

Our Women Must Return Home: Institutionalized Patriarchy in Colonial Central Nyanza District, 1945–1963

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Samwel Ong'wen Okuro

Maseno University, Maseno-Kenya

Abstract

Colonial policies and practices were very instrumental in the creation of the Luo Diaspora. This Diaspora extended far beyond the physical and cultural boundaries of Central Nyanza as was constituted by the colonial administration. To colonial officials, this Diaspora represented 'detrribalized natives' responsible for social decay and immorality in the colonial townships. Similarly, to the male elders in the rural areas, this Diaspora was an affront towards destabilizing tribal authority and sanctions, which governed Luo moral order, Luo marriage, and Luo identity as it existed prior to colonialism. This article uses patriarchy as an analytical framework to understand how male elders and colonial officials collaborated to assert control over young women under suspicion of prostitution. The article argues that the Ramogi African Welfare Association (RAWA) was a post-war patriarchal institution which was used by male elders, with the encouragement of the colonial officials, to intimidate, harass and repatriate young women seeking wage employment within the emerging colonial townships. In this article, I use archival and field data gathered from Central Nyanza between 1999 and 2002 to illustrate how institutionalized patriarchy threatened many women and young girls seeking to migrate to colonial towns in order to exploit the limited economic and social opportunities that colonialism provided.

Keywords

colonialism, Kenya, patriarchy, women

Introduction

Of all the concepts generated by feminism, patriarchy is probably the most overused and, in some respects, the most under-theorized. However, it is not the aim of this article to provide a review of the theoretical debates around patriarchy, but instead to use it to understand institutionalized male domination during the post-war period in the former Central Nyanza district. Patriarchy literally means rule by the fathers (Pendergast and MacGregory, 2007). It is a system guided by the principles of domination of old over young and male over female (Tadesse, 1982). The concept of patriarchy is not new, nor is it new to recognize women's marginalized position. The patriarchal institution orders relations between the sexes and between generations on specific lines. It divides

Corresponding author:

Samwel Ong'wen Okuro, Department of History and Archaeology, Maseno University, PO Box 333, Maseno-Kenya
Email: okuroh@yahoo.com

home and work into masculine and feminine spheres, and into a hierarchy, with men in the more powerful and prestigious positions where they exercise power and authority over women and children. The male dominated family in fact lies at the root of the patriarchy, because no matter how rich or poor they may be, men can rely on being the heads of their households, in which women submit to their authority (Kelly, 1981).

To be institutionalized, patriarchy builds a support system around itself. It establishes control over both resources and social/cultural values. It directs the production and application of knowledge, the creation of myths and meaning and metaphors, and the historic narratives and stories by which people, nations and ethnic and religious groups identify themselves and assume their places in the world (Lerner, 1986). As it grows, the patriarchal institution shapes and perpetuates gender inequality and strips women of any form of control over their sexuality. Most African cultures are patriarchal, meaning that female sexuality is largely in the hands of males (Khumalo-Sakutukwa and Garbus, 2002). This is exemplified by bridewealth exchange, arranged marriages and levirate marriages among others.

Domesticity as an ideology is historically and culturally linked to patriarchy, gender/power relations and the artificial private/public distinctions. The way patriarchy defines women is such that their full and wholesome existence depends on getting married, producing children and caring for the family. While patriarchy defines women in terms of domesticity, it simultaneously draws an artificial line to separate the domestic (private) arena from the public one. The public sphere represents men and is the locus of socially valued activities such as politics, while the private is representative of the domestic activities centred around the family. Women are confined to and/or trapped in the domestic arena, a space where men rule over them as heads of family, while men spend most of their time in the public realm.

The process of separating the public/private spheres preceded colonialism but was precipitated, consolidated and reinforced by colonial policies and practices for obvious reasons. Where there had been a blurred distinction between public and private life, colonial structures and policies focused on delineating a clear distinction guided by ideology that perceived men as public actors and women as private performers. By refusing to recognize any but male authorities, the colonial administration destroyed the authority and the capacity of women-controlled decision-making bodies, and also ensured that the occasional emergence of women as national leaders could not occur. Similarly, the imposition of a patriarchal form of Christianity by missionaries meant both that men would dominate church hierarchies and that a patriarchal interpretation of the bible would be upheld.

The area under study falls within the colonial Nyanza province of western Kenya. Presently, the regions comprise Kisumu West district, Siaya district, Bondo district, Rarieda district and Kisumu East district of the Nyanza province. The major economic activities in the region include fishing, cattle rearing and subsistence cultivation of crops such as millet, maize, sorghum, cassava and cowpeas (Okuro, 2006).

The Aftermath of Colonialism in the Post-war Period

In Central Nyanza, much of the existing literatures on social welfare and other voluntary organizations in the post-war period have highlighted the organizations' political role in the anti-colonial struggles and emphasized their mobilization of grassroots support for wider political movements (Atieno-Odhiambo, 1975; Lonsdale, 1970; Ogot, 1999; Ogot and Ochieng', 1995). These literatures have however under-emphasized the role these organizations played in changing the social, economic and even cultural landscape of women throughout the colonial period (Okuro, 2006).

Even in the context of the social and economic transformations occasioned by colonialism, in as late as 1945, African men always wanted to keep intact institutional values and practices which would continue to keep women within their subordinate position, silent and disempowered. In the post-war era, I argue that institutionalized patriarchy and traditional African culture played an important role in limiting women to the restricted social roles operating mainly as wives, daughters and mothers. African women who attempted to vent outside the prescribed social spaces attracted criticism and scorn from the African men, colonial officials, and other women who had remained trapped within the traditional order. I also argue that this form of institutionalized patriarchy became a threat to African women and girls seeking to migrate to the colonial towns in order to exploit and/or benefit from the limited economic opportunities that colonialism offered.

In the post-war period, colonialism remained the main catalyst for the vast number of social and economic changes that were being accentuated not only in Central Nyanza but also in the whole Kenyan Colony (Bookman, 1973; Butterman, 1979; Hay, 1972; Okuro, 2002; Pala, 1980; Whisson, 1964). The major colonial apparatuses driving these changes included: colonial labour policies, colonial taxation policies, colonial welfare programmes and missionary activities. These were later accentuated by the establishment of colonial urban forms, which had been designated as either administrative or commercial nodes (Anyumba, 1995). These colonial apparatuses were instrumental in uprooting a significant number of men, and later women, from their 'native areas' where they were governed using officially sanctioned tribal patriarchal institutions. Related to this was the question of how to halt the deteriorating moral state of Luo men and women within the colony, particularly in the post-war era. This moral question and the debates thereafter cannot be comprehended adequately without a detailed overview of the gender impact of these colonial apparatuses.

Unlike the fertile highlands of Central Kenya, the lush but malaria-prone shores of Lake Victoria were unsuitable for European settlement and agricultural exploitation (Carotenute, 2006). This did not mean that the region served no purpose in colonial maintenance: instead what is now known as Nyanza province and more particularly, Central Nyanza, became a massive labour reserve. The aftermaths of taxation and labour policies witnessed tens of thousands of the Luo able-bodied men leaving Central Nyanza to serve as dockworkers in Mombasa and Dar es Salaam, railway employees in Nairobi and Kampala and agricultural labourers on tea, coffee and sisal plantations throughout east Africa (Carotenute, 2006; Cooper, 1987; Kitching, 1980; Okuro, 2002; Stichter, 1982).

The demand for adult manpower from Central Nyanza intensified after the war as the colonial government felt that the Luo still had 'a large reservoir of labor' (Okuro, 2002: 114) given their tendency to return periodically to their localities, their dislike for permanent jobs, their deep ties with family and property and their apparent dislike for career and incentives (Jalango'-Ndeda, 1991). As a consequence, the private and public labour recruiters intensified their activities in Central Nyanza to get as many young men as possible for public and private colonial enterprises. Similarly, there was a vast array of push factors that compelled many adult Luo men to seek wage employment outside the Central Nyanza region. These were identified by a bi-weekly vernacular newspaper, *Ramogi* (Gadsden, 1980; Ogude, 2001; Scotton, 1971) as including: land scarcity, the demand for higher living standards, preference for industrial employment, craving for advantage or at least the trappings of western civilization, the need to pay taxes or bridewealth, and the desire to purchase trade goods (KNA/*Ramogi Press*, 15 April 1948). Others also migrated purely for adventurers' reasons after having been told about town novelties. This is not to downplay the aftermath of 'Operation Anvil', which restored confidence in the Luo men and resulted in a heavy outflow of Luo families in search of ready employment and high wages in towns and plantations (Carotenute, 2006).

Therefore, after the war, Central Nyanza became one of the largest exporters for male labour in the whole of the Kenyan colony (Jalango'-Ndeda, 1991). In fact, almost all the Central Nyanza Annual Reports after the war repeated the phrase 'the district is denuded of its adult male population' (Okuro, 2006: 38). The outflow of male labour from Central Nyanza had a significant impact on gender relations, particularly considering women married to migrant men. In the absence of able-bodied men, a significant portion of household responsibility fell on the women, children and the aged. This was in addition to maintaining rural economies.

In Central Nyanza, a significant number of women, children and the aged participated in colonial agricultural enterprises, in subsistence farming, in soil conservation, and women had to endure extended periods of time without a male companion. The consequence of this was the emergence of a complaining society never witnessed before in Central Nyanza. These complaints had remarkable impacts on the operation of patriarchal structures in the rural areas. After the war, it was not unusual for migrants to complain of inadequate wages, poor working conditions and the inability to gather enough bridewealth for marriage. On the other hand, the women in the native areas also had their own unique complaints, which concerned irregular remittances, increased burden of work, desertion and neglect. Other women had to endure the worries and rumours that their newly acquired husbands had died either during military duties or as a result of poor working conditions (Jalango'-Ndeda, 1991; Okuro, 2002).

Similarly, the widows and the old men had their unique complains in the post-war period. The Family Affairs Department compiled several letters, which illustrated the extent of frustrations that faced widows in Central Nyanza. In these letters, the widows requested the district commissioner to secure release of their sons from work to return home and help them reconstruct huts. For example, in 1954, the Central Nyanza District Commissioner was forced to order Bernard Otengi (KAR-Nairobi) to return home and assist his widowed mother construct a hut since there was nobody to do it (KNA/DC/KSM/1/22/202). In fact, the issue of dilapidated huts was common and affected even women married to migrant men. For instance, in 1956, chief Melkizedek Nindo also ordered Jordan Obuny to return from Mombasa and build for his wife a hut, which he had neglected for a long time (KNA/DC/KSM/1/19/235).

The elders were equally disappointed after the war as they realized the extent to which they had lost control over migrant men, some of whom had established marriages outside the customary dictates which required them to consult the elders on marital issues. Moreover, the exchange of bridewealth on which the elders depended to accumulate more wealth and create more daughters-in-laws faced several challenges as it was being replaced with 'cash exchange'. In the circumstances in which they worked, the migrant men found it difficult to return home and marry. Their fears were well captured by Richard Omollo on the 29 March 1947 who argued:

They fear going home because what they are having is not even one tenth of what should get them married. Comparing what they get as monthly pay with the price of one head of cattle, the pay itself may only be half the price. Thinking of this and how the present life should be treated, this makes many young boys fail to marry. (KNA/DC/KSM/1/12/6)

Therefore, to enter into marriage, a number of migrant men decided to circumvent the traditional marital obligations. Those employed in the Kings African Rifle (KRA) found it easier to enter into marriages and since they had relatively better wages a number could pledge in the circumstances where bridewealth could not be exchanged as was customarily acceptable. The bride-wealth pledge was occasioned by the high prices of cattle obtaining in Central Nyanza as similarly explained by Richard Omollo who warned that:

If this persisted regularly and gradually, at the end we shall find out that fifty-percent of Nyanza province people are lost. This was due to unfixed prices of what should be real cost of marriage. Members should kindly see to this point and discuss it properly and fix the necessary price of one head of cattle. Some may think that this is mere talking on, it is a true fact. You know very well that all people are not equal under the globe, which means that, some have enough riches but some do not. They who have can help their children to get married, but they who do not must find it difficult which will lead them to poverty unless this is brought out thoroughly, Nyanza province will have to leave out her best people. (KNA/DC/KSM/1/12/6)

The failure by the Local Native Councils to institute a mechanism for bridewealth stabilization in Central Nyanza was very catastrophic for the elders, migrant men and women. Those young men who found it extremely difficult to acquire brides encouraged young women to elope with them to the places where they worked, hence bypassing the elders in marriage negotiations. As a consequence, the Family Affairs Department held several reports indicating an upsurge of women molestation, run-away wives and girls unwilling to proceed to their chosen husbands (KNA/DC/KSM/1/36/37). To the elders, these were demonstrations of the extent to which the Luo as a society was on the brink of losing its identity and that something had to be done to stop the process from getting out of control.

The activities of the Church Mission Society did not make things any better for the elders. The CMS made its presence felt in Central Nyanza particularly after the war through evangelism. In Central Nyanza, the missionaries, together with their converts, preached against traditional marriage institutions, polygamy and wife inheritance, and discouraged bridewealth exchange among those who aspired to be baptized in the church (Nzioki, 1986). In addition, the missionaries also had a keen interest in elementary education and agricultural training for young men and women (Ogot, 1963). In fact, by the 1950s, Christianity was viewed as a divisive element as it made marriage negotiations much more difficult, especially between Christians and non-Christians (Carotenute, 2006).

After the war, the sudden process of social change among the natives bothered the colonial officials both in Kenya and in London. In Britain, the Department of Social Welfare for Colonies appreciated that the contact between Africans and colonialism was responsible for the breakdown of a sense of communal obligations. The colonial officers argued that the introduction of wage employment inevitably led to individualism, which had considerable impacts on marriage as women tended to avoid their traditional duties in communities. Moreover, the traditional sanctions which enforced communal morality had ceased to be effective in areas where European contact had been pronounced. The ethical systems, which had genuine social values, together with moral codes, which served to regulate the conduct of the small kinship units, equally could no longer be applied to people living in the large mixed communities that congregated in the new colonial towns (KNA/DC/KSM/1/1/194).

In order to remedy the situation, the colonial office opted to raise the socio-economic position of African women in the rural areas through training. This training was aimed at showing African women how to become better housewives and mothers, together with an opportunity to become literate either in their own languages or Kiswahili and the English language (Okuro, 2006). The curriculum for the training included: cooking meat, poultry, vegetables, fish, eggs, soups, fruit, cereals, baking bread, simple cakes, pastry, beverages, butter and cheese making. There was also housewifery whose subjects comprised cleaning furniture, utensils, beds and bedding. In Central Nyanza, needlework, laundry and agriculture were very familiar and course instructors found it difficult to convince the rural women to take sufficient interest in other courses (KNA/PC/NZA/1/3/548). These courses were offered at Kisumu Home Craft, Maseno Home Craft, and in the

raft of women clubs and women institutes in Central Nyanza. However, women from Central Nyanza preferred to be trained at either Kericho Training Centre or Jeans Schools as graduates from these training centres easily found wage employment as trainers in the women's clubs and institutes. This employment offered women 'wages and made them less dependent on not only migrant men but on all men' (KNA/PC/NZA/1/3/548).

While these training courses were not of any relevance for the rural women as they emphasized European values, customs, character and tastes, they nonetheless offered women opportunity to work as European domestic servants within the emerging colonial towns – a responsibility which was dominated by African migrant men. In Central Nyanza, the trained women who could not secure wage employment within the local women's clubs and institutes opted to migrate to towns such as Kisumu, Kericho, Nairobi, Mombasa, and even Kampala, in search of employment. In addition to being employed as domestic servants in the townships, some women secured jobs with the medical department or in Asian hotels and other entertainment places (Okuro, 2006).

Therefore, the post-war period in Central Nyanza was characterized by profound out migration of not only men but also women to colonial townships and other colonial enterprises. In addition to the male migrants, the newfound migration included: women with marital problems, runaway wives, and women unwilling to proceed to their chosen husbands. Others were women anticipating to be married by migrant men, trained women and women attracted to towns by rumours about town novelties.

This new type of migration to colonial townships worried both the elders in Central Nyanza and the colonial administrators. They both saw the colonial townships as morally polluted spaces, which needed social and cultural governance. Similarly, they argued that the township life offered the Luo workers a space for social interaction away from the prying eyes and controlling forces of their elders. Moreover, the colonial officials feared that the Africans in towns were becoming 'detrribalized natives' whom the state deemed to be operating dangerously outside the control of their elders. The colonial officials and the elders thus agreed not only to regulate and assert control over young Luo men and women who had broken away from their rural elders but also to revitalize the traditional leadership institutions, which were fading with the passage of time.

Repatriating Women: The Ramogi African Welfare Association

The increased outflow of men and women had significant impact on the patriarchal institution in Central Nyanza. The male elders in the localities argued that the new urban-bound mobility threatened traditionally cherished values, promoted moral decadence, lowered the number of cattle exchanged as bridewealth and upset existing gender relations. In addition, it rendered irrelevant the role of elders in marriage negotiations and removed female labour from the household. After the war, these elders, through the Luo Union (also see Carotenute, 2006; Odinga, 1967), developed a keen interest towards limiting female migration to colonial townships.

The alumni of the famous Church Missionary Society School at Maseno such as Oginga Odinga, Walter Odede and Achieng' Oneko felt that after the war, the Luo needed to build a strong sense of unity, purpose and achievement which would help foster Luo identity. By March 1945, these Luo leaders managed to not only build the Luo Union Office in Kisumu but also to revise the Union's rules and regulations to help them deal with the increased female migration to towns. One of the revised by-laws stated: 'Luo Union shall study and then offer a united resistance against any unprogressive modern influence and to promote the welfare of the Luo individually or collectively in their places of residence' (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/368).

These revised by-laws had a remarkable impact on the migrant women. On 11 August 1945, the Union wrote to the District Commissioner of Central Nyanza advising him to ensure that no Luo woman or girl is allowed to access any township without the permission of her parents or guardians (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/316). The revised by-laws further prohibited Luo women and girls from being employed in non-native beer shops, and being employed as a domestic servant without a written permit from the Union. On marriage, the by-laws argued for marriage according to the Luo customs and prohibited Luo girls from being married by non-Luo particularly Europeans, Asians, Arabs and Somali. Similarly, the Union outlawed women and girls from frequenting townships particularly if they had 'no proper dwelling place'. To curb prostitution, the Luo Union strictly argued that: 'any Luo girl or woman found smoking cigarettes with the lit end inside the mouth and drawing money from the underwear pocket will be liable to prosecution' (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/316).

By early 1946, a more specialized association named the Ramogi African Welfare Association (RAWA) emerged to curtail the migration of Luo women to townships. This new association managed to rally the colonial administration's support, arguing that their aim was to maintain the fading moral values and codes that seem to have been disappearing as a result of colonialism. In one of the letters RAWA wrote to the Nyanza Provincial Commission they lamented that migrating women and girls had created a harm that could never be repaired in the Luo society. They thus asked the Provincial Commissioner to help them prevent and prosecute all girls and women who were running away from husbands or parents and were employed in prostitution business in the townships. These included women working in European and Asian farms, in the medical department, as nursing sisters, in railway stations and in mining companies. RAWA similarly sought to stop illegal marriages between African girls and non-Africans. By mid-1946, they demanded to be allowed by the colonial officials to repatriate migrating girls and women to their husbands and parents (Okuro, 2002). To show the association's scant respect for the women, they demanded that all women and girls prosecuted in the township or near it should have their hair cut and be dressed in gunny bag before repatriation (Okuro, 2006).

By the end of 1945, RAWA managed to repatriate some women from the townships in colonial Kenya to Central Nyanza. For example on 30 November 1945 the then head of divisional police in Kisumu wrote to the Provincial Superintendent of Police explaining that RAWA succeeded in repatriating about 10 Luo women back to their reserves dressed in gunny bags. This action seem to have upset the colonial officials who wrote to the RAWA referring them to the relevant sections of the colonial laws¹ which they could supplement by providing information and evidence. The Provincial Commissioner further advised RAWA that 'the native law and custom should only prevail in the area of jurisdiction of the tribunal, so far as it is not repugnant to justice or morality or inconsistent with the provisions of any order of the King in council or with any other law in force in the colony' (Okuro, 2002).

This action by the colonial officials did not go well with RAWA, and when Italian co-operators entered the rural areas to acquire African women the RAWA Secretary Mr John Odera wrote to the Provincial Commissioner that:

Prostitution was not taking place between Ramogi women and other tribes irrespective of caste (hence its absence from the tribal custom). It, however, originated from Europeans and Asians settlement in the colony and whose racial custom it seems has need ... This practice obviously enticed African men, women, girls and boys after sometime, to follow this non-African practice. It must be recalled that, the then customary habit was between boys and girls, who were confined to native co-habitation and depended on mutual consent according to tribal law. It would be great discouragement to which in the past and the present, is their only source of unity in the every day village life is being replaced by a British

law – a law of a race with a thousand years of civilization ... who would allow a virulent to flood his dwelling, if he can divert or stop it? Surely, people would be free without any such practices and roguery would diminish. (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376)

As from 31 July, 1946 RAWA initiated a series of correspondences showing disapproval of colonial laws as applied in the Kenya colony. These included: the Laws of Kenya 1930, part II, page 701, Native Tribunal Ordinance section 13(a), the Laws of Kenya, volume X, page 242, Native Christian Marriage and Divorce Ordinance 1931, section 10. These particular provisions were rejected by RAWA officials for their lack of recognition of tribal laws and customs. Moreover, RAWA argued that these provisions deprived the elders, parents and relatives the power to control their daughters. RAWA officials pointed out that under the native laws and customs women and girls of whatever age, whether married or not, just as well as men or boys are subject to parents' or relatives' directions, and that the existence of these colonial laws were responsible for the increased destruction of the Luo unity and rise of moral decadence (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376).

A year after the end of the war, RAWA preferred charges against several women in the township, including those who were employed in various colonial enterprises. In September 1946, RAWA officials followed, arrested and preferred charges against a European man and a woman whom they found sleeping in a room which ordinarily ought to have been slept in by the children in the reserve (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376). During the same month, the RAWA officials proceeded to Kaloleni in Kisumu town and arrested four women, punished them severely and sent them back to their rural homes. RAWA even requested fathers and husbands to visit townships and look for their girls and women and avail them for prosecution within the township tribunal for leaving their fathers' homes without being married or having their fathers' permission, contrary to native law and custom. The officials further arrested women and girls found in the township for more than 48 hours without an identification pass or work.

Towards the end of the 1946, the Debating Society who opposed RAWA activities reported to the Provincial Commissioner that RAWA arrested many women and children found in Kisumu town and held them for a whole day without food, in addition to shaving their hair and dressing them in a gunny bag. This did not deter the RAWA official who wrote to the PC declaring that:

Native customs hold ... girls and women, even when fifty and over are simple – remain at homes as it would be madness to drive them away just because they are over 18 years or when daughter is married, father and husband must combine together in order to direct the girl along proper lines and it would be a folly to let her go her own way simply because she happens to be over 18 year. (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376)

As a consequence, between 1947 and 1948, RAWA revised their rules and regulations. In revising the regulations, the officials argued that the future of the Ramogi generation looked bleak unless drastic steps were put in place for assisting the colonial authorities to combat the increased moral decadence among the Luo in colonial enterprises.

The revised rules and regulations included those on the distillation of Nubian gin, the licensing of the livestock trade, disrespect for male elders, and child neglect with regard to education and roaming in the township. Part four of the revised regulations focused on marriage. Section 4 demanded that anyone who intended to marry must fulfil the usual tribal obligation of marriage before the girl or woman's parents or relatives with a liaison [*Jagam*] who has personal knowledge of both the bridegroom and the bride's parents. RAWA argued that marriage without liaison often led to dissatisfaction and trouble between the married couple and becomes difficult for elders to resettle. In accordance to these revised regulations, RAWA sought to prosecute:

Any man who shall divorce his wife with whom he had been in union before he placed the case before the woman's or girls parents or relatives, liaison and RAWA of the area concerned to prove reason necessitating a divorce. The same was to apply to women or girls aspiring to divorce husbands. No man or boy should get married to another girl or woman until dissolution of the bounds of her previous marriage is affected ... no man shall take a girl without her parent's or relative's consent. Any one, who is not a member of Luo tribe, found having intercourse with Luo or other African tribe's girl or woman is guilty of offence and will be reported before the court by the above association. The RAWA ... against producing a community of mixed blood or mulattos amongst Luo tribe and its members and the whole community is determined to arrest any Luo girl or woman found loitering in the township without proper means of livelihood. (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376)

On 19 October 1948 RAWA wrote to the Provincial Commissioner of Nyanza complaining about the Christian missionaries, the mission centres and the medical department. RAWA warned the missionaries to stop accommodating African women who escape from their husbands as the practice was creating a lot of bad feeling between missionaries and Africans. The RAWA officials argued that 'suppose the husband of the woman who is accommodated within the mission dies, the consequences are always very difficult to settle according to customs. The worst offenders in this case were the Roman Catholic missionaries' (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376).

To the medical department, the RAWA demanded that they too refuse to engage women or girls without first obtaining permission from the husband or father of the girl in question. In his response, the Provincial Commissioner of Nyanza directed the medical department to engage women and girls as hospital dressers after their application had been sent to the DC for approval. The DC as a matter of procedure consulted with his staff and if necessary would refer the matter to the girl's home for their opinion before engagement at the medical department.

However, in Central Nyanza, the male elders became notorious in turning down such applicants arguing that either such a woman was married or bridewealth had been paid for them or they were just waiting to join their husbands in marriage.² By 1951, RAWA had stopped, inspected, arrested and detained many African women visiting relatives in the town, attending church services or going about their lawful business to the bazaar or market (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376).

The RAWA activities did not go unchallenged. In Central Nyanza the opposition came from a few educated Luo men and women. These men and women operated under the Luo Debating Club – an association of educated men and privileged women. Members of this club castigated RAWA for propagating repugnant, uncivilized and outdated Luo cultural practices. They also petitioned the colonial officials in Nyanza to put a stop to the activities of RAWA arguing that it had become difficult even for married women to visit their husbands in towns. Subsequently, in the pages of *Ramogi*, a bi-weekly Luo vernacular newspaper, there took place several debates concerning female sexuality. In fact this newspaper provided literate women with a platform from which to publish their opinions against RAWA. These women even castigated the men for the moral decay in the towns. An article in 1951 argued:

... as soon as these young men get employed in towns, they find they cannot do without women and begin keeping prostitutes ... with the results that all the money they earn is spent on them and perpetual drinking, where as their wives and children are suffering in the reserves without any help or information through correspondence. (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376)

The church also condemned RAWA for mistreating women and failing to punish the men too. For example, Archdeacon LJ Beecher in his letter to RAWA officials argued: 'but why not do

something about the men who insist on using prostitutes? Why not make them shave and wear sackcloth? If men stopped using them, their trade would disappear' (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376). The migrating women also used various strategies to resist RAWA attempts to repatriate them to their native areas. Some migrant women bribed RAWA officials while others sought to hide in interior parts of the townships where they could not easily be identified.

The position of colonial officials towards RAWA throughout the post-war period appeared ambivalent if not vague. The colonialists did not want to spearhead the process of detribalizing Africans, as it was on the tribal foundation that they had built the colonial administration. Consequently, they supported the tribal patriarchal authority and particularly the RAWA, whose mission was to keep African women and girls under control. It was therefore not surprising that the District Commissioner of Central Nyanza could easily support RAWA activities saying:

I believe that there is much truth in the contestation that *ayahs* (domestic female workers) are, in a majority of instances, women of loose morals. There is no doubt that the Luo in the locations around Kisumu are very worried about the influx of girls into the municipality and it would seem that much might be done by the police to get prosecution under section 149 of the penal code (keeping brothels), with perhaps the help of the association. (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376)

On the other hand, colonial officials seem to have held a perception that African men with a female companion were particularly productive and in order to increase the African productivity in European enterprises the colonial officials had their hands tied when it came to curtailing the mobility of women to the townships either as married women or prostitutes.

However, to discourage the Luo workers from seeking frequent offs from employment to resolve domestic problems, the colonial officials ensured that the Luo women were pigeonholed at home to appropriately take care of home responsibilities. In fact this explains the ambiguity that characterized District Commissioner's general instruction concerning migrant women to mission centers. The DC emphasized that 'women like men must be free to join missions to study religion ... in case the woman had quarrelled with her parents or the husband and taken refuge in a mission, the parents or the husband had to approach the mission and explain the circumstance. After this the man could ask for the woman to be ordered to return to her home'. (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376)

As the process of land registration in Central Nyanza approached during the 1950s, RAWA found a new and even better justification to take action on women and girls resisting life within the reserves in an argument that was highly supported by the colonial agricultural officers who observed that 'the Luo woman lives a life very apart from her husband. She is in matters connected with the running of the home and *shamba*, the executive partner' (KNA/DC/1/3/61). While the initial perception by the colonial officials encouraged African men to work with their female companion, in the post-war period it was realized that the men could work even better when assured that his domestic problems and/or worries were well catered for either by his wife or parents. These domestic issues rotated around land disputes, subsistence cultivation, parental care, adultery and bridewealth, among other things. These issues seem to have been the spur behind controlling migrant women, even if it meant breaking the colonial law as was applicable in the colony of Kenya. As independence approached there was the ever-increasing motivation to encourage male labour migration and discourage women migration to colonial enterprises. The extent to which this has played out in the post-colonial period is an untold story.

Conclusion

The post-war period was very challenging for both the colonial administration and the people of Central Nyanza. For the women, this may have been a period of remarkable mobility and experimentation with vast economic opportunities offered by colonialism. However, this was not to be as colonial administrators and male elders conspired to curtail their mobility for their own benefits. While the male elders succeeded in repatriating some Luo women from the colonial towns in order to maintain tribal moral order, the colonial officials argued that migrant men worked better when his domestic problems are taken care of by women at home.

Notes

1. These sections included: 177(1), 177(8), 146 to 149 of the Penal Code, the government notices 800/45, 567/1931, Immigration Ordinances and Vagrancy Ordinances.
2. Oral information from Monica Orogno and Joyce Akeyo in Central Nyanza on 20 December 2000.

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Samwel Ong'wen Okuro is currently a senior lecturer in the School of Education and Social Sciences, Bondo University College (Maseno University). His current research interests include colonialism and bridewealth exchange and agrarian re-structuring in east Africa. Some of his recent publications include: 'Daniel arap Moi and the Politics of HIV/AIDS in Kenya, 1983–2002' (*African Journal of AIDS Research*, Vol. 8, 2009); 'African Diaspora and the Writing of African Historiography: A Critique', in *Teaching and Propagating African and Diaspora History and Culture* (Lagos: CBAAC, 2009); 'Struggling with In-Laws and Corruption: The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Widows' and Orphans' Land Rights in Kombewa Division Kenya' in *Women's Land Rights and Privatization* (Englert and Daley, eds, 2009).