Other ways	0	0
Total	277	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Most of the respondents interviewed 52% (145) cited that Igembe people were converted to Islam through marriage and assimilation. 42% (115) respondents who stated that Igembe people were converted to Islam through miraa business contacts followed this. The findings confirm the study by Nkirote (1995) that marriages between Muslims and locals led to conversion to Islam. The findings are also pertinent to the statement made by NACOST (1996) that people from Somali and

Igembe have been interdependent over the miraa business to an extent of the Somali settlers in the region agitating for political space, increased intermarriages between the two communities leading to change of lifestyles and the erosion of the indigenous Meru culture.

The researcher sought to identify signs that Islam had been adopted in Igembe region. The findings were presented in the following table 8.

Table 8: Signs that Islam had been adopted in Igembe region

Signs that Islam has been adopted in Igembe	Frequency	Percent (%)
Change of dressing mode	60	22
Change of names	35	12
Attending to mosque prayers and other Muslim festivals	90	32
Getting employment in Muslim owned businesses	22	8
Getting married to a Muslim man/woman	30	11
Change of eating habits and enjoying Muslim inclined delicacies	38	14
Other ways	2	1
Total	277	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Majority of the respondents 32% (90) stated that attending to Mosque prayers and other Muslim festivals were the signs that Islam had been adopted in Igembe region. 22% (60) respondents who cited that change of dressing mode was a sign that Islam had been adopted in Igembe region followed this. The other signs were change of eating habits and enjoying Muslim inclined delicacies at 14% (35), change of names at 12% (35) respondents, getting married to a Muslim man or woman at 11% (30), and getting employment in Muslim owned businesses 8% (22). The study findings are pertinent with observations made by Panikkar (1977) that Prayers and evangelizing meetings are held regularly at shopping centres freely with strong overhead public speakers. There is an encroachment of Christian dominated territories by the Muslim clerics who are trying to Islamize the region. Further pointers are that Muslim dressing attires are slowly sneaking into the residents of Igembe. The author also observed that some of the local residents are slowly adapting to this dressing code where some are donned in kufi caps, arafat scarfs and kanzus with some changing their names to Muslim names, for example, a man from Kiegoi changed his name from 'Francis Mutwiri' to 'Abdi Mutwiri.

4.5 Contribution of Miraa Trade to the Islamization of Igembe People of Meru County

The study sought to identify the religious affiliate with majority people doing miraa business in Igembe. The findings were presented in the following table 9.

Table 9: Majority of people doing Miraa Business

Majority doing miraa business	Frequency (n=277)	Percent (%)
Muslims	265	96
Christians	12	4

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Most of the respondents 96% (265) stated that the majority of the people in miraa business are Muslims. The study findings are pertinent to the study by Mwakimako (2007) that the spread of Islam to Meru can be attributed to several factors. First, the proximity between Meru and other Islamic communities like the Boran and Somali has greatly influenced the social interaction between these communities. There are extensive social links especially due to intermarriages between these communities, which has led to a diffusion of social customs between these communities. In fact, more than 10% of the Meru community is currently Muslim. Of particular interest is the level of trade links between the Igembe community and the Somali Muslim community

The study also sought to identify major miraa dealers. The findings were presented in the following table 10

Table 10: Major Miraa Dealers

Major miraa dealers	Frequency (n=277)	Percent (%)
Somalis	226	82
Igembe	51	18

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Majority of the respondents 82% (226) cited that the major miraa dealers were the Somalis. 18% (51) respondents who cited that Igembe people were major miraa dealers followed this. The study findings confirm the report made by Amnesty International (2005) that Somali traders control much of the international trade in miraa in exporting the commodity to Somali, Europe and beyond. Their dominance has created tension, for example, some Meru consider themselves exploited by the Somali network.

The study sought to identify the main stages in various miraa business stages. The findings were presented in the following tables.

Table 11: Miraa Pluckers

Miraa pluckers	Frequency (n=277)	Percent (%)
Somalis	2	1
Igembe	275	99

Source: Field Survey (2018)

The majority of the respondents 99% (275) stated that the main miraa pluckers are the Igembe people. This implies that miraa provides employment opportunity as miraa pluckers to majority of the Igembe people.

The study sought to establish whether miraa trade led to the spread of Islam among Igembe people.

The findings were presented in the following table 12.

Table 12: Whether miraa Trade led to the Spread of Islam

Whether miraa trade led to spread of Islam	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	260	94
No	15	5
Don't know	2	1
Total	277	100

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Majority of the respondents 94% (260) cited that miraa trade led to the spread of Islam. The findings of the study is pertinent to the conclusion made by Aden et al., (2006) that miraa business interests by the Somali Muslims in Igembe contributed greatly to their settlement in the region. Miraa usage evolved from a social and ceremonial to commercial role therefore miraa has become a regular item of exchange between the Muslims and the Igembe people through the Isiolo route where goats and hides were exchanged for miraa.

The study attempted to identify whether Muslims are using miraa trade to make new converts to Islam. The findings were presented in the following table 13.

Table 13: Miraa Trade to make new Converts to Islam

Miraa trade to make new converts to Islam	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	140	51
No	128	46
Don't know	9	3
Total	277	100

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Majority of the respondents 51% (140) cited that Muslims make new converts to Islam. During the interview one of the respondents stated:

“Muslims entice and explains to Igembe people how good it is to be a Muslim. It appears to Igembe people that they can live better lifestyles and probably become rich when they convert to Islam”

The findings confirm the statement made by Aden et al., (2006) that miraa in Igembe region is a commodity of much significance and it is part of the social-economic fabric of the people in this region. As a result of the Muslims settling in Igembe, there has been a slow but gradually increasing presence of the Islamic and Somali way of life among the indigenous Igembe people. This can be attributed to the increasing numbers of Muslims from conversions and others immigrating to the area.

The study sought to establish whether ways in which Muslims used miraa to Islamise Igembe. The findings were presented in table 14

Table 14: Ways in which Muslims used miraa to Islamise Igembe

Ways in which Muslims used miraa to Islamise Igembe	Frequency	Percent (%)
Through contacts and close associations	135	49
Through leasing of miraa farms	55	20
Through offering of employments	19	7
Through attractive hike miraa prices	22	8
Through offering of ready miraa markets	30	11
Through loaning of trade capital	12	4
Through offering transportation means	4	1
Total	277	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Majority of the respondents 49% (135) respondents stated that Muslims used miraa trade to Islamise Igembe through contacts and close associations. This was followed by 20% (55)

respondents who cited that Muslims used miraa trade to Islamise Igembe people through leasing of miraa farms. The findings confirm the statement made by Mwakimako (2007) that there are extensive social links especially due to intermarriages between these communities, which has led to a diffusion of social customs between these communities.

During the key informant interviews one of the respondents stated that:

“The constant contact between the Somali and Igembe people has influenced some to join Islam. Others have intermarried and therefore changing their religious status.”

During the key informant interviews one of the respondents stated that the presence of Islam has contributed positively into the lives of Igembe people:

“They have brought business for our people. Offered employment.”

However, the respondent cited that Islam presence has contributed negatively into the lives of Igembe people:

“Boys drop out of schools, early marriages, insecurity, a lot of conflicts, and unlawful land leasing.”

Therefore, the study strongly supports that there is contribution of miraa trade to the Islamization of Igembe people of Meru County. The contribution is both positive and negative to the lives of Igembe.

4.6 Impact of Islamization of Igembe People of Meru County through miraa trade

The study sought to identify ethnic group who are the majority beneficiary of miraa business. The findings were presented in the following table 15

Table 15: Majority ethnic group Beneficiaries from miraa Trade

Majority of ethnic group beneficiaries from miraa trade	Frequency	Percent (%)
Somalis	183	66
Igembes	72	26
Others	20	7
Don't know	2	1
Total	277	100.0

Source: Field Data Survey (2018)

Most of the respondents 66% (183) cited that the majority ethnic group beneficiaries from miraa trade are Somalis. The findings confirm the report by Amnesty International (2005) that Somalis dominate miraa export trade and exploit the people of Meru.

The study attempted to establish whether Islam through miraa trade had affected the people of Igembe in any way. The study findings were presented in the following table 16

Table 16: Whether Islam through Miraa Trade affected people of Igembe

Whether Islam through miraa trade affected people of Igembe	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	261	94
No	7	3
Don't know	9	3
Total	277	100

Source: Field Survey (2018)

Majority of the study respondents 94% (261) stated that Islam through miraa trade affected the people of Igembe in some way. During the interview, one of the respondents stated that:

“Many young people have embraced Islam because of miraa trade.”

The study findings are pertinent to the statement made by Yusuf (2009) that new job opportunities were created. Good wages attracted migrant labourers from as far as Ukambani, Kikuyu land and Western Kenya. Scores of Kambas, Kikuyus, Luos and Luhyas found their way to the coastal towns such as Mombasa and Malindi, to the numerous plantations and some even crossed the sea to Pemba and Zanzibar. Many of these were eventually converted to Islam and when they returned home, they propagated the religion among their people.

The correlation analysis of miraa trade and Islamization of Igembe people. The findings are presented in the following table 17.

Table 17: Correlation between Miraa Trade and Islamization of Igembe People

		Miraa trade	Islamization of Igembe People
Miraa Trade	Pearson Correlation	1	.754**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	277	277
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
Islamization of Igembe people	Pearson Correlation	.754**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	277	277
	Sig. (2-tailed)		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study findings from table 4.71 showed a statistically significance positive correlation on the selected items ($r = 0.754$, $p < 0.05$) between miraa trade and Islamization of Igembe people.

Conclusion

The study strongly supports that there is some contribution of miraa trade to the Islamization of Igembe people of Meru County. The contribution is both positive and negative to the lives of Igembe. Positive contributions are evidenced in employment creation and business opportunities. Miraa farmers can earn a living and take their children to school. Negative contributions are evidenced in dominance of miraa business export by Muslims, illegal land leasing, child labour, violence, conflicts, extended land lease, stealing land cruisers that belong to Merus as they attempt to take their miraa to Garissa or even disappearance of Meru land cruiser drivers.

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