

GIRIAMA AND DIGO DANCE STYLES¹

by

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It is often said in Kenya that people living on the Kenyan coast 'really know how to dance' and 'their dances are really important to them'. These statements refer to the dancing of the Giriama and Digo peoples. They inhabit the Kenyan coastal strip from Malindi in the North, to the Tanzanian border in the South; the Giriama living to the North of Mombasa and the Digo to the South.

The Giriama and Digo both originate from the Nyika or Mijikenda group of nine tribes of the Bantu race. They are supposed to have migrated around 1600 from Shungwaya, an area in South Somalia at the mouth of the Tana river near Port Durnford and Bur Gao. They were called Nyika people or WaNyika by the coastal Swahili because they inhabited the bush hinterland (*nyika* is Swahili for bush). However, the people themselves regard this as an insulting term. They prefer to be called Mijikenda, a distortion of Makayachenda, from the Swahili, meaning the nine *kayas*. *Kayas* are fortified clearings in the bush used originally for settlement. The Giriama and Digo are the two largest of the nine tribes. The Giriama is the bigger of the two and they kept themselves separate from the others. The Digo continued to travel South when the others settled further North, and the Giriama, as the rear guard, settled furthest North. So, from the time of the settlement on the coast (c.1600), it seems the two groups were separate.

Their patterns of settlement, however, were very similar. Both groups are agriculturalists who set up *kayas*, initially for defence purposes against hostile tribes, such as the Galla, from whom they originally fled South. The *kaya* system of settlement, which was also a form of central political organisation, remained with both groups for the next two hundred years or so, although due to famines, exhaustion of land and population increase, the original *kayas* were abandoned and new ones formed. Although both groups were reasonably mobile within their chosen area of settlement, neither moved out of these original areas.

As both groups of people began to feel more secure (in the case of the Giriama, supposedly due to British colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century, but earlier in the case of the Digo) they left the *kaya* system of settlement altogether and formed separate family homesteads. This decentralisation resulted in a much more diversified set up and broke ties with the traditional, political systems which centred round the *kayas*. Both groups had a ruling council or parliament of elders in each *kaya*. The Giriama called theirs *Kambi* and the Digo, *Ngambi*, and each of these had a head or leader. The Digo leader, the *kubo*, had much more power and was more king-like. Both groups suffered several famines and droughts. As a result, both developed rain-making sources. The Giriama have a great belief in magic and the spirits of the dead, and hence, developed their own rain-making customs. The Digo, however, used and paid for Vumba magic for this purpose. The Vumba are one of the neighbouring Swahili tribes. Finally, both groups had ivory trade ties with the Kamba people, a Bantu group several miles further inland.

As Brantley (1973) states 'the Mijikenda share cultural, linguistic and political customs as well as the historical tradition of migration from the Singwaya (Shungwaya) site'. Yet despite these historical and ethnological links, and the fact that the Giriama and Digo peoples are neighbours on the coast, their dance styles are very different.

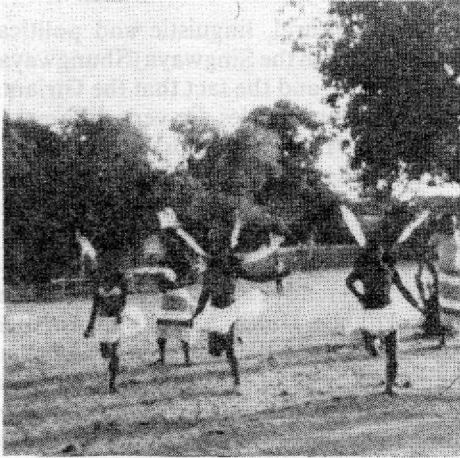
The dances of these people are renowned in Kenya. Along with those of the Kamba and the Chuka drummers, they stand out as lively, vigorous and often technically complex performances. They have become well-known as highlights of Kenyan traditional dance. Being on the coast they are also easily accessible to the rapidly expanding tourist trade. This may be one reason why they are not only very much alive today, but also in an ever-changing and evolving, creative state. They are often, importantly, representative of Kenyan traditional dance. Unless tourists have visited the 'Bomas of Kenya' in Nairobi (Kenya's national traditional dance group) as well as the coast, they will probably take home their memories of Giriama and/or Digo dancing as their sole impression of Kenyan traditional dance. For them, that *was* Kenyan dance. For these reasons it is interesting to examine Giriama and Digo dance styles.

Giriama dance

Giriama dances are lively, dynamic and colourful performances. An immediate impression is of the girls' fast, vigorous hip-shaking accompanied by one or two men leaping around energetically shaking their elbows to fast, strong drum rhythms. Giriama dance groups consist mainly of teenage girls accompanied by one or two older men. Champion (1914) reports that during the Makazengi famine of 1884 women were sold to the coast people in exchange for food. A large female surplus was reported among the adults of the Northern Nyika groups of peoples in 1948 in contrast to the Digo figures (Prins, 1952). At this time the surplus may have been reflected in the composition of Giriama dance groups and, if the composition has survived, it would account for the current predominance of females in groups. In some cases the dance groups consist of equal numbers of men and girls, but in most, the girls form the main core of the group with one or two older men leading and encouraging them. Groups generally have between six and twelve dancers.

The girls are traditionally bare-breasted and wear sisal or grass skirts (*marindas*) for dancing, which emphasise the characteristic hip-shaking movement (see Illustration No. 1). As one Giriama dancer said, 'the hip movement is nothing without the skirt'. Modern costumes include bras and cotton versions of the skirts. The incorporation of bras is, it seems, due to the large number of performances done for foreign tourists. Otherwise they are not worn. The Giriama have had unfortunate experiences with foreigners, both Arabs and British, in their history, and Leys (1924) claimed they were 'ignorant, superstitious and suspicious of strangers' and they have 'acquired a hatred of everything foreign' (p. 143). It is therefore possibly not surprising that they cover themselves to dance in front of foreigners. The girls also wear feathers attached to their backs and/or heads and bells or rattles on knees or ankles. The men wear long pieces of cloth wrapped round their waists which reach to the ground.

One Giriama dance leader described their movements as dancing with the whole body, so that skirts and feathers worn also dance. This is true; all parts of the body are involved at different times, demonstrating a large variety of movement qualities.



Giriama *gonda* dance, Charo wa Shutu's group, Msabaha village near Malindi

III. 1 Hip-shaking movement

III. 2 Same, crouching

The striking hip-shaking movement of the girls in both *Gonda* and *Mabumbumbu* dances is done very fast from side to side, sometime in a crouched position (see Illustration No. 2) and sometimes standing. A 'Bomas of Kenya' choreographer told me that 'the Giriama highlight the hip movement in each dance'. He said 'it is a special kind of hip movement that other tribes don't have'. Although hip-shaking is common in many Kenyan traditional dances, that of the Giriama is distinctive and unique, because it is extremely energetic and fast. This is one of the aspects of Giriama dancing that makes it famous and popular with Kenyan people. One Giriama dancer told me that 'the shaking of the hips in the *Gonda* dance makes the hips or bottoms bigger, because that's where the work is!' Large hips are admired in Giriama women. For everyday dress they wear rolls of cloth wrapped round their hips to make them look bigger and impress their menfolk.

Various other movements follow and precede the girls' hip-shaking. These include undulating the pelvis forwards and backwards, double take-off vertical jumps (see Illustration No. 3), half and full turns, almost spins when done fast, and combinations of running, kicking, marching and stamping. The running is usually done in place, kicking the heels up high behind. The kicking, also in place, is done in front and the marching is done forwards, backwards and on the spot. These steps are combined according to the alternating rapid drum rhythms (e.g. three quick steps forward, a stamp, a jump, a spin, three quick steps backwards and a kick). All of these steps are set, in no sense are they free or improvised. They are precisely and identically performed by all the dancers.

Alternating with these bursts of activity are 'relaxing' sections of the dance involving a simple bending of alternate knees on the spot, resulting in a hip-swinging motion following the underlying drum rhythm exactly. Whilst the girls are shaking their hips and executing various combinations of the active steps mentioned above, the men vigorously shake their elbows and forearms in front of them in a fast up and down movement, hands facing inwards and elbows pointing out. In the *Gonda* the men

perform this behind the girls, but in the *Mabumbumbu*, they move around in front of them encouraging them. In this dance, named after the drums used and the sounds they make, when the girls revert to the 'relaxing' step, the men perform acrobatic solos showing great gymnastic ability and virtuosity.

It is extremely difficult to say how old most of these dances are. Historical references to Giriama dances do not mention these dances or anything similar. However, there is evidence that the acrobatic elements are at least fifty or so years old, as these are mentioned in an account of the Gotani Show, a Giriama agricultural show.

The formation for the dances is either two lines — girls in front and men behind — or a compact set of couples e.g.



The drummers are in a group at the front and to one side of the dancers. The dancers say they cannot dance without the drums. The musicians lead the dancers who follow their rhythms exactly. The drums are the only musical instruments, apart from a whistle used by the leader for purposes of direction, and the dancers also sing. The drums are called *bumbumbu* and there are usually between three and six, either the same in size or different. They are single membrane stool drums consisting of a wood cylinder 12"-15" in diameter and 2' 6" high. They have notches in the base so they can stand vertically on three legs. They are struck in an upright position with the palm of the hand. Most Giriama groups use only drums, but some minor Mijikenda tribes, who are close neighbours of the Giriama, such as the Chonyi, have a large variety of musical instruments.

The rhythms produced consist of a basic regular beat, which accompanies the 'relaxing' step, and complex combinations of quick beats, which accompany the other more active steps. One or two drummers keep the basic regular beat going throughout, whilst the others join them during the 'relaxing' step, but change to the rapid combinations of beats when the other steps are performed. The tempo throughout is fast.

Digo dance

Digo dances have a unique quality described as soft, smooth and graceful. They are renowned for their beauty produced by the combination of music, costume and movement. Digo dancing is admired because of the fascinating and intricate relations between the movements and the sounds of the many musical instruments used. Another striking feature is the graceful movement of the women. One Digo dancer said, 'the women in the *Sengenya* dance give you a picture of a beautiful lady trying to show off in her movements, it gives a very nice picture of beauty'. Another male dancer comments about the same dance, 'the movements produce emotion, you enjoy doing it, it's beautiful, you get carried away by the dance itself, the movements just flow one to another, as if not changing, but you are changing'. This ability to get carried away, due to the combination of music and movements, is reiterated by other dancers.

III. 3 Giriama *gonda* dance, vertical jumpsIII. 4 Digo *kayamba* dance, Waa location, Kwale district, women's costume

The characteristic Digo movement is shoulder-shaking, especially by the women. This, although quick, has a light, sensitive quality unlike the more common, vigorous shoulder-shaking of other Kenyan dances, such as those of the Kamba. One shoulder moves forward as the other moves backward in quite quick succession. This is enhanced by small shoulder capes edged with beaded fringes, worn by the women over ordinary knee-length dresses or floor-length wrappers (see Illustration Nos. 4 & 5). The men wear wrappers and tunic shirts of the same cloth as the women, with large feathers attached to their backs diagonally across one shoulder (see Illustration No. 6) again emphasising and enlarging the effect of the shoulder-shaking. Rattles and bells are also worn on ankles or knees by some. The women make themselves even more attractive by wearing plenty of jewellery and ornaments. The dancers tend to be drawn from the older generation and there are approximately equal numbers of men and women. Groups usually have between twelve and twenty dancers.

III. 5 Digo *mzungano* dance, entrance

III. 6 Men's costume

The shoulder-shaking movement is combined with a shuffling step consisting of a small step on one foot bringing the other foot together with it in a small tap. This is then alternated and used both on the spot and for travelling. Another common Digo movement is vigorous forearm and elbow shaking by the men, similar to that of the Giriama.

One of the most well-known Digo dances is the *Sengenya*. One of the dancers from the 'Bomas of Kenya' described it as 'a very soft dance, not very vigorous, and one of the best African dances because of that, because it is different'. The dancers enter in two lines, one of men and one of women (as in Illustration No. 5) doing the shuffling step and the shoulder-shaking described earlier. These steps are done in both an upright position and with the knees bent slightly. The two positions alternate after every four, six, eight or more steps, depending on the music. The dancers form a crescent with the women in front and their male partners behind. Variations of the same basic step are then executed on the spot. Sometimes the men's line comes through the spaces in the women's line to be in front and then the women repeat the move. The women also go down on their knees, thus the men's shoulder-shaking and forearm and elbow movements are seen more clearly. In other sections of the dance the two lines travel round in an anti-clockwise oval pathway continuing the same basic step.

Sengenya is typical of most Digo dances, exhibiting smooth, graceful qualities. *Mzumbano*, however, is an exception. The outstanding feature of this dance is the *kiriba* worn and played by the men. The *kiriba* is a skin with metal imitation cowrie shells attached to it. It is worn on the right leg attached by rope at the waist, the knee and the calf. It stretches from the waist down the outside of the leg almost to the ankle (see Illustrations Nos. 6 & 7). It is played by rubbing a *mugao*, or metal shield with a wooden handle, up and down the skin, making a very loud sound. In order to do this, the leg must be lifted slightly from the hip, and the body tilted to the left, lifting the *kiriba* (see Illustration No. 7). It is played whilst the men leap around each other, twisting and turning in the air, and whilst they lie on their sides on the ground (see Illustration No. 8). Whilst this is going on, the women maintain the more typical style



Ill. 7 Digo *mzumbano* dance, *kiriba* playing technique



Ill. 8 *Kiriba* technique, prone

of Digo dancing, as in the *Sengeny*. The formation for *Mzumbano* dance is similar to that of *Sengeny*; the dancers enter in two lines and then form a crescent with the women in front. This is broken by the men when they come out, either in pairs, or alone, to leap and play the *kiriba*.

Digo dances are reasonably homogeneous in style and the rhythms and movements are generally at a medium pace. The Digo have a strong musical tradition, especially vocally. This could possibly be attributed historically to the close links with their neighbours, the Taveta or the Mijikenda Segeju, who, like the Masai, have a strong, vocal musical tradition. Songs and many different musical instruments accompany the dances. These include large and small drums, similar to the Giriama one described, but sometimes longer and narrower, large horns which make a deep loud sound, *kivote* (flutes about 18" long, blown on the side with three or four holes), *kayamba* raft rattles, whistles and knee and ankle rattles made of imitation cowrie shells. The Digo's Swahili neighbours, the Shirazi and Vumba, have also always had a large selection of musical instruments for ceremonial use (McKay, 1975). For many, it is the variety of sounds produced, and the intricate rhythms resulting, combined with the dance movements, which give Digo dances their unique, aesthetic value.

Similarities in the two styles

Shoulder-shaking exists in both Giriama and Digo dances. In each case feathers attached to the backs enhance and enlarge the vibratory effect of the movement. Whereas in most Digo dances the shoulder-shaking continues throughout to keep the rhythm (e.g. in *Sengeny*), in Giriama dances, such as the *Gonda* and *Mabumbumbu*, it comes in isolated sections and is mostly done by the girls only. The shoulder-shaking of the Digo dances is done in an upright position and all at about the same speed. In the Giriama *Mabumbumbu* dance, however, the girls sometimes go down on their knees and shake their shoulders parallel to the ground, and they sometimes bend their trunks from the waist and slowly move the shoulders back and forth towards and away from the ground. So, although shoulder-shaking is a common movement in both styles, it is executed differently.

Another common movement is the men's vigorous elbow and forearm shaking enhanced by feathers attached to the elbows. This is one of the few movements which occurs identically in both styles. In most Digo dances, and the *Gonda* Giriama dance, this is seen behind the movements of the girls and women. These are really the only identical movements used in both styles. Further similarities rest on tenuous connections and associations. The Digo shuffling step-tap-together movement can also be seen in a slightly different form in the *Gonda* and *Mabumbumbu* dances. The tapping is emphasised more and in some cases it becomes a stamp.

Jumping exists in both styles, but whereas the Giriama jumps are vertical, double take-off actions, those in the *Mzumbano* dance (and they do not occur in any other Digo dances) are leaps from one foot to another done by the men in pairs, flinging their arms in the air, when not playing their *kiribas*.

The other major similarity between the two styles is that of formation. Both groups form lines to dance, and in a version of the *Mabumbumbu* dance, there is a phrase identical to one in the *Sengeny*, where the back row of men moves between the women to become the front row.

Differences in the two styles

One of the major differences between the two styles is the overall quality produced. Giriama dances have much stronger and more vigorous movements than Digo dances, requiring more muscular tension, although some of the men's movements in the Digo *Mzumbano* also possess this quality. Otherwise Digo dances are more fluid, light and graceful, requiring less tension and more sensitivity. Giriama dances tend to be faster showing more sudden movements and changes of action, whereas the Digo dances, especially the *Kayamba* and *Sengenya*, progress more sedately. The Giriama rhythms are regular but the Digo rhythms tend to be more complex due to a larger variety of instruments. They are continuous and only change after a pause in the music, unlike the Giriama rhythms, which alternate.

The other major difference in style is that Giriama dances possess more steps than do Digo dances. The major Digo step is the shuffling step-tap-together step and most dances seldom deviate from this combined with the rhythmic shoulder-shaking action. The only deviations known to the author are the jump of the men in the *Mzumbano* dance and a bending of the right (usually) knee and beating of the same heel to keep the rhythm with the leg and ankle bells. In contrast, the Giriama use many different step combinations including acrobatic male solos.

This difference in the number of steps and actions performed, in turn, dictates the body shapes produced. Hence, Digo dancers are upright or slightly bent over forward as they shake their shoulders, whereas in Giriama dancing, there are many more occasions when the body is required to change shape in order to accommodate different steps. Quite often the normal upright position is changed to a curved, crouched position or turned and twisted to allow for quick changes of step. In Digo dancing the only twisting observed is in the *Mzumbano* dance during the male leaping steps.

Giriama dancers tend to move more off the spot than do the Digo. Both groups move forwards and backwards but the backwards direction is used more in Giriama dances. In the *Mzumbano* dance the women and remaining men (i.e. those who are not leaping), move from side to side, whilst the other men leap in front of them. The Giriama, on the whole, do not use these sideways directions, but when the girls shake their hips they move diagonally forwards both to left and right. Both styles, especially the Digo, require dancers to remain on the spot for most of the time. The Giriama utilise a greater range of levels, for they jump high and crouch low, and also get down on their knees and almost kiss the ground, when shaking their shoulders in one version of the *Mabumbumbu* dance. Although in Digo dances there are also high and low movements, these tend to be rare and not so extreme. The exception is in the *Mzumbano* dance, when the men leap and then lie on the ground (see Illustration No. 8), and in the *Sengenya* when the dancers walk with their knees bent in a semi-crouch position.

Digo dances tend to be longer and more drawn out than their Giriama equivalents, which are short and to the point, unless a series of sections of a dance are linked together. Both styles, in common with other African traditional dances, adopt a 'call and response' pattern which is dictated by the nature of the accompanying song. This means there is a verse section which the lead singer, who is often also the lead dancer, sings whilst the others perform the 'relaxing' step in order to listen to the song. At this

moment in the *Mabumbumbu* there might also be a male acrobatic solo. Then there is a chorus section which all sing together whilst all doing the same dance steps. Both styles have a leader or leaders. For the Giriama it is usually one or two men whereas for the Digo, either the female song leader also leads the dance or there is a separate male dance leader.

Functions of the dances

Most of the Giriama and Digo dances originated as celebratory dances. They were, and still are, done to mark special occasions such as weddings, funerals and visits of important people. There is evidence that Giriama dances were performed at initiation ceremonies of the Kambi (the ruling *rika* age set), but these ceremonies started dying out towards the end of the nineteenth century with the diversification of settlement. Giriama dances were also closely associated with the secret societies of the community and the exorcism of evil spirits. Champion (1914) describes the *Uganja*, *Chengi Chengi*, *Kijimbi* and *Kifudu* dances he saw at a funeral he witnessed in March 1913, but no evidence has been found by the author that these dances are still done today. An article written in 1957 (Kenya Today) mentions the dancing and feasting that takes place annually at Giriama New Year celebrations in October and November. It therefore seems from historical evidence that dance played a part in many aspects of Giriama life.

Almost every village or community on the coast has its own dance group with a leader who trains them. As there are a number of groups performing the same dances, rivalry has grown up between them and competitions are held to select the best group for music festivals or to entertain important visitors. The *Mabumbumbu* is often done as a competitive dance by young boys and girls around Malindi; the boys compete in order to gain girlfriends.

All the dances mentioned by name represent a series of dances, and various groups have their own versions of these which may differ. The dances also serve an educational and socialising function within the village community. Right from the time when a child is old enough to walk s/he begins to learn the village dances. The children are taught and trained from a very early age and the small ones dance in their own groups and try to copy their older brothers and sisters. Inevitably therefore they learn the ways and customs of the village and their people through the dances.

The effect of the tourist trade on the dance styles

There are three types of dance groups that perform for tourists. There are those who perform in their local village Boma (an open space or arena reserved for dances and other functions) and invite tourists to come and watch them. Then there are those groups who go round to the hotels and beach cottages and perform either formally or informally. Some groups have fixed bookings at hotels and their pay is also fixed, but others, often the smaller groups, just move from one cottage or hotel to another hoping for an audience. Then there are places, such as the Porini Village at Kikambala, about 20 kilometres north of Mombasa on the coast, which is a restaurant that has been set up for the sole purpose of giving traditional dance performances every evening. The groups that perform in their villages or at hotels or beach cottages are village groups, hence their performances tend to be of one style of dance only. However, at the Porini Village restaurant, and other similar centres, dancers are recruited from a variety of

groups. The repertoire therefore tends to be larger and more varied and both Giriama and Digo dances are performed.

It is interesting to note how the tourist audiences have affected the dance styles. For instance, one Giriama group I visited, asked if I wanted to see the 'tourist version' or the 'traditional version' of their dance. The major differences between the two seem to be that in the 'traditional version' the girls dance bare-breasted, whereas in the 'tourist version' they do not. The 'traditional versions' also tend to be much longer and maybe more monotonous to the Western eye. They have therefore been shortened and more variety of steps and movements added, so as not to bore the tourist. Hence, the 'tourist versions' tend to be more organised with set patterns that all the dancers follow, and they are trained to be much 'slicker and more snappy' as one leader put it. This tends to restrict improvisation and spontaneity, often a feature of African dance, for apart from solo acrobatic interludes, which occur in the *Mabumbumbu*, dancers are encouraged to conform and follow the step patterns set by the choreographer.

More indirectly the presence of tourists on the coast has affected the traditional dance styles. The latest Western dance trends in the discos, hotels and clubs, are picked up and included in the traditional dances. One Giriama group has incorporated the 'bump', a popular dance trend, into one of their *Mabumbumbu* dances. It seems the Giriama dances are more affected by the tourist industry, possibly because on the north coast there are more tourist centres. Also the Digo people have settled mainly inland, and the dancers tend to be older men and women, who are possibly less likely to be influenced by the latest disco trends (although there are some exceptions!) and less prone to change and adapt their dances for tourists.

The clear differences in dance style of the Giriama and Digo are evident. Considering that both are of the Bantu race and from the Mijikenda group of coastal tribes reputedly from the same origin, and that they exist as neighbours on the coast, it is interesting to note the distinct contrasts in their dance styles. The Giriama dances, characterised by the vigorous hip-shaking of the girls, have much more energy, vigour and variety of actions than do those of the Digo. The latter are rather characterised by more sedate movements consisting of slower, shuffling steps and subtle, graceful shoulder-shaking. Comparatively, they lack variety of movements, although they possess a much greater variety of musical accompaniment, which results in a fascinating and often complex relationship of movements to music.

What are the possible reasons for these distinct differences in style of two tribes that have many historical and ethnographical links? McKay (1975) notes that there is greater linguistic and cultural variation between the Digo and the Giriama, or any other Mijikenda tribe for that matter, than between other Mijikenda groups such as Giriama and Rabai. He states that this is partly explained by the Digo's position south of Mombasa, where they are isolated from the mainstream of Mijikenda activities. This could also be a major reason why very different dance styles have developed. McKay also describes the Digo as a proud group believing themselves to be distinct from the other Mijikenda sub-groups — they use the term 'Alupanga' for all those Mijikenda groups who do not speak Chi-Digo.

Other factors differentiate Giriama and Digo traditions and customs and they may or may not have had an effect on their dance styles. The Giriama are a patrilineal group, whereas the Digo are originally matrilineal, although they have changed to

become more patrilineal in the last two centuries. Both tribes circumcise their boys, but only the Digo circumcise the girls as well, although traditional circumcision is fast dying out. These original differences in the two groups could have had an indirect effect on other traditions such as dances.

Of the two groups it seems the Digo are more easily influenced and likely to change and lose their customs and traditions. This might explain why there is more historical evidence of Giriama dances. Many Digo have been converted to Islam especially in the last 100 years (Sperling, 1970). This has had a marked effect on their culture and traditions. Very few Giriama have been converted to either Islam or Christianity, even though there have been missionaries in the centre of their territory since 1846, when Krapf opened the first mission station at Rabai (Brantley, 1973). The Digo have also incorporated customs and traditions from their neighbours. They use Vumba magic for rain-making, they have *Utani* (joking relationships) with the Vumba (McKay, 1975) and they allow the Segeju to marry their women. There is also evidence of a Digo called Mwavuo, travelling north and actually becoming a Giriama; his son Ngonyo was one of the leaders of the Giriama rising against the British in 1914 (Brantley, 1973). The Giriama, however, appear to be a much stronger, more resistant people, not only unaffected by the two great religions trying to penetrate their area, but also resisting many attempts by the British colonial government to change their way of life. As a result, it seems their customs and traditions have survived (they still practise witchcraft and exorcism), and their strong character seems to be reflected in their vital, energetic, vigorous dances. A combination of all these factors, even though it does not explain the phenomenon of the two distinct and different dance styles, at least makes the situation more credible.

I. This article, written in 1977, is the result of part-time research carried out with the aid of a research grant from Kenyatta University College, Nairobi, where I was employed as a lecturer. I have not been in Kenya since 1979 and so I have been unable to update the work. It is quite possible that the dances described have changed and that new material has now come to light.

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