

Migrants and Martyrs in Eastern Africa: A Historical Engagement

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Abstract

The article explores the nature of “migrants” (temporal residents) and “martyrs” in East African Christianity from a historico-analytical design. It samples six cases of martyrdom, largely from the East African coast, to demonstrate the thin line between martyrs and migrants. An analysis of Bakongo Christianity, which was mooted in the sixteenth century, shows the legacy of “migrant” Portuguese who provided the first Christian martyr (John Robello) in Eastern Africa in 1585. In the course of engaging the sixteenth century and the nineteenth century attempts at Christianising Eastern Africa, the article brings out various forms of Christian martyrs, including the Mau Mau martyrs of the 1950s, during Kenya’s struggle for independence. It also brings out other forms of martyrs from non-Christian faiths. Hence, it cites the African indigenous religion, Islamic, and Christian martyrs. In sampling some cases of martyrdom, the article endeavours to ask: Is martyrdom the real test of faith, or is it the normal route for all “migrants” across the religio-social divides? Hypothetically, it argues that although some church historians ascribe the initial emergence and survival of Christianity in Eastern Africa to the nineteenth century European missionary explosion, it is the sixteenth century Portuguese migrants who first introduced a contextual form of Christianity in East Africa that survived through to the twentieth century despite experiencing a hotchpotch of challenges, where martyrdom formed one of the critical ones.

Keywords: Bakongo; martyrs; Mau Mau martyrs; migrants; Portuguese “migrant” Christianity

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Introduction

In this article, the Portuguese missionaries and traders of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries are referred to as the “migrant Portuguese.” This is partly driven by our definition of migrants as persons who move to other places in search of better prospects or people who move to other places as temporal residents. In the case of the “migrant Portuguese” missionaries, the quest for territorial growth and the desire to expand their Christian empire, among other factors, were some of the reasons for their temporal movements to Eastern Africa. Second, the article dwells on Augustinian and Jesuit friars as some of the key missionary groups that stamped their mark in the East African region during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. This does not mean that the Jesuits and the Augustinians were the only active groups among the Roman Catholic Christianity. Indeed, there were other Roman Catholic missionary groups and Roman Catholic Orders, including the Consolata Fathers, the Holy Ghost, the Consolata Sisters, the Patricks, the Loreto Sisters, Franciscan Sisters, the Assumption Sisters, and the Immaculate Conception Sisters, among others (Ngari 2016). Nevertheless, the context under discussion favours the Augustinians and the Jesuits. Third, Bakongo Christianity and early Christianity on the East African coast are methodologically sampled to demonstrate the positive role of migrant Portuguese Christianity that has remained an elusive element among historians. In other words, was the fifteenth to seventeenth century attempt at Christianising Africa, and East Africa in particular, a total failure? Are there positive imprints from migrant Portuguese Christianity? Were there African indigenous martyrs and Islamic martyrs on the east coast of Africa during the period under consideration, the fifteenth to twentieth century, and how did this play out? What is the juxtaposition between migrants (temporal residents) and martyrs (persecuted for their faith) in this context? Such concerns informs the plot of this treatise.

Martyrs and Martyrdom

A martyr is a person who is killed because of his or her religious beliefs, as in the case of John Rebello, a Goa-Portuguese Christian who became one of the earliest casualties in Eastern Africa (Strandes 1961). This came after fiery jihadist speeches by a Muslim-Turkish pirate, Mir Ali Bey, in 1585, which radicalised the people of the East African coast against the Portuguese version of Roman Catholic Christianity and their general conduct (Strandes 1961). To this end, Mir Ali Bey’s activities demanded that people denounce other faiths save for Islam. Rebello refused to denounce his faith, and was subsequently stoned, and afterwards dragged around the main town on the Island of Pate. He died from the injuries encountered during this ordeal (Gray 1958, 18). Hence a migrant Goan-Portuguese man was martyred at the hands of a fellow migrant, a Turk. As a result, the Portuguese, who had immense interests in the East African coast since the fifteenth century, as their empire spread across the Indian Ocean, had to contend with resistance from indigenous peoples, religious persecutions, and rival traders and eventually left East Africa by 1699. In other words, the Portuguese left Eastern Africa after their landmark venture, the “Fort Jesus in Mombasa fell to the Omanis [Muslims] after a 33-month siege, and rapidly thereafter control of the entire coast up to Kilwa in the south fell into their hands” (Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy

in Africa 2005, 1). As this article demonstrates, martyrdom was a common occurrence on both sides of the divide, and largely speaks to the hostile environment that prevailed. Hence, we shall consider indigenous African, Muslim, and Christian martyrs across racial divides.

Resistance and Forced Migrations

Prior to the migration of Portuguese to the East African coast after Saturday, 7 April 1498, when Vasco da Gama “anchored off Mombasa near where Fort Jesus stands today” (Nthamburi, n.d.), there were local Africans who occupied the Mvita Island of Mombasa. These indigenous peoples included the Wachangamwe, Wakilindini, Watanga, Kingozi, and the emerging Swahili people. With superior weapons, the Portuguese gave the locals a hard time as they sought to control the area in terms of religion (Roman Catholic Christianity) and trade (with Persians, Chinese, Indians, and Arabians who had been coming to trade in wine, metalware, pottery, cloth, and beads since the first century CE) (Jack 1972). Considering that the eighteenth century European Industrial Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment that ushered in steamboats and ships had not yet come, these traders to the East African coast relied on the monsoon winds that would blow them accordingly (Gathogo 2023). Characteristically, the two types of monsoons in Africa are the “West African Monsoon, which prevails during the Northern Hemisphere Summer (June through September), and the East African Monsoon with rains during spring and autumn” (CLIVAR, n.d.). Moreover, a collective “influence of the Indo-Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans drive the inter-annual and the decadal monsoon variability over these regions” (CLIVAR, n.d.).

When the locals (noted above) sought support from the Mazrui Oman Muslim Arabs, who were part of the incoming traders, some of whom had earlier migrated from the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula to Mombasa and the East African coast, they were readily given support (Strandes 1961). After fighting for a long time with the Mazrui soldiers, the Portuguese dominance in the area had died by 1699, though the final straw that broke the camel’s back was achieved in 1729 when they “officially” left the East African coast. A major attack or rebellion against the Portuguese was led by Sultan Yusuf in 1631. In this battle of migrants to the East African coast, the Portuguese armies who were residing in Fort Jesus, which they built in 1593, were massacred in cold blood (Gathogo 2019), hence they died as Christian martyrs at the hands of Mazrui-Muslim migrants. With time, the locals (the Wachangamwe, Wakilindini, Watanga, Kingozi, and the Swahili) who had sought the support of the Mazrui (Oman Muslim Arabs) and aggressively aided them in defeating the Portuguese were conversely forced to migrate to other “safer” areas of the East African coast (Tanga, Changamwe, Jomvu, and Mariakani among other places) when the Mazruis turned their guns against them and afterwards occupied their traditional bases (Gathogo 2019, 5).

The martyrdom of Rebello in 1585 as one of the first Christian victims in Eastern Africa is reminiscent of the case of the Roman Empire in the second century. Indeed, the Romans expected the early persecutions to push Christians to be “good citizens” or to

conform to their own patterns of religiosity (Strandes 1961). This “goodness” or “conformity” would have driven them to recant their beliefs and pay tributes to the Roman gods and spirits that were mysterious and feared, including Mars, the god of nature; Ceres, the goddess of agriculture; Minerva, the goddess of wisdom; Jupiter, the king of the gods and the god of thunder and lightning; and Apollo, the god of music and poetry, among others. It was Tertullian (c. AD 155–c. 220) who famously stated that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church” (Kennedy 1966, 21). Tertullian went beyond this by insisting that the Gospel could not be expressed while using the thought forms of Greek philosophy, which differed from some of his contemporaries, as in the case of Origen, who found it necessary to synthesise the Gospel with contemporary thought forms and eventually meet St. Paul’s model of “becoming all things to all people so that by all possible means, I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22, RSV); and eventually deal with the world in its diverse contexts (Kennedy 1966, 21). Nevertheless, Tertullian saw Christian persecution and martyrdom as a processes of building bold Christians rather than as a source of triggering migrations to safer places. Hence the blood of martyrs watered the faith in the God of Christendom rather than triggering mass movements to “safer” grounds.

Early “Migrant” Churches

On the east coast of Africa, migrant Portuguese missionaries attempted to establish the Roman Catholic churches in the sixteenth century. This refers to the islands of Zanzibar, Pemba, Lamu, Pate, Manda, and Mafia. The Jesuit priest Fr. Jeronimo Lobo, who visited Pate in 1624, described the area as follows:

The island of Pate is only four leagues long [approximately three miles]. Nevertheless, in such a small territory, there are four towns, each of which has its own King. The first when coming from Mozambique, is Lamu; the second and most important is Pate, where as I have said there is a factory; the third is Sio, quite small but fertile and in this region there are many Owls; the fourth is Ampaza, which is very pretty; there is a convenient bridge, which has attracted quite a few Portuguese, so that for some time now a church has been built there as well as a factory. (Lobo cited in Alonso 2007, 11–12)

Alonso (2007) concedes that before the establishment of churches by the likes of the Jesuit Fr. Lobo, several groups existed by 1624, namely the original inhabitants of the region whom the Portuguese called “Cafre” (African)—“the Swahili, the Bantu communities, and black race who stuck to African religion strongly, and the Banyans of Indian origin. The Swahili population were of Arab descent and were Muslims in their religiosity” (Jack 1972, 6). In other words, just as the first church on the east coast of Africa was introduced by migrants (Portuguese), the Islamic faith was also introduced by migrants (Arabs). These early attempts at establishing Roman Catholic churches by the Portuguese was done within a hostile environment which was predominantly Islamised by the Oman Arabs who had entered the East African coast since the seventh century. This bold attempt was also done amid the biting rivalry between the cities of Malindi and Mombasa, which stood 100 km apart.

To an extent, such rivalries were advantageous to the Portuguese enterprises as they first allied with Malindi. The latter supported the Portuguese when their ships besieged Mombasa in both 1505 and 1529 (Strandes 1961). Earlier in 1536, upon arrival at the port of Massawa, which is part of the larger Eastern Africa region, the Portuguese were pleased to find a Christian kingdom (Abyssinia, or the Ethiopian empire). They teamed up with the kingdom of Abyssinia to deliver victory against the Muslim soldiers of Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi (c. 1506–1543) who was leading the Adal Sultanate in the northern part of Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Additionally, the indigenous Coptic Church priests of Ethiopia and the Jesuit missionaries from Portugal became allies (Jack 1972). Despite the battles and general violence, such gestures ushered in the early migrant churches of the sixteenth century albeit that their religio-spiritual bases were weak. To blame the Portuguese for failing to successfully introduce Christianity in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries to the east coast of Africa, as the Church Missionary Society (CMS) later did in the nineteenth century after the coming of Ludwig Krapf in 1844 (Gathogo 2009), is nothing but ignorance, as circumstances were quite different.

The expansion of European missionaries in Sub-Saharan Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came after the Industrial Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment in continental Europe. The two events favoured the colonial and missionary enterprises. Besides this, the colonial and missionary enterprises benefited from the rivalries among the Busaidi and Mazrui dynasties that ruled Zanzibar and Mombasa, respectively. As a matter of fact, it was the Mazrui Muslims who unconsciously midwifed Christianity and colonial enterprise in the nineteenth century. This development began in February 1824, when “they invited Captain William Fitzwilliam Owen, the Naval commander of HMS *Leven* ship, Lieutenant J. J. Reitz [who] was left in charge of the British base but shortly died and was replaced as governor by Lieutenant J. B. Emery within the same year” (Gathogo 2019, 8) to come and fight their rival Busaidi dynasty who were about to attack them from their Zanzibar and Muscat bases. In so doing, the Mazrui Muslim Arabs met the team leader (Captain Owen) who was the commander of the British ship (HMS *Leven*) which was patrolling the Indian Ocean in their bid to stamp out the slave trade. They requested support which was readily given by the British who were eager to form a workable alliance that would help them to spread their religion (Christianity) and civilisation which they thought was the most superior globally (Aldrick 2013). This was followed by the Mazruis’ surrendering of their most spacious and magnificent two-storey building, which was renamed Leven House after the British ship that Captain Owen commanded. In a succession of events, Captain Owen’s team had surveyed the area and hoisted the British flag over both Leven House and Fort Jesus itself by the end of February 1824.

By the end of 1824, Leven House had been converted into the centre of British activities in Eastern Africa where socio-ecclesiastical matters were schemed. Since then, British explorers, missionaries, and colonists travelling to Uganda and other interior areas of Eastern Africa treated it as the starting point upon docking in the Mombasa port (Aldrick 2013). Protestant missionaries who came from 1844 onwards (Ludwig Krapf, Johannes

Rebmann and others) found Leven House a good starting point. Without pirate Mir Ali Bey (also called Mir Ali Beg) and a coalition of indigenous communities (Wachangamwe, Wakilindini, Watanga, Kingozi, and the Swahili) and the Mazrui Arabs that fought the Portuguese during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, the nineteenth century missionary enterprise was set to harvest dividends (Gathogo 2019). Hence the migrant Portuguese of the fifteenth to seventeenth century and the missionaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be judged from the same perspective, as the circumstances were radically different. In any case, Fort Jesus was built from 1593 to 1596 following the order of King Felipe II of Portugal to create a religio-social bulwark of the Old Port of Mombasa. It was christened Fort Jesus because the Portuguese viewed themselves as the agents or ambassadors of Christendom in the areas in which they were migrants (temporal visitors). As they wrestled with strong “enemies” of Christendom, they relied on the flag of the order of Christ. To guarantee themselves longevity (if not eternity), they believed that calling it Fort Jesus would help in securing such a dream (Kirkman 1974). It is no wonder that it remains a major tourist site in Eastern Africa and was declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations in 2011 (UNESCO 2023).

Bakongo Christianity

As James Diskant has noted, fifteenth and seventeenth century Portuguese Christianity had its greatest impact on the kingdom of Congo (Diskant, n.d.). In turn, this was one of the rare areas in Africa that were “never conquered in the early modern period.” Bakongo Christianity emerged among the Bakongo out of the discourses with the discredited “Portuguese migrant Christianity” where wars with the Muslims and the local Africans dented their image, and sometimes made their efforts look suspicious. It gave the impression that their only agenda was trade and not necessarily the Gospel of Christ, though this can be contested on the basis that theirs was a bold attempt at evangelisation prior to the Age of Enlightenment where the Mosaic “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, fracture for fracture, and hand for hand” (Lev 24:19–21) was the *modus operandi*, hence fashionable. After all, was it not an extension of the medieval age, where biblical ignorance, as in other forms of ignorance, was commonplace, as only the priests read the Bible in the Latin language? The medieval era or Middle Ages extended from 500 to 1500 CE and went hand-in-hand with the fall of the western Roman Empire in the sixteenth century. It was during this period that Latin was used as the common language in academia, a phenomenon where all educated people studied it (Backman 2022). A study of Bakongo Christianity, however, gives the impression of a “writers’ bias,” as one considers some ecclesiastical societies that had originated from Britain, as in the case of the Church of Scotland Mission, the Methodist Mission, and the Church Missionary Society, who failed to initiate a dialogue between the Gospel and African culture (inculturation). Undoubtedly, these protestant missionaries of the nineteenth century were overly dismissive of any possibility geared towards inculturation. In view of this, one wonders how “migrant” Christianity of the Portuguese surpassed them among the Bakongo, yet the Portuguese had come in the dark days of the medieval age.

Were the Portuguese experiencing some light of the Gospel (inculturation) during the dark era (medieval times)? Nevertheless, this dialogue among migrant Christianity with the Bakongo made it possible for the latter to outlive succeeding religious waves that have remained in Africa prior to and after the coming of Islam in the seventh century CE.

Indeed, Kongolese/Bakongo Christianity, which emerged from the Portuguese efforts, combined “local beliefs and practices with imported ones” (Diskant, n.d.). The Portuguese, who are portrayed by some African writers as trade-minded only, immoral, anti-mission, war-like, and heartless in their engagement with the East African coast (Mugambi 1989) conversely displayed diplomacy when dealing with the Bakongo as their kings “made treaties with the rulers of Kongo and other coastal African states” (Diskant, n.d.). They went on to supply them “with wool cloth, tools, and weapons, in return for gold, cotton cloth, ivory, and slaves” (Diskant, n.d.). While the supply of slaves and cheap labour was contentious, other forms of supply show people who had a cordial working relationship and bilateral cooperation. In view of this, Gathogo explains thus:

A story is told of King Afonso 1 (real name Mvemba a Nzinga or Nzinga Mbemba, 1456–1543), of the Kingdom of Kongo whom the Portuguese converted to their Roman Catholic Christianity as a measure of winning the entire populace (Gathogo 2001). After he was converted to Christianity, the entire kingdom professed the Portuguese version of Catholic Christianity. Shortly after, the Kongolese aristocracy leaders adopted Portuguese titles, coats of arms, dress styles and their new names. Additionally, some middle-aged members of the kingdom were sent to Portugal to acquire the western education. Further, the Kongolese now observed Christian festivals, opened up churches, as craftsmen made Christian artefacts that were later found by missionaries of the 19th century. (Gathogo 2020a, 11)

Sundkler and Steed (2004, 49) have narrated how, in the 1470s, “the Portuguese sailors reached the mouth of the Zaire River [Congo], eager to make *conquista* for their King.” They further explained how the deeper interaction between the Kongolese and the “migrant” Portuguese grew stronger as Diogo Cao went back to Portugal in 1483. This time, this team leader returned with four local Africans. The aim was to ensure that they learnt the Portuguese language and eventually become transcribers, interpreters, and translators and hence ease future communication between Portugal and Africa. This far-sighted strategy was to ensure a well-founded relationship among the Portuguese and the Africans. Further, his second visit in 1491 began the agenda of evangelism. This time he brought five clerics, evangelists from St. Eloi Monastery in Lisbon, and “Portuguese artisans and the Kongolese who had been baptized in Lisbon after catechetical instruction by Father Vincente dos Anjos” (Sundkler and Steed 2004, 50). Although the Holy Eucharist was not celebrated during the Easter of 1491, as the ship that was carrying the altar-stones had been delayed, it was a climactic moment as Mani Soyo, a key character among the locals, was baptised in the presence of more than 25 000 onlookers. Beside this, 3 May 1491 witnessed the baptism of the most respected

Kongolese by the name of Nzinga Nkuvu. To demonstrate his command, Nkuvu ordered that all fetishes, idols, and other things that he felt were not compatible with the Gospel of Christ be brought forth for public destruction. According to John Baur, Afonso's indigenous name was Mvemba Nzinga, son of Nzinga Nkuwu, and he was the first historically known king of the Kongo (Baur 1994). Afterwards, King Afonso was baptised, and the "migrant" Christianity displayed positive and permanent trajectories (Sundkler and Steed 2004).

In view of this, the "migrant" Portuguese Christianity has had mixed fortunes. While it has suffered a huge backlash among African scholars, it has also stamped its permanent imprints that are visible right into the twenty-first century CE (Mugambi 1989). It also has some positive far-reaching effects in the regional history and beyond. It is the Bakongo who were able to sustain Christian converts from the fifteenth century to the twenty-first century with the vigour of the early church, while the latter versions of evangelism that came afterwards are, in my view, getting nominal, or embracing the prosperity gospel as their new trajectory. With prosperity theologies and theologies of self-esteem being associated with American Pentecostalism, leaning on it rather than the local African initiatives gives another doom picture of Christianity in Africa. Certainly, a Christianity that is energised and invigorated by neighbours' waves retains its alien nature until practitioners learn to dialogue with their own local resources.

Augustinian Convent in Mombasa

Besides Bakongo Christianity which was the result of the works of migrant Portuguese of the fifteenth and seventeenth century, the Augustinian convent in Mombasa is another pointer to their evangelistic efforts which have always escaped historians' attention. As a matter of fact, the Augustinians managed to establish seven Roman Catholic convents from 1572 to 1597 (McConkey and McErlean 2007, 113). A Roman Catholic convent "is a community of Monks, Nuns, Religious Brothers or, Sisters or Priests" (Wikipedia 2023; see also Herbermann 1913). It can also mean a building used by the particular community of faith. In these convents, teachings on religion, musicology, philosophy, publishing, and other forms of education were offered (Alonso 2007). This implies that the Roman Catholic convents, prior to and after their sixteenth century activities, were critical in building a modern society. Hence their imprints cannot be ruled out among the Bakongo and East Africa in general right into the twenty-first century (Diskant, n.d.).

Besides the seven Roman Catholic convents (Goa and Hormuz in 1572; Tana-India in 1575; Cochín in 1580; Malacca in 1587; Chaul in 1590; Macao, which was founded by Spanish Augustinians from Philipppines in 1584; Muscat in 1597; Bassein in 1597; and the Mombasa convent, the tenth one, which was founded in January 1598, Alonso 2007), these Augustinian friars had been sent by their superior, Alexius Meneses (OSA) of Goa, India. Upon being consecrated as the archbishop of Goa in 1595, at the age of 35, Meneses (1559–1617) worked hard to expand the Augustinian Order beyond Portuguese East Africa during his 15 years of stewardship. He lost "many hours of sleep

in collecting and classifying records, as well as writing hagiographies” (Alonso 2007, 17). Alexius de Meneses’s elevation as the archbishop of Goa went hand-in-hand with the appointment of Don Francisco da Gama, a grandson of the famous Vasco da Gama, as the viceroy, the highest political representative of the king of Portugal. It was when he was on his way to India in 1596 that he was forced by circumstances to spend the winter in Mombasa.

During his stay at the Swahili coast, he observed that the whole region was badly lacking in spiritual oversight, with no Roman Catholic priests to minister to the soldiers and Portuguese traders. He also felt that the local people needed to be evangelised by Augustinians. His return to Portugal, after an eight-month stay in Mombasa, saw him book an appointment with Archbishop Meneses, at which time he urged him to send priests there. Considering that this was the time when Fort Jesus’s construction was nearing completion, the need for more soldiers and priests was a matter worthy of attention. Following a pattern that other Roman Catholic orders (Franciscans and Jesuits) had set, Meneses contacted the Augustinian Vicar Provincial and asked for volunteers to go to the Mombasa/East African mission. As a result, four Augustinian priests volunteered to go, and were under the leadership of Fr. Pedro de Nazareth who was deputised by Fr. Andrés Baptista. Upon their arrival in January 1598, they occupied the hermitage of St. Anthony on Mombasa Island (Mvita). In turn, the place was named after St. Anthony of Padua, who is also referred to as the “saint of the poor, of sailors and fishermen, of priests and travelers, a protector and guardian of the mails, and wonder-worker” (Alonso 2007, 19). He was born in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1195, and made history by joining the Order of St. Augustine, a denomination that was largely seen to attract mature people, at the age of 15.

The Augustinians later built their Augustinian convent near St. Anthony, Mombasa, in 1597, where the church of Misericordia, a tiny structure designated as “Arab Custom House” and other houses formed part of the buildings. The place was called “Gavana” and was situated in the East of the main street (McConkey and McErlean 2007, 113). To this end, Fr. Prof. Stephen Mbugua Ngari has perceptively noted as follows:

By 1624 there seems to have been four established places of worship in Mombasa. There was the Augustinian cathedral, the Misericordia church, the church inside the walled town referred to as the *igreja matriz* (mother church) and a chapel inside Fort Jesus. There are no records to show how Christianity was faring at Lamu and Pate, but there was a good deal of literature concerning Faza. At Pate, the ruler, Mwinyi Kombo, had been beheaded because of his great hatred for the Portuguese. There was, therefore, very little missionary enterprise to be expected in the context of such a strained relationship. (Ngari 2016, 2)

The Mombasa Augustinian convent largely focused on providing health care and education to the inhabitants (Ngari 2016). After the fall of Portuguese rule in Mombasa in the seventeenth century, little was heard about the Augustinian convents save for the martyrdom of four “Augustinians and 152 lay Christians” by the Sultan (Augustinians,

n.d.). The Augustinians only returned to Kenya in 1977 from Miraa Porte, Italy, and founded a monastery at Ishiara, in the Mbeere sub-county of Kenya. Ishiara is within the present day Embu Catholic Diocese. On their website, the Augustinians' Vicariate of St. Rita-Kenya traced their presence in Eastern Africa (Kenya) since 1597 as follows:

In 1984, Spanish Augustinian Missionary Sisters through the invitation of Bishop Silas Njiru of Meru diocese opened a girl's secondary school at Ishiara and gave it the name St. Monica. In 1989 ... the Prior General asked the Irish Province and Nigerian vice province to send Augustinians to help in running the Ishiara parish and give spiritual care to the contemplative nuns. In 1994 Cardinal Otunga [former archbishop of Nairobi] asked the Prior General in Rome if the Order of Saint Augustine would set up a formation house in Kenya and accept Kenyan vocations. "After all," he said, "You were the first missionaries to bring the faith to Kenya." In 1997, a formation house was built in Southlands Nairobi and Kenyan candidates were accepted. In February 1998 Augustinians took up the newly established Sacred Heart parish in Baba Dogo, Nairobi. In 2004 an International house (Friary) was blessed and opened for the formation of Augustinian theologians in Karen, Nairobi. In 2006 Augustinians took up a newly established parish after invitation from the Archbishop of Kisumu In 2013, the Augustinians took up a parish in Eldoret diocese after invitation by the Bishop of Eldoret... . On 1st January 2017, the Augustinians took up a newly established parish in Meru diocese. The parish is called Holy family Mbwiru parish near Chuka town. On 29th January 2017 the Augustinians took up an already existing parish in Kericho diocese. The name of the Parish is St. Luke's Kebenet Parish. (Augustinian, n.d.)

Besides the imprints of Augustinian friars, John Dos Santos, a Dominican friar who had a station at Kerimba Islands in Mozambique, had in 1591 managed to baptise a relative of Zanzibar's sultan (Gathogo 2009). Despite the hostile environment that obtained, the "migrant" Christianity of the Portuguese had managed to have 4000 converts in Mombasa by 1624 (Gathogo 2009) who, however, underwent two centuries of persecutions or martyrdom until they became more or less non-existent by the nineteenth century when there was a new wave of European missionary expansion in the same area.

Thus, although the "migrant" Portuguese's version of Roman Catholic Christianity has been dismissed as non-existent and as that which evaporated in the tropical heat of Eastern Africa together with its attempted social influences (Mugambi 1989), its resilient nature could as well be the hidden reality that historians of religion have tended to by-pass. In other words, both the Augustinian convents and Bakongo Christianity demonstrate the imprints of "migrant" Christianity amidst strong wave of hostility that obtained, albeit with a historically suppressed or covert impact. Was it a by-product of the writers' bias, as all historians write from their own perspectives?

Mau Mau Martyrs (1952-60)

While the nineteenth and twentieth century European missionaries benefited from the colonial structures that fixed roads, railways, and other breakthroughs of the Industrial

Revolution, the fifteenth and seventeenth century attempts at Christianising the East African region did not enjoy such luxuries (Gathogo 2023). First, there were thick bushes that were best known by the Arab traders and slave dealers who would move to the interior to capture slaves for their markets. Second, the fact that the nineteenth and twentieth century European missionaries were more zealous in evangelising Eastern Africa than the former was aided by the coming of colonialism and the impact of the Berlin Conference of 1884/85 which partitioned Africa and allocated the more than 50 states to the European powers. These European missionary groups, especially the Protestant wing, were the German Lutheran Mission, the Church Missionary Society, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Friends of Africa Mission, the African Inland Mission, the Church of Scotland Mission, the United Methodist Mission, and the Gospel Missionary Society, among others (Gathogo 2010). Third, the coming of the Mau Mau martyrs of the 1950s, referring to people who were killed for failing to take the binding oath for Kenya's war of independence, is a sign that the latter missionaries were more effective in reaching out to the local Africans than the "migrant" Portuguese missionaries. In the circumstances that obtained from the mid-1940s to the late 1950s, a person was expected to take the oath of freedom, which was more of a mockery of the holy sacrament of bread and wine, to commit oneself to the freedom struggle. A person who had undertaken the Mau Mau oath was supposed to kill when ordered by his seniors, keep the organisation's secrets, spy for the team, or retreat to the forest as a guerrilla fighter if requested to do so. The oath takers were also warned that failure to obey the vows made during the oath-taking session may lead to a "curse" or even a death penalty that would be administered by members of the movement. As a result, scores of people volunteered to die rather than go against their Christian faith. There are those who asked for time to pray and "reconcile" with the God of Christendom before they were killed, after which they were either beheaded or shot dead by the rebels who would afterwards retreat to the thick forests so as to avoid capture by the British colonial forces who ruled Kenya (1887–1963). In a nutshell, the rebels made it clear that whoever collaborated with the colonial government and its religious inclination (Christianity) would be seen as an enemy. Though they were largely schooled in church-sponsored schools, the Mau Mau rebels viewed their war of liberation as a contest between the God of African religion (*Ngai*) and the God of Christendom. In one of their liberation songs, they said: "if we lose the freedom war, we know it is you God who has lost the war; and we are sure, you cannot lose the war; if we win this war, you are the ultimate winner" (Gathogo 2020b, 5). Such a religious dimension made the rebels who were killed by the colonial forces (seen as beholden to the Christian faith) to be regarded as martyrs of African religion.

The "voluntary" deaths of so many Christian revivalist Kikuyus in central Kenya during the Mau Mau war of independence drove the then Anglican archbishop of East Africa, Leonard James Beecher, CMG (1906–87), to team up with then Fort Hall District (now Murang'a County) commissioner, John Pinney, to push for the idea of building a permanent memorial church for such cases (personal interviews with church leaders, 17 February 2023). Hence, the construction of the present day St. James & All Martyrs

Cathedral, Murang'a, began in earnest. Its commencement came after the infamous Operation Anvil of April 1954, a phenomenon where all Mau Mau suspects in Nairobi and its environs were swooped on and bundled into police Land Rovers. They were taken to the various prisons across the then Kenya Colony. Nonetheless, St. James and All Martyrs Cathedral, Murang'a, had its foundation stone laid by the then archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Dr Geoffrey Fischer, at Fort Hall (Murang'a), on 18 May 1955. Upon its completion, it was consecrated by Bishop Obadiah Kariuki in October 1958. The "migrant" connection in this Mau Mau historiography is the irony that came with it (personal interviews with church leaders, 17 February 2023). First, the Christians who chose to die as martyrs, mainly from the East African Revival Movement, largely saw themselves as sojourners or migrants who would later return to their original home, where their good rooms awaited them (John 14). They had good Christian missions to pursue in their earthly lives, but when it came to choosing between death and life, they were somewhat in a dilemma, as their living was to witness to Christ and his resurrection, as death was also a gainful enterprise (Phil 3:20–21), and viewed their eventual meeting with Christ as the end goal. The "migrant" brethren who opted for martyrdom rather than partake of another one (consume elements of goat blood), now that Christ did it once and for all, were strongly reasoning with St. Paul's letter to the Philippians (3:20–21), as theirs was heavenly citizenship where their martyred bodies, mutilated for that matter, would be like Christ's glorious body. Without biblical exegesis, which urges deeper analysis and reflection of any given biblical text in order to establish the original meaning and thereby apply it appropriately, the Mau Mau martyrs, in Murang'a, Nyeri, Meru, Nakuru, Kirinyaga, Embu, and the rest of the then Kenya Colony, were certainly encouraged by the beauty of the scriptural promises, and would not compromise at all. Their motto was "let the word of God remain the word of God," and "let the savior remain the savior" (Gathogo 2020b). As citizens of heaven, the "migrant" revivalists were eagerly awaiting the Saviour, "the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20).

Such bold faith, akin to that of the deacon Stephen (in Acts 6:55–56) who "looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" and further saw "heaven open" as "the Son of Man" stood "at the right hand of God," baffled not just the locals and Archbishop Beecher, but the global community. While the local Africans (the Wachangamwe, Wakilindini, Watanga, Kingozi, and the Swahili) teamed up with the Mazrui-Oman Arabs to wrestle down Portuguese Christianity during the fifteenth and seventeenth century (Jack 1972), the twentieth century encountered credible witness of the Christian faith; a phenomenon where Mau Mau martyrs viewed themselves as sojourners or migrants, as heaven was their ultimate home (John 14). In other words, the message was clear, that historical Christianity had genuine witnesses who needed "no other argument rather than Jesus is Lord." Indeed, as in the Christian hymn which says, "My faith has found a resting place," the revivalists would sing thus: "I need no other argument, I need no other plea; It is enough that Jesus died, And that He died for Me" (Moen 2017; see also Gathogo 2020b). Certainly, the song echoed St.

Paul's words: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and participate in his sufferings, and become like him in his death" (Phil 3:10, RSV).

Conclusion

The article has ably demonstrated six instances of martyrdom in the East African context, with particular reference to the east coast. The first instance was John Robello, a Goa-Portuguese Roman Catholic Christian who was killed in 1585 during Mir Ali Bey's Jihadist initiative. The second one took place in 1631 when the Portuguese Roman Catholic faithful were killed during Sultan Yusuf's siege. The third instance of martyrdom took place in 1586 when the Portuguese Christians beheaded a Muslim (Lamu Sheikh) after he was accused of aiding Mir Ali Bey in crippling the Portuguese in the previous attack of 1585. Nthamburi (n.d.) has also put forward the ruler of Pate (Mwinyi Kombo) as another case of beheading by the Portuguese. The fourth case of martyrdom has been identified as the killing of four Augustinian priests and 152 lay Christians by the sultan in January 1598. The fifth case is seen among the inhabitants of Mombasa, who were adherents of African indigenous religion: the Wachangamwe, Wakilindini, Watanga, Kingozi, and Swahili. Initially, they sought support from the Mazrui Muslim Arabs to defeat the Portuguese Christians. With the Islamic religion being seen as closer to the indigenous religion, the locals thought that they would form a religio-military alliance with the former, only to end up as martyrs whose remnants had to migrate to the present-day Changamwe, Mariakani, Jomvu, and other places in the coastal region. These remnants were largely assimilated into other coastal communities, and their voices remain suppressed in the twenty-first century, as little is said or written about them. The sixth group of martyrs are the Mau Mau martyrs, a phenomenon where African Christian converts in the East African revival movement chose to die rather than take the binding oath for Kenya's quest for independence from colonial rule. They also considered themselves sojourners or migrants (temporal residents) of this world, as their heavenly home was their ideal home (John 14). As Mau Mau rebels murdered the "stubborn" Christian revivalists, who insisted on "nothing but the blood of Jesus," migrants and martyrs became related concepts in Eastern Africa, as martyrs considered themselves as sojourners or migrants (temporal residents) of this world.

Based on the evidence given in this article, we are not convinced of Nthamburi's contention that the victims of the Fort Jesus attack were not genuine martyrs who died for their faith. This refers to the case of Sultan Yusuf who led in the killing of the migrant Portuguese who were residing in Fort Jesus in 1631 and other noted cases. To reduce it to a mere colonial uprising, as one group resisted the "transfer" from one master to another, is tantamount to denying that faith exists at all. In our view, all these attacks were motivated by religious creeds and religio-cultural supremacy quests, hence Muslims rarely attacked fellow Muslims. Christians likewise martyred Muslim "enemies" of their faith whom they regarded as traitors. The Mau Mau rebels in Kenya's war of independence were motivated by African indigenous religion, and constantly insisted that they could not lose the war of independence because it was *Ngai's* (God's)

war with the enemies of African religion; hence victory was always God's, the one who does not lose battles with mortal beings. Thus, their political agitation became a religio-cultural contest between the European religion (Christianity) and African indigenous religion, a phenomenon where *Ngai* had to grant their victory come what may. In their bizarre activities such as the beheading of the revivalists and other "traitors" of the freedom struggle, they were seeing the African Christians as double-dealers, hence the real enemies of *Ngai*. Likewise, the revivalists saw the taking of the Mau Mau oath as a mockery of the Holy Eucharist. Theirs was the "pure" religion of the God of Christendom, in which partaking of the Eucharist was a constant reminder of the final blood that was shed for humanity as God's salvific providence.

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