

NOMIYA LUO CHURCH: A GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE DYNAMICS OF AN AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCH AMONG THE LUO OF SIAYA DISTRICT IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND.

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the connections between gender and the independency Christian ideology in the formation of new social relations as well as affirmation of traditional relations of domination between men and women. Women's roles in these movements are examined. A case study has been picked to aid in the analysis of these issues, that of the Nomiya Luo Church. Hence this paper discusses the history and tenets of the Nomiya Luo Church, which emerged in colonial times and persists in independent Kenya. This church developed among a group of people with a semi patriarchal set up hence we analyse male dominance and its persistence even in church. The religious doctrines and beliefs and value systems that denigrate women in the unconscious fears of the men and how they affect the roles and values concerning women are also considered. The ways these systems have exerted controls on women are also discussed. Roles of women in independent churches, the opportunities for leadership, their roles as healers and patients and in relation to their background and concerns of daily life are discussed. Moreover as the rank and the file members of such movements, women also possess their own hidden sub-cultures and practices, which definitely influence the groups. The intention is to establish the gender roles and attitudes in this church.

INTRODUCTION

The study of independent churches in Africa is a growing and crowded field. Publications have increased exponentially during the last three decades and the mastery of literature is beyond the grasp of a single scholar (see Turner, 1977). They appear in fascinating variety and therefore the term independent church is just a working definition. The term independent churches is a recent terminology applied to churches which were identified in older studies as syncretistic, nativistic, separatist, sectarian, messianic, Zionism, prophetic and cultic. In Africa the increase of such religious breakaway has been immense (Turner, 1971;Lantenari, 1963;Barret, 1968).

In earlier years, these churches were seen as a reaction to colonialism but when they continued to mushroom, in modern times, society began to reconsider the causes. Today, there are about 9,000 African Independent Churches (AICs) with millions of followers estimated at 15 per cent of Africa's total Christian population. According to some sources these estimates are too conservative since the movements are growing faster than scholars are studying them.

Independent African Churches emerged at a remarkably earlier date in Kenya and even before the First World War there was articulate independency. The independent African Church Movement emerged in response to colonial presence and became a vital part of the political history of Kenya. It was important at a time when there were few other expressions of African response to colonial presence so that independency in church has emerged as obviously significant by virtue of its scale (Barret 1978). After independence, Barret (1968:30) says that by1966, there were 166 independent churches and by 1978 they had become a matter of state concern.

These movements have not only reshaped but also rocked the stability of the mainline churches. Their aim has been to rectify the Christianity of the mainline churches by injecting into their religious movements, the dynamic aspects of the traditional religion, the social mannerism, and the view of the world and the practical aspects of the gospels. With the rise of these movements a new conception of the cure of souls and an African theology has been brought into being with a new appreciation of the African personality and its cultural and religious customs (Barret 1970: 153). They rejected paternalism shown in areas such as sharing, simplicity and compassion. They also rejected monopolistic attitude. Their aim was to create a fraternal spiritual understanding as a means of arousing a sense of identity amongst the followers and fulfilling immediate needs of the communities (Baeta 1962:6; Sundkler, 1963:31)

The rapid increase in the number of independent churches in Kenya has attracted the attention of many scholars who have extensively documented their rise and spread (Muga 1978; Wipper 1977; Parrin Jassy 1973; Opwapo 1981; Hinga 1980). Some scholars have also attempted to explain various other issues pertaining to independent churches, such as their theological stances. In Kenya these independent movements have been described, at least in the colonial

period, from the viewpoints of westerners. Sex, superstition, magic, witchcraft has been given a prominent place by journalists and novelists when they discuss independent churches. This picture was reinforced by the government and the missionary churches. Some scholars also supported the colonial view (Ogot 1963:249-73 and Lonsdale 1964:363). There is a great deal of literature available currently on independent churches in Kenya that would be difficult to review in a work of this magnitude. (Wipper, 1977; Welbourn and Ogot, 1966; Ogot, 1973; Welbourn, 1961; Muga, 1975). Currently, various sympathetic approaches have been given to the study of these independent churches. These studies make important though seemingly contradictory contributions to the understanding of religion and change in Kenya.

Because independency involved direct break from mission control one might expect that they too would emphasize influential roles for women in reaction to the limited roles held by lay African women in mission organisations. These studies do not however analyse the participation of women who flock these churches and their role in the process of social transformation. Women have played a great part either directly or indirectly in the troubled life of the church in recent years and especially in that of the independent churches.

The predominance of women in these churches is significant and yet with the exception of research done on women's participation in the Legio Maria church, there is little information in the way in which gender shapes religious ideology and the experience of conversion has not been central to the analysis of these studies.

THEORETICAL FOCUS

Kretzshmar (1995) asks why it is necessary for issues of gender to be taken seriously by the churches and missiologists. She argues that while in the academic circles gender debate proceeds apace, in the church it is not taken seriously. She concludes, "Can we afford to ignore the vital issues of gender?" We need to ask how those who are proclaiming the good news, respond to the oppression or subordination of women. Further, can the church preach liberation if it oppresses women within its own ranks? What is the reason for the subdued silence of women in church and other areas? What does this convey of the church and its perception of women. This comment is carried further by the remark made by Ramodibe

There can be no argument that the church is one of the most oppressive structures in society today, especially in regard to the oppression of women. About three quarters of the people in the church are women, but men make decisions affecting them alone (with very few exceptions). Once women are acknowledged as pastors, as the body of Christ, we can build a new church (in Africa). I say a new church because the church as we have it today is a creation of male persons. As women, we have always felt like strangers in this male church (1996).

The term "gender" is used here simply to refer to the distinctions of male and female. As such it is closely related to the term "sexuality" as opposed to the narrower term "sex". Whilst the latter is generally used in relation to sexual intercourse, the former refers to our human identity and ways of relating to the world around us. The term gender refers to that which constitutes femaleness and maleness and the social constructs and expectations that influence the way in which gender identity and differences are perceived. On the face these definitions state the obvious but, when examined more closely, a host of difficulties arise that I will not delve into. This section simply examines the ways in which women experience oppression, and analyses how women are oppressed. Oppression simply means the imposition of the will of a certain person or group upon another person or group which may take the form of structural (repressive cultural customs) or more personalized forms of oppression. These can be expressed in the forms of external and internalized oppression. Externalised oppression is manifested through androcentrism, exclusion and subjection. Androcentrism is the habit of thinking about the world, ourselves and all that is in the world from the male perspectives. It drowns or silences the women's voices and perceptions by continual outpouring of male perceptions into the world (Wehr 1987:16). Androcentrism then is a male centered worldview, which devalues or excludes female perceptions, critique and contributions. It is also seen in instances where women are not permitted to define themselves or their roles but simply discover that they have been defined and categorized by the others. So they become the silent other. Women are then perceived as non-men, those who have neither the status nor the roles of men. Very often women are defined in terms of their relationships with other people.

Another way in, which they are oppressed, is through exclusion, which means restriction to certain areas and from certain responsibilities for instance church government. The main area of exclusion has been that women are prevented from occupying positions of leadership, power and authority or from participating in significant ecclesiastical roles. This means that men have controlled the access to the decision-making sectors. In relations to the church they can attend church services, raise money, teach children but they cannot themselves be ordained or serve in positions

of leadership. The third form of oppression is that of subjection which also has cultural forms. Clearly then, oppression has very concrete and damaging forms. These forms of oppression have one thing in common; they are imposed by men serving in various categories of life hence all of them can be encompassed under the rubric of patriarchy, literally the rule of fathers or by men for the benefit of men.

Internalized oppression is insidious and women themselves internalize it. In religion and other areas they become compliant victims. Such women are difficult to liberate because they first need to be convinced since they have accepted the order and systems of the powerful. Internalized oppression becomes something of a vicious circle since once women accept the judgments of androcentrism or patriarchy they are unable to critique it.

Why the oppression of women? The major cause of this is Patriarchy. The precise origins of patriarchy may be difficult to establish but the present actuality and power cannot be disputed because of the persistent male domination in all spheres of life. Given that all cultures are patriarchal it is difficult for their members to view women and men as equal partners. Both men and women perpetuate this form of oppression. Hence unconsciously in the independent churches it has remained as the norm.

This paper explores the connections between gender and the independency Christian ideology in the formation of new social relations as well as affirmation of traditional relations of domination between men and women. Women's roles in these movements are examined. A case study has been picked to aid in the analysis of these issues, that of the Nomiya Luo Church. Hence this paper discusses the history and tenets of the Nomiya Luo Church, which emerged in colonial times and persists in independent Kenya.

This church developed among a group of people with a semi patriarchal set up hence we analyse male dominance and its persistence even in church. The religious doctrines and beliefs and value systems that denigrate women in the unconscious fears of the men and how they affect the roles and values concerning women are also considered. The ways these systems have exerted controls on women are also discussed. Roles of women in independent churches, the opportunities for leadership, their roles as healers and patients and in relation to their background and concerns of daily life are discussed. Moreover as the rank and the file members of such movements, women also possess their own hidden sub-cultures and practices, which definitely influence the groups. The intention is to establish the gender roles and attitudes in this church.

THE LUO BACKGROUND OF THE NOMIYA LUO CHURCH (NLC)

The NLC developed among an ethnic group of Nilotic origin, the Luo of Kenya who were settling in their present localities in the 17th and 18th centuries. By 1900 the Luo settlements was complete and their politico-religious and socio-economic systems were intact. *Dala* (homestead) was the basic unit of society both politically, socially, and economically. Thus the structure of the Luo society was dictated by the grouping of a man, his wife/wives and children as well as the type of economic production utilised by the household (Schiller 1982:67). The owner of the homestead was the primary authority in his compound.

In the polygamous homestead, the husband was the head of many households. Co-wives lived in separate houses (Ocholla-Ayayo 1980:34). Each co-wife was, therefore, *wuon ot*, that is, the head of the house and the leader of its domestic and economic activities. Under her were her children who grew up with the idea of *odwa* (our household) thus planting the concept of collective ownership. In the struggle for the recognition and independence of *odwa*, children of one household became antagonists of those of another household. Wives also became rivals in the possession of property and competition for the household favour (Ogutu, 1975:19). Thus rivalry (*nyiego*) was practiced as a means of promoting self-pride and unity. (Ochieng', 1974:29). Sometimes favourable circumstances could lead co-wives to co-operate. Each household (*ot*) was charged with all the activities required for the maintenance and needs of its members, including production, deployment and use of labour power and the determination of economic objectives.

Land was allocated to the household. The land of one's mother (*puoth min*) was shared by the sons as they married or rather when the wedding was considered finalised (*riso*). A mother usually gave her son a part of her farms and his wife retained usufructory rights and was referred to henceforth as *puoth nyar kumanyio* literally the farm of the women from the foreign village and this became the inalienable property of her sons. If the women, however, deserted before bearing a male child, the farms reverted to him (Wilson 1965:12). If she had a male child before desertion, her farms became his future inheritance no matter how long he remained with his mother elsewhere.

Spiritual and political leadership went together and there were two ways of gaining this. The first was a man's lineage position that had significance in the matter of ritual. There was also charisma which was individualistic in lineage structure. Apart from its influence on leadership, religion played a very significant part in the day-to-day life of the Luo and was generally practical at the family level. The Luo recognised the ancestral spirits and the supreme God and they also contended that each individual had his or her God (*Nyasache ni kode* - when one escaped from danger) who in collaboration with the ancestors was responsible for his or her wellbeing (Odaga 1980:23). They also believed that man was moulded in the womb of the mother. The uterus that was considered the point where life began was called *Nyasach dhako* meaning the uterus. It was here that God's moulding work was carried on. Reference to the uterus meant that a woman's social strength and power rested in her ability to give birth to continue the lineage of her husband preferably to sons. When a woman gave birth, there was rejoicing and people made reference to the fact that God had helped her. If she got a boy, it was said that she had brought forth the handle of the spear (*bol*) in reference to future male responsibilities. If she brought forth a girl, then she had produced the wild cat (*Ogwang*), a symbol of unknown abode. The Luo also believed in spirits of non-human origin, magic and witchcraft.

In all matters of protocol, the senior wife (*mikayi*) was very important. Often she participated in the settlement of homestead land disputes. She always began the clearing of fields planting, weeding and harvesting before anyone else. Failure to wait for the chief wife to act first was bad omen and a breach of village discipline.

Every Luo wife basically controlled the crops grown on her land, which basically were used to feed the family or if need be for exchange. She was responsible for all labour provisions on the farm and afterwards processed the crops. According to a Luo myth, women infuriated God for disobedience marking the beginning of hard labour for the women. Since the women caused the problem, her toil was greater, evidenced by the division of labour that left a lot of continuous agricultural labour to the women. Indeed, a young woman only received a recommendation as marriageable if she showed powers in the fields.

The division of labour within a typical homestead was based on sex and age. Women and men had different roles (though overlap occurred in certain instances), as did the young and the old. The males were heads of homesteads and sometimes households depending on the number of wives and family size. In decision making some exerted control over many aspects of household operations while others tended to delegate authority to wives and sons. In homesteads with fewer people the heads would be involved in many aspects of household operations. In larger homesteads, delegation was easy. No matter how involved the men were in household operations women were in control of the domestic economy. (Felix Oswald 1915:27 and 28).

While women were not expected to express their views publicly on important matters, they were consulted privately. Before a man took a decision with repercussions on the family he might say "*We apenji orindi mondi* (Let me consult the head rest before making the decision). This headrest was a woman, frequently the first wife (*mikayi*) (Odaga, 1980: 22). Men consulted particularly with *mikayi* because of her prominence in performance of all crucial rituals. She was considered the co-owner of the homestead with the husband. On attainment of menopause all sexual relations with the husband ceased but she participated in decision-making. Older women were regularly consulted on numerous issues of significance.

The contribution of women to societal development was always accorded recognition in spite of the fact that they were viewed as dependants. They were considered the weaker sex needing protection of the men in the homesteads. All in all, despite these allowances to women, the Luo system was patriarchal and theoretically the men were expected to dominate in spite of the obvious allowances. This was a system that could be easily manipulated by a more dominant system. Colonialism, which was a male dominated system, generated the alienation of women through practices like the monetisation of several of Luo practices. Several colonial economic, social and political policies were to have adverse effects on the Luo family life and specifically on the women.

THE FOUNDING OF THE NOMIYA LUO CHURCH

Yohana Owalo, the founder of the NLC, was a man with great experience within this new worldview. He got involved with the colonial government possibly as a porter when the railway construction was approaching Kisumu before 1900. He became a migrant labourer in Kisumu before proceeding to Mombasa to work for a court judge, Alexander Morrison. While in Mombasa, he had several visions and revelations that convinced him of God's call upon his life. The most spectacular one that completely transformed him came in March 1, 1907 when he was taken to the first, second and third heaven by the spirit. He saw various revelations in these heavens. He noted that the first heaven, the abode of men was a remarkable place. All races of the world were attracted to it but the angels Raphael and Gabriel secured the gates.

They allowed in the Arabs, the Jews and the Luo only because they had prophetic representatives. However, attempts by the Europeans (the Pope inclusive), the Goans and the Indian Bunyans were thwarted violently. They failed to meet the conditionalities.

The second heaven housed numerous angels. In the third heaven he met the Godhead. God the father instructed Owalo to acknowledge that He was the only true God and beside Him there was no other.

Nor shall there be any after me. But currently the creation has deviated into the worship of images. Go! Take a well-sharpened knife to circumcise all men. He who has an ear let him hear and adhere but leave the disobedient alone. (NLC Prayer Book 1973; 118).

Owalo was instructed to discard all human efforts to reach God (e.g. Holy mass). He was provided with a long cord whose other end was held by Jesus in heaven, to take to the earth. Jesus himself confirmed to Owalo that he was not of the same substance as God and so Owalo was to serve God alone. He was further instructed to take a long sharp sword and circumcise his adherents as a sign of distinction between his adherents and other Luo.

After his heavenly experience, Owalo was deterred by Morison from starting his movement until he had acquired adequate education. Consequently he joined Catholic Ojola mission until it became apparent that his beliefs were inimical to the Catholic faith and sent away in 1907. He had a brief spat with the Muslims in Kisumu and was probably circumcised before he joined the CMS School in Nairobi in 1908. Later, he joined the Church of Scotland in Kikuyu by 1909. (Judicial 1/297 and Judicial 1/474, KNA).¹¹ In October 1910, he joined Maseno as a teacher but again his controversial beliefs became known and he was expelled in 1912, because of his avowed belief that Jesus was not of the same substance as God and his rejection of monogamy as basically a European idea and not a biblical one. He left Maseno to start his Mission to the Luo later (1914) renamed Nomiya Luo Mission. This was the first African Independent Church in Kenya.

The thesis that churches such as these have merely arisen as a reaction formation to colonial oppression does not account for enough (Lantenari 1963). Certainly the link between colonial oppression and initial religious reactions is clear and has been proven by scholars (Blandier 1971:417-487; Lantenari 1963:19-62). But the situation is more complex. It has to do with the types of problems that religious and secular authorities within a given group already handle and their susceptibility to and contacts with external groups. J.M. Lonsdale (1964: 350) gives four factors in Nyanza environment that determined the character of the movements. The first, related to the religious tug of war that existed in Nyanza. The European Missionaries seemed to be an auxiliary arm of the colonial government. Mutual understanding existed between the missionaries and the government so the Africans concluded that, although their methods were different, they had similar objectives. The second factor that determined the nature of the movements was, the more immediate frictions of foreign rule, such as taxation, which forced people to go out far from home to labour. Third, the multiplicity of missions brought confusion to the people. Moreover, in Nyanza independence was not purely an African phenomenon. Willis Hotchkiss of the Friends African Industrial Mission, decided to pull out of the mission and establish an independent mission in Lumbwa. Multiplicity of missions was an invitation to the indigenous religious heritage, which was interfered with, to react. It created a very suitable background or setting for these independent churches (Lonsdale 1964: 350). This background was perhaps the basis for the emergence of the NLC.

A lot of literature on Yohana Owalo, shows political causes as basic to theories the emergence of the NLC. J.M. Lonsdale (1964) and A. Wipper (1977) suggest that Owalo utilised the movement as a vehicle for interclan rivalry, since he belonged to the clan traditionally opposed to the chiefly clan (Lonsdale 1964; 208; Wipper 1975: 157). Oginga Odinga says that the movement was a political protest and when Owalo was questioned by the District Commissioner in a public baraza, he said, "Leave me to preach. I am preaching to Africans not whites" (Odinga 1968: 68-69). B.A. Ogot describes Owalo as the first Christian rebel in Nyanza, who, on discovering the hypocrisy of "Westernism" decided to be a Christian but on his own terms (Ogot, 1973; 262).

In spite of these indicators, to conclude that political reasons were basic to the rise of this movement seems simplistic. A new religious movement is not necessarily opted for as a political outlet. Its presence therefore, does not signify in itself the frustration of other expressions of power. In his call, the only indication of rebellion is the instance where the Europeans,

¹For details on the life of Owalo see Opwapo M.A. 1981.

Indian-Bunyans and goans were denied entry into heaven. This could be explained as follows: Due to his inability to express his dissent, Owalo was content, for the moment with the notion that, in the realm of the spirit, colonialists and missionaries would miss places when the Luo, Arabs, and Jews will enjoy the splendours of heaven. Of course political factors were latent. Possibly he sought a movement to release the Luo, politically, socially, religiously, economically, and culturally, from colonial domination but realised that, given strong political overtones, his movement would experience severe reprimands from the colonial government which already responded violently to such movements. Examples of such responses like, the cult of Mumbo in South Nyanza dealt with mercilessly between 1913-1915 (Wipper 1975: 32-40) and the Chilembwe uprising of 1915 in Malawi abound. Owalo had to prove that his movement was not dissident by reporting regularly to Kisumu for a period of two years, a probationary period slapped on him by the Provincial Commissioner, Mr. John Ainsworth, before the movement could be registered. When it was evident that it was "not subversive to good order and morality", it was registered during which time he got a political appointment to serve as (DC CNI/5/2 1919-1923 KNA) the sub-headman for Kochieng' clan. A reconstruction of the history of this movement reveals that a religious movement goes through several phases as it emerges and that its relations to a larger political context changes overtime.

Owalo had a poor family background and perhaps sought the economic prosperity that seemed obvious in the mainline churches. However, economic causalities may not be adequate as explanations for its emergence because even the mission station at Oboch simply supplied the food requirements of the numerous adherents who for one reason or other had to reside with him. For instance the mission station at Oboch was established to enable the adherents to have ample time together as they prepared for missions and also serve a haven for his adherents from the rampant conscriptions of Africans for the First World War. These adherents had to undertake farm work for subsistence and not mere economic gain. Hence, the appeal of a new movement can be approached but not completely explained in terms of economic variables or even ethnicity.

The NLC arose out of a situation plagued with the effects of the Western impact of the colonial government, Christian missions and the white settlers, who were continuously instrumental in influencing the political, religious, economic and social issues which had strong repercussions on the lives of the people (migrant labour and taxation). The change had profound effect because it was accompanied by the efforts of the schoolmaster and the missionary to introduce Western religion and culture. Adoption of European customs seemed indispensable to a true understanding of Christianity. The two missionary groups which evangelised Nyanza were the Anglican Church Missionary Society(CMC) and the Catholic Society of the Mill Hill Fathers(MHF).

European occupation resulted in political dependence and the Luo who were accustomed to consensus policies had now to obey orders. There were economic pressures caused by taxes and other measures which forced people to obtain cash and this was possible through migrant labour. This had detrimental effects, particularly on the institution of the family. Although the Luo were willing and even eager to derive benefits from the new conditions, education and Christianity were to disrupt traditional patterns as much as migrant labour did. Respect for taboos, structures and values on which the society depended for its security and harmony was beginning to shake (see Ndeda 1992). Solidarity of the clan and family was under constant attack. The stability of tribal marriage patterns, including polygamy, the levirate, divorce and dowry were beginning to disintegrate and yet there were no new and secure alternatives. Since the traditional methods for obtaining leadership and prestige were no longer accepted, disappointment and loss of identity were beginning to be experienced and emotional need too did not receive the normal outlet. Subsequent stress possibly led to tension and unhappiness, loss of identity and sense of belonging (Whisson 1964: 63-163).

Yohana Owalo lived within this set-up and yet with a wider experience due to his interaction with people from other parts of Kenya and he was aware of their responses to colonialism. He, probably, longed for an African pattern of worship and a meaningful local community that formed a transition between the old and the new. As Erasto Muga writes he might have desired a church with a Luo hero, a saviour of the people. His attitude represented rejection of missionary paternalism and certain Western Christian values, such as monogamy, which were integrated in Christian teaching (Muga 1975: 167).

Wilson (1970:231) claims that those who start their own religious movements are relatively deprived. But it should be borne in mind that separation sometimes arises in schism from existing sects without operation of external causes. That Owalo was religiously dissatisfied can be inferred from his movement from one denomination to another and even from Christianity to Islam. The type of Christianity introduced did not seem suited to his needs and understanding, he needed an institution, claiming equality with Christianity and Islam. However, it was to be superior in quality to the type of Christianity introduced by Europeans. When he visited the heavens, God wanted to admit the Luo, like he had done to Arabs and Jews, but they had no prophet. Owalo was then given the Mission to make God's message relevant

,consequently, to usher the Luo, who accepted his message, into heaven. The Luo had also to have a unique experience like that of Jews and Arabs, that of circumcision of the male adherents.

In the call of heavenly experience recorded early, there was evidence of theological issues that were basic to the rise of NLC. He refuted the reliability of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory since on his way to heaven he only saw hell on; not purgatory. Consequently the NLC catechism clearly instructs against the belief in purgatory. On a man's death he is ushered into heaven or hell according to his deeds on earth (Ogut, p. 50 and 53). Owalo was warned against these because they marred the image of God. This experience touched very closely on the cardinal Catholic belief in the supremacy and infallibility of the Pope, and the intercession of the saints, particularly that of Mary. In fact, in the first heaven, the abode of men, he informed that the Pope was barred from heaven because of misleading the faithful to rely on relics and images in worship and to believe in the intercession of the saints.

In the third heaven another cardinal Catholic sacrament, that of the Holy Mass, was declared an unacceptable sacrifice before God and Owalo was to teach his adherents that the only acceptable sacrifice was a broken and contrite heart. The Catholic practice of the sacrament of bread and wine, which they consider as the real or actual body and blood of Christ was declared sinful and Owalo was reprimanded for having tasted the components and hence the NLC catechism teaches vehemently against it.

All the churches he attended held the belief that Jesus Christ was not only a son of God but also of the same essence as God however in the third heaven, Owalo was instructed that God alone was to be worshipped. The church hymnals stress the supremacy of God. In his Bible, he deleted sections that equated Jesus with God. In the many hymns borrowed from the Anglican church, he replaced the word Jesus with Jehovah. For Owalo Jesus was perfect men endowed with power to perform miracles to furnish evidence that God that he was God's messenger. Perhaps this is why B.A. Ogot (1973:256), J.J. Willis, and M. Whisson describe him as a "Unitarian" and suggest that, the Unitarian Judge, Alexander Morrison, impacted on Owalo (Whisson 1964:154). Since Owalo had an intimate relationship with Alexander Morrison, it is possible that apart from working together on the study of Luo grammar, they discussed serious theological thoughts (Opwapo 1981: 18).

The two most immediate causes were: first, the fact that he was called by God in March 1907, and second, the action of the council in Maseno which caused him to leave Maseno prematurely to start his own Mission.

In a society that was changing already, with Christianity providing the framework, certain important factors were overlooked. First, spiritual, emotional, moral and religious needs of the Luo were ignored. Visions, dreams, spirits and even their idea of God were considered futile. The society had a need for solutions to existential problems such as fears of the forces of evil, the need for emotional outlet and religious healing. In Owalo's teaching, he laid emphasis on the spiritual world, especially on angels perhaps again emerging from his heavenly trip where he was not only under the escort of Gabriel and Raphael but saw many angels. It can be inferred that, for him, angels comfortably replaced the Luo spirits. Second, whereas the healing world was ignored and rejected as futile, however, Owalo prayed for the sick and exorcised the possessed. Third, while polygamy and the levirate were castrated; Owalo accepted these as practical within his movement.

It is also probable that the local people did not comprehend several aspects of Christian teaching but lacked the courage and forum to declare it or to formulate something more suitable. However, Owalo was not a weak and frivolous character but engaged in a most serious search for a more acceptable reality. With the magnitude of his experience and as a courageous person he noted a problem and sought a solution. When he had established what seemed relevant to a people who had to adjust to change, he started propagating it in 1912. He was mainly concerned with his tribe, the Luo and this concern has continued to affect the development of the membership of the church.

Conclusively, it could be said that Owalo seemed to be an original and imaginative thinker, despite his limited education and had the charisma of leadership, which made it possible for him to have followers. Secondly, Owalo's movement had both religious and political components, but the political aspect was disguised in his theology. His was an attempt by a person in a rapidly changing society to create a kind of dialogue between Luo traditional beliefs, Islam and Christianity in that he looked for meaningful experiences in different traditions. He used the idea of the centrality of God in the three traditions and related every other idea to it.

The advance of the African NLC did not come about by an organised evangelisation effort, but either by a migratory movement of one person, which has continued to date, or through the initiative of local adherents. The church

developed through contact. A new community formed around the first convert or converts, for among the Luo, a man of plenty draws people to himself. Other groups were formed as disciples multiplied and spread out from the initial centre. The best illustration would be that of Tanzania's North Mara. The NLC was introduced in North Mara in 1929 by one Nickodemu Siwa who reached here accidentally while searching for pasture. He settled at Ochuna where he formed the first community. With the development of the movement in the area, he became the Bishop, then relinquishing daily affairs to his assistant, he settled in another area of the district because the pasture was exhausted. After settling down in North Mara he then invited other members from Kenya to go and baptize.

This sort of growth ran a risk of slackening off as the initial dynamism of the movement gave way to routine. Soon after the death of the founder, the evangelical impetus slackened. After 1920, there were adherents in North Mara District of Tanzania, Gem Ahono and Alego. Expansion continued up to the early 1930 and the government report in 1933 said, "Nomiya Luo Mission" (African) continues to gain ground and is spreading its activities in South Kavirondo and among the Luo settled areas" (DC/CN1/6/2, 1932-34:KNA). However, soon after 1934, the government report said that, "The Nomiya Luo Church continues to function but I have not heard it spreading" (*Ibid.*, p.27). Whereas its expansion could have been curbed by the pattern it took, the most serious drawbacks were connected with internal feuds. The church experienced crisis at the death of the founder. Beginning from 1920, it survived sixteen and a half years crisis over leadership. Today, the church survives as Nomiya church with numerous splinters.

THE NATURE AND ATTRACTIONS OF THE NOMIYA LUO CHURCH

This religious movement was attractive to both men and women and spread with such marked rapidity that by the time of the death of the founder, it had spread all over Luoland and into some of the white settled areas. When the growth rate of a movement is so rapid, several issues need to be responded to, for instance, why were people joining? What features did it display that made it attractive?

First, when Owalo appeared in Asembo, it is possible he recognised the situation of the Luo Community in the face of colonialism. He capitalised on this situation and then made it articulate. He introduced a movement attuned to the traditional fears, needs and aspirations. Several cultural practices of the Luo disgusted the Europeans, especially missionaries, who militated against them. Indeed their attitude to the indigenous culture and religion was generally disastrous. Owalo's movement contributed significantly to the process of deculturation. His curtailed campaigns against certain religious practices, customs and institutions, for example polygamy. To the missionaries the Luo practice of polygamy was offensive to Christian morals, therefore, the baptism of polygamous men and of women and children of such marriages, was not allowed

The controversial issue of polygamy was touchy because it was an integral part of the local culture that people were bewildered with the idea that there should be anything wrong with it. The crusade against polygamy by Christianity directly affected all but particularly by women. Wives of polygamists suffered if their husbands became Christians because the man was only permitted to keep one wife and the others were often sent away suffering the stigma of rejection and disgrace. Robins (1979) suggests that women joined independent movements seeking religious legitimisation for the rejection of polygamous unions. Europeans attacked it as originating from sinful lust but failed to recognise it as an economic and social institution. Thus, the campaign against it was conducted with colonial criteria, methods, and aims, which took little account of the real and immediate exigencies of women. For women this constant conflict between mission and polygamous establishments was leading to an assault on the family. Luo women had managed to cooperate with co-wives, polygamy worked for them-in that it guaranteed them some autonomy, personal freedom and greater mobility than would be possible in monogamous nuclear family. They could also use it as a means of maximising their own interests. Several wives in a homestead meant that women had more time to themselves and could develop strong bonds with other women.

Although the practice of polygamy has declined, it persists to date and perhaps today the attitude of women towards it is completely different. However, from Owalo's time through to early post-independence days, at face value women felt quite comfortable. Owalo authorised men to keep a maximum of four wives if they were interested in leadership positions, but gave no limitation to those with no leadership interests (Opwapo 1981). He, however, advocated for equal treatment for all wives by the husbands. He maintained that polygamy was not immoral but scriptural since patriarchs like David, Abraham, and Solomon practised it with no godly vindication.. He insisted that polygamy was more acceptable than adultery. Thus entry into the church became easy; polygamist did not need to discard extra wives and the polygamous women and children were relieved of the stigma, they acquired recognition and, acceptance, which they had been denied in the mainline churches. Owalo actually stopped Daudi Migot, his colleague in Maseno, from divorcing his second wife. Many

adherents such as Samuel Otiemo of Manyatta, Nickodemus Tambo of Nyakach, joined the movement because of its teaching on polygamy.

Yohana Owalo Christianised and incorporated customary marriage patterns into the religious and social life of the people. His acceptance of polygamy in particular endeared his movement to the people. He recognised the social significance of this type of marriage to the Luo people and therefore, anybody intending to marry was advised to negotiate with parents of the girl and to fulfil the dowry according to the traditional requirements. When his effort to get such marriages officially registered by the colonial government in Kisumu failed in 1914, he instituted his own pattern of marriage arrangement that was in line with the community's arrangement. Henceforth when dowry requirement was met, the faithful gathered in the groom's home as a group went to ceremonially convey the bride from her natal home. The marriage was not consummated on the first night; the man spent the whole day and evening with Owalo in prayer (Opwapo 1981: 159). Breach of this order was a serious offence.

Currently, all intending to marry notify the church leader three months in advance to enable them to make public announcements of this intention at both the man and the woman's local churches. After this, the bride and groom would register at the judiciary before the church ceremony and other celebrations. Intention of marriage to a junior wife would still be announced in the churches. After dowry is fully paid, the faithful will gather at the man's home for celebrations and prayers to welcome the woman. However, life is dynamic and changes have occurred so that adherents intending to take junior wives do so secretly because women's attitudes towards polygamy have changed over time.

Despite the acceptance of polygamy, we are not denying that in some African Independent Churches important and even crucial situations have emerged to wage direct and significant assaults on the family. Some of the movements have been established by women, who have abandoned marriage and all sexual relations in order to be free to preach, for example Gaudencia Aoko of Legion Maria who left her marital home after the death of her two children. In Ivory Coast, the Deima cult was established in 1942 by Maria Lalu, a married woman who took a vow of chastity. Zambia saw that of Mai Chaza and Alice Lenshina. The majority of these leaders relate strange tales, for example of death that leads to going to heaven and being entrusted with a ministry which they can only fulfil effectively without marriage. For the NLC adherents, marriage is important.

The practice whereby on a man's death, his widow was inherited by his brother and through her he was to raise children to carry on the line was abhorred by the Europeans. This offended the church's laws as to the degrees of relationship within which marriage might take place. In the view of the missionaries, the practice posed a serious threat to a widow's ability to remain steadfast in her loyalty to the church. In the early years of the British administration, the Christian widows were protected by the marriage ordinance of 1912, the missions and the government wanted to confront this issue but no satisfactory solution was reached (Spencer, 1973: 108). According to the Luo, the practice of the levirate ensured that the widows and their children had their rights to a secure home. Owalo advocated for the retention of the levirate. By this practice wives were not inherited at their husbands' death. They were regarded as still formally married to the dead men and referred to as *chi liel* (wife of the grave). The leviratic union was not regarded as marriage, although some of the elements are common. This was like the Luo version of the life insurance policy and women had a choice in who to be their levir. The leviratic union finds a close parallel in the Old Testament. It was on this type of marriage that Israelites based their approach to polygamy. The widow was cared for in some ways by this arrangement. To date, it is the practice of NLC to ensure that widows are inherited and they claim a biblical basis for it. (Bible Genesis 38; Deuteronomy 25: 5-10; Ruth 4).

Handling of the dead and deceased is a big score to the church because the Luo celebrate death. When an adherent died, they actively participated in the celebrations, ceremonies and burial. 70 days after the burial a ceremony to free the dead to proceed to heaven was conducted by the faithful. The NLC members believe that after death the spirit of the dead continues to hover in the air space watching the handling of his affairs. After seventy days, all that pertains to burial should have been appropriately handled to release the spirit to rest in peace. Henceforth if the dead was a man then his wife/wives was/were free to pick a levir

Owalo built a community out of the breaking pieces of the old and the ill adopted offerings of the new. He understood the importance of witchcraft and ancestral spirits among the Luo and viewed them as issues to be dealt with through the ministry of the church. Consequently, he promised both mental and physical healing of illnesses. Adherents cite several instances of healing and exorcism, the majority of whom were women. Exorcism remains a common practice in the NLC.

The tolerance shown towards polygamy, the levirate and other traditional patterns was compensated for by the rigorous and legalistic taboos on drinking, smoking, dancing and wearing of shoes in holy places. Traditional religious concepts and practices were re-interpreted in a Christian sense. This kind of re-interpretation seemed acceptable within the changing circumstances.

This movement also met a need in a society disturbed by the colonial impacts. Specifically, the Luo could neither provide from their resources nor accept without disruption the Europeans life style. Europeans paid little attention to cultural beliefs and practices of the Luo, in spite, of the warning by the Provincial Commissioner, Mr. John Ainsworth that:

All persons who have dealings with the natives of this country to investigate their customs and beliefs before attempting to govern them, to proselyte them, to trade with them, or to live amongst them and employ them as labourers, for it is only by understanding and appreciating their superstitions and habits that one can hope to win their sympathy and affection (PC NZA 2/3. 1908-15, KNA).

After disrupting this kind of community, the Europeans failed to offer any alternative community to replace the lost solidarity of the society. By introducing the new movement Owalo was providing a home, a community, for those experiencing the disruption. The First World War enhanced their disruption of the traditional patterns even further and therefore those who joined the NLC found it accommodative.

Third, Owalo's personality also played a significant part in the formation, development and the nature of the message of the church. The movement was a product of a revelation received by him directly by divine will. His doctrine emanated from the heavens. Through the account given of the supernatural world, the character of the mission and the message can be perceived. The important element was the role of the prophet in relation to the movement of which he was the founder. He was chosen by God to be the interpreter of God's will for men and their guide on their way to salvation. Before the message was communicated to the rest of the humanity, the call of the prophet and the promise of salvation was first addressed to the Luo, the particular group of which he was a member. He was to be the intermediary between God and his people.

Through him, the group was to be made equal to other races, to ethnic and social groups dominant in the material world, and even better than some, like the Europeans, Goans, and the Indian Banyans, who were kicked out of heaven by the angels. His people became a chosen people, like Jews and Arabs, because, henceforth, they also possessed in him direct line with heaven. The prophet, therefore, was the incarnation of every desirable quality and, through him, the people participated in the revelation of which he was the instrument. The relations of Owalo and the people, on one side was, therefore, an essential part of his message.

Although the church is not clear whether Owalo was a messiah or a divine person, what mattered was the divine character of the message and the revelation which continued throughout his career as a prophet. In other words, a direct communication with God was the source of the movement's dynamism and without it the church would have diminished or simply stagnated. The charisma in Owalo, which was associated closely with the divine revelation, made one to claim and gain obedience and the respect of his fellows in the Luo community. The pattern of fasting, visions and returning with power is a feature of many stories of how a '*Jabilo*', (medicine men) among the Luo, gained his power. The charismatic person was usually the arbiter in society, he had the energy and personality to unite people and to turn the society in the direction of his ambition and to bring order where there were problems. The personality of Owalo, particularly after the heavenly experience, was such that it commanded obedience and respect, especially when he could be considered a charismatic person. His charisma was recognised by friends, and foes and adherents. A charismatic person usually appeared in the hour of need, so Owalo showed a masterly judgement in the selection of his moment.

The NLC was an African movement, not only in its leadership and the growing membership, but especially in its attempt to come to terms with the African existential situation. This Africanness was at first a definite asset. Through it God's word was made to belong to the Luo, thus the Luo self-respect was regained. To date one of the articles of faith is that the NLC will provide eternal life for all its adherents.

This movement attracted all and sundry. Men who had nasty marital experiences with the colonial system joined with whole families. Of those attracted to the movement were women. Studies on independency ascertain that women make up at least two thirds of the non-missionary church members and have often noted the greater attraction of religious faith and religious participation to women than to men. This is particularly true for the independent churches and nearly every major study of these groups remarks upon this fact (Sundkler 1969 Seeley; 1984). Membership of the Independent

Churches provided certain benefits. Women in particular gained a caring support network outside the formal structures (e.g. fellowship groups with shared experience) of society and the opportunities for personal advancement. These churches also formed a legitimate space within which women freely participated outside the home without question or need for justification. On the other hand, they provided that spiritual solace and community in a world in which hard work, social, economic, physical and emotional violence were the order of the day. Nervous breakdowns or mental disturbances were and are not rare among women with such stresses. In the small local communities there was relief. She found a relaxing escape from the arduous daily tasks and an opportunity of entering into a sympathetic relationship with women under similar strains. When the woman was prayed for or when she prayed alone she underwent a psychological treatment that gave her emotional relief. Increasing drift of women into independent movements was also due to barrenness, delay in conception, and domestic difficulties. The churches responded to these problems through deliberate and open prayer and healing sessions. And as Barret (1968) claims, it is in the independent church movements of Africa that women had the chance to recover some of their traditional status and position which had been undermined by the teaching of the mission churches.

Apart from the tensions and anxieties of the family, the women in colonial times were also the victims of the policies of the mission churches. Missionaries had often criticised and undermined the African forms of religious expression in which women had a part to play. Lehmann (1963) suggests that many women were attracted to the independent churches because they replaced the functions of customary institutions that were weakened by culture change. Barret remarks:

The missionary assault on the family complex caused women to act, for they felt the issues at stake more keenly than the men. With more to lose, they vehemently defended their traditional institutions and way of life (1968:147).

It can be stated that their interpretation of Christianity gave women the opportunity to be involved in the churches' activities not as silent observers but as participating actors.

INDEPENDENCE AND THE SUBORDINATION OF THE LUO WOMEN

Ethnographic and historical studies of women and religion have thoroughly documented patterns of women's exclusion from positions of significant religious leadership. In many societies women have active religious lives, yet ecclesiastical hierarchies rarely include women, and official or great tradition religious concepts generally reflect men's and not women's priorities and life experiences. But scattered throughout the world and centuries, however, there are instances of religious domination by women- in which women have been the leaders, the majority of participants and in which women's concerns have been central (Sered,1994:3).

In the available literature, the most puzzling issue is the immense power and influence which female leaders often wield in these churches contrary to male dominance in the mainstream churches. In some of these churches prophetesses have left indelible marks on the African continent, for example, Alice Lakwena of Uganda, Mother Jane Bloomer of Freetown. In Ivory Coast Marie Lalou was inspired by a dream to start a cult so women have ceremonial leadership and a clear sense of gender roles is maintained. In the movement of William Harries Wade women become leaders and gender roles are well balanced but polygamy is not renounced. Such independent churches believe that it is the Holy Spirit that raises people to positions of authority irrespective of gender. Locally, there is Mary Akatsa of Kawangware and Maria Aoko of Legio Maria who carved a niche for themselves in Kenya's religious history.

Bengt Sundkler (1976: 79) says that from early times the church was like a women's movement. It functioned as a women's liberation movement long before that term was invented. Indeed, he points out numerous examples of churches in South Africa where women excelled as leaders but he also gives instances of the efforts of women that have failed to be fully recognised and appreciated just because of gender. An example is that of Grace Tshabala who brought great revival in her church but was just described as "after all she was merely a woman" (Ibid., 79). Her husband and other Zionist leaders admitted, "yes they can pray all night but of course man's prayer is stronger, for he is the head and leads in everything." Perhaps in South Africa, the fact that women lead as presidents of churches, while others carry both the financial burdens and evangelistic outreach, is Zionist great contribution to African society. Zion gave women a central and honoured position, in healing activities, in worship and social life of the church, new emotional contacts of care and concern were found where women and men could meet on equal terms. These terms were regarded as those of the ultimate authority, the Holy Spirit. But perhaps this was also determined by other parallel occurrences, for example, in 1955 women led in the bus strike in the Rand. There was also an upsurge in women's involvement in business and women's organisations were even stronger in the churches.

Some charismatic independent churches are more of a man's world than women. Many women scholars have criticised African Christian traditions for being sexist. Despite the church being populated by women, they still play a marginal role in power structures of the church. The African churches are like "inverted pyramids" where the many women are led by the few men. One Kenyan Independent Church leader once commented that ordination of female priests was a deviation from Christian teachings and called for its immediate end. He claimed the practice would bring confusion. This was after the ordination ceremonies of a Presbyterian Church of East Africa and a Church of the Province of Kenya female priests. This gathering was attended by representatives from Akorino sect, Nomiya Luo Church, Salvation Army, Roho Israel and Nomiya roho sect (KNA 18/1/1983).

Leadership is an important feature of any church. The hierarchy provides outlets for the exercise of leadership ability and at the same time ascribes status to the office bearers. It is also important to note that in various Christian denominations women have been striving to open up the churches' hierarchies to the participation of women and to increase women's representation in church and decision making bodies. Those who do not find immediate scope of advancement within the church are potential seceders unless new positions are created for them with new responsibilities. What we are saying is that women's roles in their religions vary tremendously between and within religions. Some religious organisations are founded on fundamentalist principles which promote a traditional or even regressive social position of women while others are welfare oriented. The NLC does not fall within the category of those that enhance the positions of women.

In some literature dealing with independent churches, the importance of leadership is stressed. The churches are seen as allowing outlets for expression of leadership qualities and disputes (Martin West 1975, 49:74-75). The NLC developed its form of leadership with time. Owalo established what seems as a paramount chief type of leadership, in that the leadership went beyond clan boundaries. He mingled the Luo leadership pattern and the Christian one. The church was his ethnic group and he insisted that true Luo could only be his followers. Owalo was the first leader of the group. However, he failed to appoint his successor. He had no son to inherit leadership. Hence after his death wrangles over leadership ensued. However, Petro Ouma became recognised as leader.

In 1930 Petro introduced new positions in the leadership structure, that is, secretary, treasurer, and archdeacon. He held the position of Bishop in spite of the recurrent wrangles until his death in 1954. G.C. Owalo born to Alila wife of Yohana Owalo through leviratic union took over as Bishop. Writing the first constitution of the Church, G.C. Owalo included the following on leadership: "The direct descendant (male) of the spiritual leadership will normally succeed to the spiritual leadership of the church at the majority age of thirty or more years." During his leadership, the area of jurisdiction was divided into two pastorates managed by two male pastors. Hence the leadership had two pastors, locational teachers, preachers and lay readers. Lay posts like the general secretary and treasurer were also introduced. All of the holders of these positions were men.

The Bishop was the overall head and was assisted by the archdeacon. The chief pastor who was the direct representative of the bishop, had under him locational priests and lay readers who were directly responsible for small communities. The secretary general was responsible for all church correspondences and the administration of the church. The treasurer was in charge of all church finances. This was the pattern of leadership until 1972 when the whole hierarchy was revised and even made more elaborate.

The new hierarchy included the synod as the supreme and final authority, chaired by the Archbishop. This synod met annually to deliberate on matters affecting the Church. The new offices introduced were the archbishop and the rural deans. One other important office and one that has caused numerous problems for the church is that of the Sharriff (The circumciser). There's the office of the chief sharriff, diocesan sharriff and the pastorate sharriff. However, those who claim to be able to circumcise are too numerous and several decrees have had to be promulgated to stop them from practicing.

In the NLC titles are important, as well as marriage and age in conferring status. The ideal leader in addition to being male must at least be middle aged and married. The leader must be literate but not necessarily have high level of education. Before assuming the position of spiritual leadership one has to be ordained. The leader must be properly consecrated and this must be done in the presence of many adherents. During the ordination of the leader, his duties are clearly delineated to avoid conflicts.

It is categorically stated here, therefore, that in the NLC, then and now, women have been subordinated against. This subordination simply means to put a person or group in a less important position (Collins 1971, Caulfield 1981, Leacock, 1981). The subordination of women refers to relations between men and women within the social process as a

whole and the way those relationships work to the detriment of women. Collins (1971) argues from the Freudian perspective that women's subordination is fundamentally as a result of men's sexual lust and men have used their size and strength to coerce women. Tiger on the other hand asserts that male dominance arises from their social bonding.

The argument here is that their subordination was not solely the result of the policies imposed by foreign capital and other forces of colonialism. Rather, patriarchal value systems borrowed patriarchal control reinforced and transformed one another evolving into new structures and forms of domination. The contention here is that both Owalo and later church leaders did not seriously challenge the basic structure of gender relations. Hence inequality between men and women remained rooted and perpetuated. Conclusively, independence which become institutionalised has largely lost its liberating function for women as it reinstates, determines and distorts traditional values. NLC mainly affirmed traditional relations of domination between men and women. Thus women were and continue to be actually victims of male dominance. Patriarchal value systems borrowed from both the Luo patterns and colonial system were supported by religious beliefs of the NLC and exerted social belief in male superiority and female inferiority. Hence subordination of women was rubber stamped by the NLC.

Despite the attractions of this movement, it should be noted that the society within which it emerged was guided by strong patriarchal tendencies which were real and quite durable. This system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women was clearly replicated in the Nomiya Luo Church. The tendencies caused the subordination of women in the movement. The NLC developed fundamental organisational principles based on the traditional social structure with gender as the major determinant of the division of labour. As in the rest of the society, the major decision makers and functionaries were and remain men. The main figures in the church are the bishops, elders, administrators e.t.c. This religious movement was viewed as everyone's concern but with the specific responsibility and privilege of men. Women were extremely important, absolutely essential and highly regarded but primarily as facilitators of the men's religious activities. Most of the women were not aware of their own giftedness, dignity, potential and self worth because they were unconsciously victims of male domination, social prejudices and discrimination. Their valuable contribution to the church was either insignificantly appreciated or not at all.

In the church, men regarded themselves as superior to women and their roles exceeded in number and importance so they were denied equal opportunities in church. Women were not appointed into the critical areas of decision-making and participation like the NLC synod and other gatherings of leaders. The church structure has not allowed their entry into these roles up to today. They have also been excluded from the leadership role in all public rituals, for example, no women officiate as elders during ordination and baptismal ceremonies and to date there is no female *sharriff* (The person who circumcises). At the official level of church organisation women were seemingly excluded from positions of authority, for at the death of Owalo individuals who had been close to him and who could carry on his vision and thus fulfil his mission were men. However, women played the same domestic roles that they fill in other areas of life such as cleaning the church, cooking and serving during their ceremonial functions, women also led in the church singing on Sundays and other occasions and organise prayers for the sick. They were and continue to be in charge of women's meetings, the cleanliness parades conducted during one of their annual celebrations. Perhaps, they also exercised considerable informal authority through their husbands or their fathers. Currently some may preach during *mony* (all night vigils) which emerged after the demise of the founder.

The female religious participation, religious metaphors and beliefs concerning female sexuality are all evidences of the existing subordination. Female religious metaphors for example derived from the sexual and reproductive status. There is also the age held belief that female sexuality is polluting and contaminating to all things. Hence a woman would not lead worship service or the singing because she could be menstruating. Her sexuality was also seen as needing periodical purification, for example, after birth of a child the woman was confined for a period of either thirty three days or sixty six days depending on the sex of the child. This period ended with a feast (*Sawo*) in which chicken and or other animals were slaughtered to mark the end of the period of confinement and hence purification. During the period of confinement, the woman was under the care of an elderly woman, ate specially prepared food, was confined to specified section of the house, was not to be seen outside their house, was not to touch the husbands or her church clothes, bible and prayer book, and had no sexual relations with the husband during this period. In other words she was in a state of sexual taboo. Even those independent churches which involve women in ministry still evoke inauspiciousness of the energy which emanates from female sexuality and use it to curtail women's involvement e.g. a menstruating woman, or one who has just delivered, or unwashed after sexual intercourse or women with uncovered hair (Oduyoye,1992:20). Women are keen observers of these taboos against pollution particularly in the case of menses which is believed to defile a woman and all that she touches.

Most ritual obligations for adult women were related to their roles as mothers and took place in the private family setting, or private domain of the household. For example, during the sawo (Celebrations after period of confinement). It is the women who directly helped their fellow women throughout the period of confinement. But at the end of the period the church male leaders officiated in the purification ceremony and they ate the juicy sections of the meal as specified by the religious movement for instance, the roasted chicken and the kidneys and livers of the animal. Males on the other hand perform rituals that are beneficial to the whole group, for example, baptism and circumcision.

Why are women subordinate? Paradoxically women attended and attend church in greater numbers than men and thus largely concords with the commonly held view that women are intuitive, receptive to religious experience and by nature more devout than men. Yet women were and are confined to the domestic sphere often in some form of seclusion or even if they are allowed to move in public spaces there are numerous social conventions. Secondly, they are excluded from formal religion and from participating in important public rituals. They may be important in possession cults and healing rites but these are extensions of the traditional female roles. On the other hand the few men who attend the church hold prominent roles, perform religious rituals, formulate dogma, provide those divinely inspired ideas and control the powers of female reproductivity and dictate social and cultural roles of women.

Women have been exploited by male adherents but not given equivalent status. In 1930 Elisha Adet a recalcitrant member of NLC took about 12 married women to Chula Ndere against the mandate of colonial government and the advise of NLC leadership, because he had afresh vision, which required him to receive commandments, instructions and structures from God. But it seems the women were only used for sex for when they returned six months later the majority were not only pregnant but sick. Similarly in 1961 when James Owigo Pesa emerged among these NLCs adherent with new powers of preaching, healing and exorcism, he took a group of women (married and unmarried) as helpers and doctors with him when he travelled from Oboch to South Nyanza. The end result was mass pregnancy. In 1967 he had to quit and form his Holy Ghost Coptic Church. However, he still left with individuals mostly women who had received Muya (Holy Spirit-the ability to operate in the Spirit and perform miracles of all sorts.) The NLC and its splinters have somehow managed to control the churches affairs in spite of the women who claim to have received the Holy Spirit.

Whereas women were freed from their political responsibilities they had expressive powers that operated chiefly in ceremonies and settings managed by female elders. Because they lacked legitimate authority women based their leadership upon two forms of power: the mystical power based upon spiritual gifts, which operated like Muya (Holy Spirit) Since the 1960s and direct control of situated interaction. Like Jules Rosette (1979) we learn that this limited exercise of power as ceremonial leadership. As already mentioned, most of the NLC ritual activities are distinguished by gender marked expectations and differences in participation. The concept of Christian equality, with the expectation that men and women enter heaven side by side is basic to the NLC doctrine. However, the expression of equality in political leadership is denied women whenever men are present at a ritual of events, Luo women show the respect and express their control through their formal leadership. Through this interaction, women can control and direct the sense of ceremonies and other ritualised behaviour without formally acknowledged leadership roles. This is evident in the participation in song (Opwapo 1981). The woman would be reprimanded when their participation transgressed the boundaries of sin, healing and mediumship. However, during ritual the routine exercise of power occurs through song intervention. Intervention with song allows the woman to redirect sermon topics to present moral lessons that criticise the types of wrong doings they associate with men.

For men, preaching is a routine aspect of ritual leadership. The sermons are performed in concert with a reader who presents a passage, which is elaborated upon by a speaker in antiphonal fashion. Women remain seated and initiate song from this position. The women's interruption is a controlled contribution from this restrained position. This ritual participation could be viewed from the large Luo concept of wich kuot or shame. In the Sunday ceremony, the women's song participation is complementary to that of men. In the curing ceremony, women play an active and instrumental role. Healing would be like an extension of normal routine domestic activity. Midwifery (nyamrerwa) is confined to the older women.

The words of E. Sullerot (1971: 233) aptly forms a conclusion for this paper:

A visitor from another planet would find it paradoxical that while the majority of the Churchgoers are women, religious doctrines certainly do not value the female sex very highly, or at least have been misinterpreted over the centuries to give women a subordinate role in religious practices. They have been debarred from conducting religious services and administering sacraments. In the main line churches currently a number of women are now rejecting the self-effacement involved in this definition of their religious roles.

The NLC has survived in a world that has experienced several changes. It is a world where both in the secular world and the church women are speaking with a new voice and a new urgency. In conferences, seminars, discussion groups - of

various kinds the issue of women's roles is addressed. It is amazing that in spite of political independence, the Womens Decade 1975-1985, post-Nairobi and now Beijing, this church that came as a result of changed circumstances has not considered ordaining women as priests to date or changing the rules concerning women's participation.

As life transmitters, effective agents of communication and fervent religious adherents, women in the NLC should be empowered to advance to all positions of church leadership. Empowerment would mean provision of education since the majority of the women folks are either illiterate or semiliterate. Thus they are incapable of participating in certain deliberations requiring literacy. This is part of the church population that has distinguished itself for its love of the church, willingness to commit itself to work in the church. These women were and are actually the pillars of the church, always active, strong and ready to carry forth the mission of the church. Bearing these in mind it is necessary for the church to authenticate the ministry of women. Women must be given roles in decision making and this will help towards equity. The church should also come to grips with its own concept of vocation and perhaps develop a new theology of family life.

CONCLUSION.

What is the future of this religious movement? Would it fall prey to the secularisation process? Sociologists predicted that by the year 2000 religion would be much less relevant than it was in 1970. But in 1990 a sociological census emerged suggesting that the secularisation idea was wrong and a parochial European error made using the public choice theory because religion was more prevalent in the year 2000 than it was in 1970. The number of those calling themselves religious is on the rise in almost all countries of the world. Religion has become more prominent and widespread but less relevant. There is no reason to imagine that this trend will be reversed within the next decades. Possibilities are that by 2010 religion will remain important in society but the most crucial cultural and political decisions will not be made by it. This means that NLC will survive in spite of the pejorative flavour it has maintained throughout time. As David Barret says this movement would be attractive because its message is that of showing God reflected in their own language and culture. This makes it easy for those who are marginalized to hear the word of God as it relates to their own needs and expressed through their traditions.

This means that within these religious movements equality of the sexes in relationship to God will continue to co-exist with complete male monopolization of leadership roles, religious laws and authority in community affairs for even in religious frameworks that exclude women from authority women may be active participants. Women's religious lives are often closely linked to their interpersonal concerns: the network of relationships that seems most relevant to the understanding of women's religiosity is the family. An intense concern with the well being of their extended family characterizes the religious life of many women. Even within the male dominated religious contexts, women domesticate religion by emphasizing ritual and symbols that give spiritual meaning to their everyday lives (e.g. Observing food taboos, sacramental foods). Studies of women and religion are notable for emphasizing ritual instead of theology. Consequently we know more about what women do than what they believe in. Perhaps women invest more time into ritual than into theological speculations.

In spite of these for its own survival and future effectiveness there is need to address the issue of the liberation of women. How can women be liberated from this? There is need for analysis of the individuals and the society. Both men and women need to develop a consciousness of gender related issues. Both long term and historical effects and present day realities need to be understood and evaluated, as far as this is possible. The issues causing oppression be dealt with. Finally there is need for increased education for women. Men also need to be liberated from the attitudes and structures that bind them. This implies that male and female liberation are two sides of the same coin; both are necessary for liberation and wholeness in the church.

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