

Religious Rituals and Their Manifestation in Contemporary African Christianity: A Case Study of Luong Mogik Church in Kisumu County, Kenya

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Abstract- Religious rituals constitute fundamental expressions of faith that shape the identity and practices of religious communities worldwide. This study explored the specific religious rituals practiced in Luong Mogik Church (LMC) in Kisumu County, Kenya, examining their manifestation in contemporary African Christianity. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research involved 135 participants selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, focused group discussions, and participant observation. The findings revealed four primary ritual categories: refraining from worldly actions (80%), ritual cleansing practices (85%), punishment of transgressing members (90%), and adherence to specific worship attire (93%). The study demonstrates how traditional African religious elements integrate with Christian practices, creating unique expressions of faith that maintain cultural continuity while adapting to contemporary contexts. These rituals serve multiple functions including spiritual purification, community cohesion, and moral regulation. The research contributes to understanding the dynamic nature of African Christianity and its capacity to synthesize indigenous and foreign religious elements.

Indexed Terms- Religious rituals, African Christianity, Luong Mogik Church, Cultural practices

I. INTRODUCTION

Religious rituals represent structured, repetitive behaviors prescribed by religious institutions that facilitate communication with the divine and reinforce

community identity (Evrin, 2022). In African contexts, rituals serve as bridges between the spiritual and physical realms, expressing the need to communicate with supernatural forces, particularly ancestral spirits believed to remain active in community life (Mouralis et al., 2021). The significance of religious rituals extends beyond mere ceremonial observance to encompass social organization, cultural transmission, and individual spiritual development.

Kenya's religious landscape reflects a rich tapestry of indigenous beliefs, Christianity, and Islam, with approximately 97% of the population following organized religion (Pew Research Centre, 2020). Within this context, various Christian denominations have emerged that blend traditional African religious practices with Christian theology, creating unique expressions of faith. The Luong Mogik Church represents one such manifestation, having originated from the Seventh Day Adventist Church in 1963 due to theological differences regarding traditional practices and ritual observances.

Despite extensive research on African Christianity, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding the specific ritual practices of indigenous Christian movements like the Luong Mogik Church and their role in shaping religious identity. This knowledge gap necessitates empirical investigation to document and analyze these practices, contributing to broader understanding of religious syncretism in contemporary Africa.

This study aimed to explore the specific religious rituals practiced in Luong Mogik Churches in Kisumu County, examining their content, significance, and manifestation within the framework of African

Christianity. The research addresses the question: What are the main rituals practiced in Luong Mogik Churches and how do they reflect the integration of traditional African and Christian religious elements?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Religious Rituals

Religious rituals have been theorized from various disciplinary perspectives. Anthropologically, rituals serve as mechanisms for social cohesion and cultural transmission (Bell, 2017). They create symbolic boundaries between sacred and profane, facilitating community identity formation and maintenance. From a sociological perspective, rituals function as social control mechanisms, reinforcing normative behaviors and sanctioning deviations (Durkheim, 1915).

The Social Capital Theory, developed by Putnam (1995), provides a relevant framework for understanding how rituals generate social connections, trust, and shared values within religious communities. This theory recognizes the significance of social networks and resources in influencing individual and collective outcomes, highlighting how ritual participation can foster cooperation and community development.

2.2 Religious Rituals in African Contexts

African religious traditions emphasize ritual as fundamental to spiritual practice and community life. Traditional African religions employ various ritual forms including purification ceremonies, ancestral veneration, and rites of passage (Magesa, 2021). These practices often involve symbolic actions, offerings, and prescribed behaviors that maintain harmony between the living, ancestors, and divine forces.

In East African contexts, indigenous religions place strong emphasis on rituals such as ancestor worship and spiritual connection to land (Kratz, 2021). Among Kenyan communities, rituals encompass purification practices, social transformation ceremonies, reconciliation rites, and punishment rituals for societal transgressions (Munala et al., 2022).

2.3 Contemporary Manifestations in Churches

Modern African churches demonstrate varying approaches to traditional ritual practices. Some denominations reject traditional elements entirely, while others incorporate them into Christian frameworks (Nel, 2019). Pentecostal and charismatic movements often embrace certain traditional practices while reinterpreting them through Christian theology.

The phenomenon of religious syncretism in African Christianity reflects adaptive strategies that allow communities to maintain cultural continuity while embracing new religious systems. This process creates hybrid forms of religious expression that combine indigenous and foreign elements in novel configurations.

2.4 Research Gaps

While existing literature addresses general patterns of religious syncretism in African Christianity, limited research focuses on specific ritual practices within indigenous Christian movements. The documentation and analysis of particular church communities' ritual systems remain underdeveloped, creating gaps in understanding how local congregations negotiate between traditional and Christian practices.

III. Research Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide comprehensive understanding of ritual practices in Luong Mogik Churches.

3.2 Study Area and Population

The research was conducted in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kisumu County, Kenya. The target population comprised members of four Luong Mogik Churches: Nyamasaria, Nyawita, Obunga, and Manyatta, with a total membership of 450 individuals.

3.3 Sampling Techniques

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was employed. Purposive sampling identified key informants including church directors, pastors, deacons, and women leaders. Snowball sampling facilitated access to additional knowledgeable participants. The final sample comprised 135 participants representing 30% of the target population.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data collection utilized multiple methods. Questionnaires were administered to 68 church members and youth. In-depth interviews were conducted with 38 key informants including pastors, women leaders, and church directors. Seven focused group discussions were held with different demographic groups. Participant observation involved direct observation of ritual practices during church services.

3.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics. The NVivo qualitative analysis software assisted in identifying patterns and themes in the data.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The study achieved a 96% response rate for questionnaires and 90% for interviews. Participants comprised 57% females and 43% males, with the majority (41%) aged between 25-35 years. Educational levels varied, with 55% having secondary education and 67% being married. Employment status showed 25% formally employed and 60% self-employed.

4.2 History of Luong Mogik Church

Luong Mogik Church originated in 1963 in South Nyanza, founded by Mama Susana, a former Seventh Day Adventist member. The church emerged due to theological differences regarding traditional practices

including polygamy, ritual cleansing, and strict Sabbath observance. The name "Luong Mogik" translates to "the last call," reflecting the church's eschatological focus.

The church's organizational structure follows a hierarchical model with directors at the apex, followed by overseers, pastors, prophets, and specialized ministry leaders. Membership requires adherence to specific practices including hair restraints, bathing restrictions on designated days, and abstinence from alcohol.

4.3 Specific Rituals Practiced

4.3.1 Refraining from Worldly Actions (80% participation)

This category encompasses multiple practices. Jewelry and makeup prohibition requires members to refrain from wearing jewelry, makeup, and body piercings. Nyamasaria church recorded the highest compliance (80%), with members viewing jewelry as promoting vanity and diverting attention from spiritual matters. Biblical justification draws from Isaiah 3:16-21 and 1 Peter 3:3-4, emphasizing inner beauty over external adornment.

Sabbath observance involves strict adherence to Sabbath requirements including complete rest from work and abstinence from sexual intercourse from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. Obunga (90%) and Nyamasaria (87%) churches showed highest compliance. Members spend Sabbath time in church, viewing this as dedication to divine worship.

Gambling prohibition was evident in Nyamasaria (80%) and Nyalenda (70%) which recorded highest abstinence rates. Members cite biblical principles regarding stewardship and honest labor, viewing gambling as contrary to Christian work ethics.

Modern wedding rejection shows that members prefer traditional prayer ceremonies over formal church weddings, viewing the latter as Western impositions inconsistent with traditional marriage practices.

4.3.2 Ritual Cleansing Practices (85% participation)

Cleansing rituals address various forms of perceived impurity. Sin purification involves members engaging in confession sessions before worship services, pairing up to confess transgressions and seek mutual forgiveness. This practice aims to achieve spiritual cleanliness before divine worship.

Menstrual cleansing requires women experiencing menstruation to occupy designated seating areas separate from other congregants and they cannot participate in worship activities until the seven-day purification period concludes. This practice reflects Old Testament purity laws (Leviticus 15:19-20).

Postpartum cleansing involves new mothers undergoing isolation periods varying by child's gender (33 days for boys, 66 days for girls) before receiving prayers and rejoining community activities. This practice combines spiritual purification with traditional recuperation customs.

4.3.3 Punishment of Transgressing Members (90% participation)

Physical discipline is administered to members who commit serious transgressions. Specialized individuals, termed "Samson" figures, conduct beatings under perceived spiritual guidance. This practice aims to drive out evil spirits and serves as deterrent to other members. Biblical justification references Jesus's use of whips in the temple (John 2:15-17).

4.3.4 Specific Worship Attire (93% participation)

Members wear white clothing during worship services, symbolizing purity and unity. White attire creates visual uniformity, masking socioeconomic differences and fostering collective identity. Women cover their heads with white cloths, following biblical prescriptions regarding head covering (1 Corinthians 11:3-16).

4.4 Ritual Significance and Meaning

Analysis reveals that LMC rituals serve multiple functions including spiritual purification through

removing impediments to divine communication, community boundary maintenance by distinguishing members from outsiders, social control through enforcing normative behaviors via sanctions, cultural continuity through preserving traditional practices within Christian framework, and identity formation by creating distinctive religious identity.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal how Luong Mogik Church creates a unique synthesis of traditional African religious practices and Christian theology. The church's ritual system demonstrates selective appropriation of Old Testament practices, particularly purity laws, while rejecting certain New Testament innovations. This approach reflects broader patterns in African Christianity where communities negotiate between indigenous traditions and foreign religious systems.

The emphasis on ritual cleansing mirrors traditional African concerns with spiritual purity and ancestral approval. However, these practices are reinterpreted through biblical frameworks, demonstrating religious syncretism's creative potential. The church's rejection of modern elements like formal weddings and jewelry reflects resistance to Western cultural impositions while maintaining cultural authenticity.

The high participation rates in ritual practices (80-93%) indicate strong community commitment to these observances. This suggests that rituals successfully fulfill community needs for spiritual expression, social cohesion, and cultural identity maintenance.

However, certain practices, particularly physical punishment and menstrual restrictions, raise concerns regarding human rights and gender equality. These practices reflect tensions between traditional religious authority and contemporary human rights discourses.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Luong Mogik Church maintains a complex ritual system that integrates traditional African and Christian elements. The four primary ritual categories—abstinence from worldly practices, purification ceremonies, disciplinary measures, and uniform requirements—create a

comprehensive framework for religious life that emphasizes spiritual purity, community cohesion, and moral regulation.

The research demonstrates how indigenous Christian movements develop distinctive practices that reflect local cultural values while maintaining Christian identity. The high participation rates indicate community satisfaction with these practices, suggesting their effectiveness in meeting spiritual and social needs.

The study contributes to understanding religious syncretism in African Christianity, documenting how local communities create meaningful religious expressions that honor both traditional and Christian elements. This research provides valuable insights into the dynamic nature of African Christianity and its capacity for creative adaptation.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 For Practitioners

Church leaders should engage in dialogue regarding practices that may conflict with contemporary human rights standards. Development of educational programs that explain ritual significance while respecting individual dignity is recommended. Creation of spaces for theological reflection on traditional practices' contemporary relevance would be beneficial.

7.2 For Researchers

Conducting comparative studies of ritual practices across different African Christian movements is needed. Investigation of the psychological and social impacts of ritual participation on community members requires attention. Examination of gender dimensions of religious ritual practices in African churches should be pursued.

7.3 For Policy Makers

Development of guidelines for religious freedom that balance cultural practices with human rights is essential. Support for interfaith dialogue initiatives that promote understanding of diverse religious

expressions should be provided. Creation of educational programs that increase awareness of religious diversity in Kenya is recommended.

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