

***Mekatilili wa Menza: Her movement as a Model for
Africa's Feminist Theologians***



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By

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Background of the Study



- Pre- colonial Women for years (Africa) in particular were regarded simply as being weak, fearful and with no power to speak out their intentions and greavances.
- They were underestimated; said to be only suitable for working in kitchens and performing lesser duties than men.
- Women were also said to be shy and even unable to express their grievances. (Brantley, 1985)
- They were said to have relied on men for decision making (Ngome 2012) un published paper
- This study explores the life history and activities of a renowned Kenyan Giriama woman from the coast of Kenya. Her name is Me-Katilili and her history has of recent has drown the attention of national and global scholars about her legacy in independent Kenya and African in general. The current study limits Mekatilili as an African Indigenous oral Theologian whose movement and activities have not keenly been taken as sources that can emulated by African feminists theologians

Objectives of the Research



- To establish the reasons that made Me-Katilili to engage in resisting colonial domination among the Agiriama
- To determine her religious theological beliefs in liberating the Giriama community
- To analyse the response of Agiriama men, women and youth on Me-Katilili's liberation movement.
- To establish reasons of African Feminist Theologians in not putting efforts of studying Me-Katilili as a symbol of African Women's theology.

Methodology



- Ethnographic approach
- Interviews
- Participant observation in the Mekatilili yearly festivals
- Focus Group Discussions

Statement of the problem



- African feminists theologians have not studied Me-Katilili's Liberation movement in the context of African woman's theology.
- There has been a trend of recognizing Biblical women and despising African Indigenous Adherents who also had the inspiration of God and were use as mouth peace to speak for the oppressed.

Family Life Of Mekatilili – Marriage



- According to her close relatives, information from her granddaughter (Sayo wa Kalama) who is still alive, Mekatilili's original name was;
- Mnyazi.
- Her father was Menza
- She was born in the early 1840's at Bamba – a village called Mtsara wa Tsatsu.
- Born among the Giriama (Mwakiringi) clan of the Milalani Community.
- She had four brothers; Nzai, Hare, Kithi and Mwarandu.

Cont.

- During her youth, her brother Kithi was Kidnaped by the Arabs at Mtsanganiko maket. later She was married to the Mwamkare Clan of the Akidzini by Mulewa wa Duka.
- She had nine children; **Katilili, Karema, Kalama, Kavumbi, Kanazi, Mwathethe, Dyeka, Kwakidhiru and Mwedyia.** **Katilili** was also abducted without knowing who the abductors were.
- Later in life, she felt the need to have a co-wife (*mkakazi*) , who would keep her husband, Mulewa, company when she was away meditating on how these problems would for good be resolved. She was able to get a hard working and well disciplined co-wife (*mkakazi*) called **Kavunje/Ghawe-Dama.** Mekatilili's co-wife got three children with Mulewa; **Kitsao, Dama** and **Kahonzi.**
- After the revolt Mekatilili, Ghawe-Dama and their husband Mulewa went to settle at Gede; a place very close to Msabaha called Madunguni. When Mulewa died and was rested at Kaliapapo, Mekatilili was taken back to Bungale to be taken care of, as she was now advanced in age.

Her Religious Life



- She believed in God and the Midzi-Chenda ancestors – *koma na Mulungu*.
- She had high regard of the people close to God; ***atumia a makaya - mvaya*** (*kaya elders*), ***Magohu*** (*priests*), ***kambi*** (*committee*) and ***nyere*** (*youth*).
- Mekatilili was aware that traditional and religious governance among the Agiriama addressed all problems: health, political, development and leadership.
- She also believed that her religion had power to liberate the Agiriama and Midzi-Chenda in general from outside oppression.
- She was a member of the *Chifudu* (a womens' religious organisation)
- She was a healer

Her Experience with Foreign Religion and Leadership



- The Arabs had their own new religion, leadership and culture which they introduced to the midzi-chenda.
- The British like-wise had their own religion, leadership and culture which also they wanted the midzi-chenda to copy.
- According to Mekatilili these new religions did not belong to them. They were brought to destroy the aocial-religios structure of the Agiriam. She saw a weaknes in the Kaya Traditional and Religious Governance; not see the power of liberation in their religion. Brantley and Patterson both claim that she was a fluent public speaker, courageous and fearless. Mekatilili started receiving revelations from God and ancestors on how to handle the two powerful foreign leaders (Arabs and British). This was by the use of the Midzi-Chenda religion (*chikwehu*).

Her Feminist Liberation Movement



- According to Brantley Mekatilili mobilized women and youth to meet at Kaya Giriama in the June 1913 because she knew that the Agiriama men relied on women for reconciliation with the youth who were almost being influenced by the British.
- She sensitized her fellow women to embrace on their religion and religious practices such as rituals that would empower them to resist the new policies of governance introduced by the British.
- She mobilized all Agiriama to visit Kaya Giriama/fungo to renew their covenant with God.
- At Kaya Fungo she encouraged the mvaya, the magohu and kambi to administer an oath (*kiraho cha fisi*) in order to resist the demands of the British i.e.
 - (a) Taxation
 - (b) Forced Labour
 - (c) Carrier a corpse
 - (d) Ignore the rubber plantation at Mnirani – Masarini

Response of the Agiriama



- The Agiriama men, women and youth agreed to boycott the demands of the British.
- The Village elders did not attend the meetings of the British.
- The young people avoided to labour in the British farms.
- Generally, all giriama refused to pay tax.
- This was the beginning of the Agiriama – British uprising of 1914.
- Mekatilili became famous because of his activism of;
 - a) Childrens' Rights
 - b) Womens' Rights
 - c) Land Rights
 - d) Mens' Rights.
- She was a true feminist who used her African Indigenous Theology to resist oppressive powers.

Reaction of the British



- The British regarded her as a mad woman and a witch
- They destabilized the Agiriama leadership.
- They destroyed sacred places i.e. makayas by burning the kaya fungo
- The economy – by displacing the community into the dry lands
- They frustrated the Me-Katililis' Liberation Movement by taking her to prison in Kisii together with one of the supporting elders called *Wanje wa Mwadori Kola in 1914*. After six months they were able to escape from Kisii prison by foot back to Giriama land where they continued with their mission. Oral history from the informants indicate that she was later taken to Kismayu, but had to be brought back through a dialogue by a prominent Arab called Fadhil.

The Legacy of Mekatilili to Feminists Theologians



- She loved justice
- She protected the rights of children
- She educated women to be bold, courageous and defend their land.
- She was a true patriot who feared no man. She is said to have slapped Aurther Champion (the then Ass. D.C)
- Valued and loved her religion and culture
- She was ready to die for the truth

Recommendations and Conclusion African Feminist and Mekatilili



- The women's' theology in Africa should be focused in liberating society from oppression of all spheres i.e. political, economic, social and religious
- Similar to Mekatilili's'Womens' theology to address contemporary issues that affect African Society such as poverty, poor governance, corruption, health issues, terrorism and insecurity just as Mekatilili did.
- They should accept to risk their lives by being vocal to moral evil practiced by selfish and heartless leaders who have no concern of development of nations in Africa but interested in corruption.
- Women in Africa should be ready to take the role of leadership
- They should be patriotic,



Giriama Women Celebrating Mekatililis' Heriosm



**Giriama Women Celebrating Mekatililis'
Ready to defend their rights from oppression of any kind**



**Giriama Women Celebrating Mekatililis'
Mekatililis yearly festival**



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**Mekatililis' Tomb discovered
in 2004**



Research Conducted By
Dr. Tsawe-Munga
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collaboration with
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Cultural Association
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*Komati- Mulungu
Ndulu
Taireni.*



**Mekatililis' Tomb discovered
in 2004**