



AFRICA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

A COSMOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE CONCEPT OF PURIFICATION IN
RELATION TO BLOOD IMPURITIES AND ITS SOCIAL-RELIGIOUS
IMPLICATIONS AMONG THE DIGO PEOPLE
IN KWALE COUNTY, KENYA

BY
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ABSTRACT

Purification plays an important part in the lives of Muslims. This phenomenon is understood and practiced in various forms based on their cultural orientation. The objective of this study is to examine the phenomenon among the Digo people of *Kigato-Kwale* County in Kenya. This dissertation investigates how the Islamic teaching on purification, with particular attention to menses and postnatal impurities, is understood and embodied in the everyday lives of Digo Muslims.

In order to establish the emic perspective of the concept of purification among the Digo, I used purposeful sampling, where 40 participants were selected. The choice was based on various categories such as, gender, age-group, the role a participant plays in the community and the knowledge acquired by participants on Shāfi'ī School of *Sunni* Islamic teachings. This was intended to establish different perspectives on how the Digo people of *Kigato* relate with this phenomenon.

The ethnographic research was conducted for one and a half months. Three research methods were used to collect data, namely; participant observation, interviews and focus group.

It was observed that even before the advent of Islam, Digo people practiced ritual acts of purification among women experiencing menstruation and postnatal bleeding. The research has further established that even after embracing Islam, their way of addressing the phenomenon is still guided by their cosmological viewpoint. This has made them to continue with the *Chidigo* traditional way of addressing impurities caused by menses and postnatal bleeding. The study argues that, according to Shāfi'ī School of *Sunni* Islam such impurities do not restrict from social interactions. This is not the case with most Digo people among whom the impurities are viewed as impure and contaminative. Their viewpoint is largely influenced by the African religious thought as articulated by Mbiti (2011). According to Mbiti, the spiritual world of an African is viewed as inseparable from the physical world of the living (see 1991:81; 2011:75). Therefore, each African community has established taboos which ensure there is harmony between the two worlds: the spiritual and the physical. Menstruation and postnatal bleeding impurities is believed to have negative effects on the spiritual universe of an African. In keeping with this African cosmological reality in most African cultures, menstrating and postnatal women are separated from religious and social activities of a community for a prescribed period of time as a way of protecting a community from the wrath of the ancestral spirits. The empirical findings of this research have established that this practice is also manifested among the Digo, particularly among women during their postnatal period. This phenomenon has posed a challenge towards the social and marital life to both the married Digo men and women. Further, Digo women in the age bracket of menstruation and childbearing have experienced alienating socio-religious transformation. This has made them feel deprived of necessities in life, such as, the act of worshipping God and freedom of socialization. This worldview led to situate and employ a working theory for this study by Mary Douglas (1966) known as "matter out of place." Therefore, this study contributes to the reality that the concept of impurity and pollution as advocated by Mary Douglas (1966) exists, even among the Digo *Sunni* Muslims, because of their way of mixing the *Sunni* Islamic teachings and *Chidigo* traditions in addressing the concept of purification in relation to menses and postnatal impurities.