

## **Gender Equality in the East African Revival Movement**

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### **Abstract**

*The East African Revival is one of the movements which displayed gender equality in the Church. This is mainly because the message of the revival was founded on the message of Pentecost. When people joined the revival, they got inspired by the Holy Spirit which brought complete transformation. The transformation resulted in breaking down all barriers, including barriers between men and women. This article highlights gender equality and empowerment of women in the East African Revival Movement (EARM). Women became both preachers and leaders in the EARM. The revival also resulted in mutuality and partnership in marriage. Walking in the light was a major characteristic of the revival which led to openness and democratic ethos. Testimonies and public confession gave women empowerment. The women challenged cultural practices which had previously disempowered them. The women were persecuted and became martyrs of faith.*

***Key words: Gender, Equality, East Africa, Revival, Movement***

## Introduction

The East African revival movement is one of the movements in the Church in which gender equality is displayed. This is due to the fact that most of the revivals are founded on the message of Pentecost. The revival started at Gahini medical mission station at the Rwandan mission of the Church of Uganda in 1929. According to Dr. Joe Church, the revival was as a result of the movement of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> This can be seen as a fulfilment of Joel's prophecy:

I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophecy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants both men and women. I will pour out my Spirit on those days (Joel 2:28-29).

The revival was established after a meeting between Dr. Joe Church, the medical doctor in charge of the medical mission at Gahini, at the Rwandan mission of the Church of Uganda and Simeon Nsimbambi, a land owner and court interpreter. Their main concern was laxity in the Church and spiritual powerlessness of Christians. Most people were Christians but the Christian message never applied to their lives. Dr. Church saw the revival as fundamentally displaying the message of Pentecost and the early Church. This is seen in the radical equality between men and women, whites and blacks and Tutsis and Hutus.

Revivals always emphasize the transforming power of the gospel and renewal by the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who repent and believe. In the East African revival, the saved ones felt completely transformed and their attitudes, habits and worldviews were completely changed.<sup>2</sup> When people got saved, they had to organize their lives and homes around new values that came from God-given knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Ward, "Revival, Mission and Church in Kigezi, Rwanda and Burundi" in *the East African Revival History and Legacies* Eds. Kevin Ward and Emma Wild-Wood (London: Ashgate Publishers, 2012), 14

<sup>2</sup> Emma Wild-Wood, "Chosen Evangelical Revival on the Northern Congo- Uganda Border" in *East African Revival*, 129

Revival resulted in radical discontinuity from the past, bringing new standards of life in the family including equality between men and women.

In 1936, Bishop Cyril Stuart was very disturbed by the laxity in the Church of Uganda. He prayed for revival and invited Dr. Joe Church to preach, and he did so accompanied by several African brothers and sisters. A major characteristic of the revival was equality, which was completely opposite of what happened in the Church of Uganda.<sup>3</sup> Bishop Langford Smith, Bishop of Nakuru and a member of the revival said that at the heart of the gospel is the message of reconciliation of human beings to God through Christ crucified, and outstanding among its fruit is equality between men and women. This victory of the Spirit is seen when a smiling African man introducing his wife says to you, ‘This is my sister, my wife, raised to equality, but more to oneness in the cross.’<sup>4</sup> John Gatu, a former PCEA moderator and a member of the revival testified about his salvation:

From then I was able to receive the freedom I had longed for and which I thought I had all along to enable me to glorify and obey God, and to be able to relate to my fellow human beings as a new creature washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. The relationship between me and my wife has changed for the better.<sup>5</sup>

### **Preaching and Leadership**

The first feature of equality in the East African Revival fellowship was the changed status of women. The egalitarian norm of the movement ensured the full participation of girls and women in the fellowship. This included preaching and taking leadership positions. They were committed to spiritual equality of all believers. In 1936, Juliana Mfuko, a young girl from Kigezi in Southern Uganda heard the revivalists preaching near her home.

She converted after being influenced by the Holy Spirit. Juliana was empowered and started speaking in public, preaching and witnessing about Christ both in Church and in the revival fellowship.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ken Farrimond, “The Loyalties of Early Revival Leaders in Busoga” in *East African Revival*, 91

<sup>4</sup> N. Langford –Smith, “Revival in East Africa’ in *International Review of Missions* Vol. XLIII No. 169, January 1954: 80

<sup>5</sup> John Gatu, “Jesus Christ the Truthful Mirror” in *The East African Revival*, 2012, 37

In 1938, the revival movement reached Nyanza in Kenya. A team of revivalists reached Maseno under the leadership of Dr. Church.

They were invited by Dr. Norman Green, who was in charge of the medical mission in Maseno. Gladys Odila, Agnetta Owino, Judith Odero and Dorsilla Abor were among the first converts. Luo women used locally made megaphones or ‘*tung*’ to preach. One of the main challenges in Western Kenya was the practice of polygamy. The revival women used Luo art of speech in songs and testimonies to castigate polygamy. One elderly woman held her hands to her mouth, as if shouting in a megaphone, while singing ‘*Jadoho idong, Nyachira Idong*’ (The polygamist you are left behind, the second wife you are left behind).<sup>7</sup>

By 1939, the revival movement had a very great impact on Haya women from North-Western Tanzania. The Christians at Haya had been greatly impressed by members of their community who got saved in Uganda and returned as witnesses. The women were very active members of the preaching team. Elizabeth, a widow, was one of the chief preachers, and gave her time to travel to different places for the preaching mission.<sup>8</sup>

The women preachers in the revival looked at the Bible passages in a unique way. In 1939, Naomi wa Paulo, a saved sister from Tumu-Tumu in Kenya, preached on the parable of the woman at the well with Jesus. The sermon was directed to both men and women, however she changed the roles, so instead of the woman at the well, Christ encountered a male sinner. She underlined that Jesus told the woman her most intimate sins, but underlined that such intimate sins are also found among male Church elders and preachers.

Naomi focused on the hypocrisy of church elders and secret sins committed by men. According to her, men were to be blamed for social disorder.

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<sup>6</sup> Peterson, 2006, 106

<sup>7</sup> Derek Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent 1913-35*, 2013, 143

<sup>8</sup> Brigitta Larsson, “Haya Women’s Response to Revival” in *East African Revival Movement 2012*, 120

In the 1930s, Naomi concluded that men's refusal to confess their sins made them devilish. Naomi illustrated her point with what she referred to as a confession from an elder after his death:

People thought that I was fine, but that was not the case.  
I sinned with so many women but when I asked them to  
stand they refused. I mentioned their names and their sins.<sup>9</sup>

Naomi concluded that after the elder finished his confession, fire from beneath burnt the elder completely. Doris Nyambura was also a leader and preacher at Tumu-Tumu. She was an evangelist and was one of the preachers at the first convention in Kahuhia. The convention was attended by over 3000 people.<sup>10</sup>

Truphena Odin was one of the preachers and influential leaders of the EARM. Mama Truphena was born in 1918, and was brought up as a member of the African Inland Mission Church. In 1947, she accepted Jesus as her personal saviour after listening to the preaching of the gospel by brethren from Uganda, including Joe Church and William Nagenda. Truphena was in a polygamous marriage by the time of her salvation. She decided to leave her marriage and take care of her children. Truphena was a gifted preacher and was a main speaker at both the local and district conventions. She was also a popular speaker at the annual national conventions and the East African region. Truphena was also part of the leadership team from the local level to the national level. She was able to reach Christians in all parts of East Africa. She preached in Churches, conventions, markets, fellowships, homes and door to door outreach.<sup>11</sup>

One of the main passages used by the revivalists was Genesis 21, the story of Abraham and Hagar.

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<sup>9</sup> Derek Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent 1913-1935*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 480

<sup>10</sup> Derek, 2013, 480

<sup>11</sup> Mombo, Esther, 'The Revival Testimony of Second Wives' in Kevin Ward and Emma Wild-wood (eds.) *The East African Revival*, 2012, 155

They underlined that Hagar was asked to leave her marriage after having a son with Abraham. They used the Luo metaphor, ‘*Gar*’ or usurp to say that Hagar had usurped or taken Sarah’s husband. Hagar was the nickname given to the second wives.

This was in line with the Luo idea of giving people nicknames to befit their character. Sarah in her sermon pointed out that most of the second wives were living a life of slavery as in most instances they were used as a source of cheap labour. Most of the second wives left the polygamous marriages and settled in a life of economic independence.

The members of the revival also pointed out the problems encountered in polygamous marriages. They underlined that there could be no true partnership in polygamous marriages.

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### **Mutuality and Partnership in Marriage**

The revival movement led to mutuality and partnership in marriage based on the idea of spiritual equality. The revival members had a new concept of family, in the context of social change during the colonial period. The members of the revival focused on the concept of “walking in the light”, which led to openness in the family. Walking in the light meant discussing all issues with one another and praying together. They shared in decision making and responsibility within the family. Andrew Rugasira gave his testimony:

It was on 28<sup>th</sup> of February that I was relieved of my sinful load that had been on my back. I committed so many sins, I was a drunkard, an adulterer, as well as a perfect bully. I used to beat my wife but now I praise and thank God for having remitted me of these sins, as well as giving me peace. He made me love my wife whom I hated strongly and who I used to beat seriously. My wife and I now have peace in our house, it is transformation from sadness, hatred, violence, secrecy to equality, peace, openness and happiness. Our former home was darkness but now it is light.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Onyango, Emily, ‘Luo Women’s Negotiation of Mission Education’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2006, 223

<sup>13</sup> Jason Brunner, “The Testimony Must Begin in the Home: The life of Salvation and Remaking of Homes in the East African Revival in Southern Uganda 1930-35”, Unpublished Paper, 2016, 20

Walking in the light led to democratic ethos within the revival families. According to Felicitus, the revival led to a new relationship between husbands and wives and a life of real equality.

In the new relationship, when problems arise, people discuss with each other, forgive one another and in fact they call each other brother and sister. In 1949, Barbo Johnson, a Swedish missionary reported on the position of Bahaya women and noted the changes brought by the revival movement:

Where the revival has been, the men begin happily and voluntarily to assist in the daily work. They are also eager to go with their wives to the fellowship and ask for their participation in deliberations, testimonies, prayers and fellowship. They set their slaves free.<sup>14</sup>

In Nyanza, men lived a life of openness with their wives. They discussed their finances and in some instances they even had joint accounts. Women in the revival were very keen that their families should succeed and therefore they developed an entrepreneurial spirit.

The women worked hard and were supported by their husbands and therefore brought a lot of income to their families. Dorcas Nyongo used her farming skills to support the family and contribute towards the fees of her children. Dorcas was married to Canon Archdeacon Nyongo a clergy in the Anglican Church of Kenya. Clergy did not have a steady income, and therefore Dorcas had to focus on business as a way of making ends meet. Dorcas and other revival women in Nyanza were seen as women of class, because they were very organized both at home and in the society. In Nyanza, members of the revival even gave property to their daughters. Joyce was given a piece of land as inheritance by her father because he believed both men and women are equal.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Brigitta Larrison, "Haya Women's Response to the Revival" in *East African Revival* (Surrey Ashgate, 2012), 123

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Dorcas Nyongo, Ratta, Kisumu 2013

## **Empowerment and Giving Women Voice**

The revival movement gave women a voice and empowerment in patriarchal societies where women were mostly to be seen and not to be heard. Women used their testimonies and public confessions to discuss issues which they would otherwise not discuss. Testimonies gave women opportunity to speak in public.

Women used testimonies to criticize Church bureaucracy. In 1937, the revival women decided to tell the church elders off at a convention in Tumu-Tumu. The women said that they had endured long lectures and sermons from church elders mainly focusing on the model of a God-fearing woman. The God-fearing woman had to be a good cook and welcoming to visitors. However, towards the end of the conference the women pointed out in their testimonies that domestic violence was mainly a man's issue and not a woman's issue. The women therefore made three resolutions:

- There are some wrong things done by men and these should be corrected.
- The church elders, who are heads of their families should be conscious of their mistakes as they were the ones destroying families.
- Women asked that:
  - a) Their workload should be reduced.
  - b) They should be allowed to travel to other places, so that they can see the hospitality of other women.
  - c) Men must buy sufficient cutlery, cooking utensils and furniture.

The women concluded that Christians must discuss these issues in the Church so that they can be an example to others (Ex. 5:14). They concluded their resolutions by pointing to the Biblical reminder 'that you are the light of the world'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Derek Peterson, "Wordy Women: Gender Trouble and the Oral Politics of the East African Revival in Northern Gikuyuland in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 42 No. 3 (2001), 479

Women in the revival also discussed the greed of the Church elders. In 1940's during land consolidation, the Church elders were involved in multiple land cases. They used the government courts to consolidate land holdings at the expense of other members of the society including their family members. The Church elders became so corrupt that some of the money given in the Church went directly to their pockets. In 1948, Cecilia Mugaki got saved and decided to voice the fears of the converts:

Cecilia complained that she was disturbed because the receipts were rarely collected for money issued in the Church, that elders made decisions in private, outside the hearing of members and the Church to conduct private business or to fund land cases. The Converts mainly felt that the Church bureaucracy was a means of sucking wealth out of the members.<sup>17</sup>

Women also used testimonies to challenge patriarchy within the context of socio-economic and political changes in the society. The language of the testimony was used as a way of creating social order in the home. Women criticized the shortcomings of the husbands. They had public debates or discussions over men's infidelity in the context of social change. During the colonial period most men were conscripted for labour and migrated to the urban areas. There were also men who were recruited for World War II. Most families therefore had distant relationships with men only returning home once a year. This led to both infidelity and irresponsibility. In 1935, Salome Kagume testified in church court. The women had hoped that the Church courts would reveal men's infidelity and protect feminine virtue. Salome said that her husband, Isaaka had gone to Nairobi for wage work, but was now going around with prostitutes.

Fredrick Ruheni and Philista Wangari were married in Church in 1940. However Fredrick became irresponsible and started going out with prostitutes and bringing beer drinkers at home.

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<sup>17</sup> Derek Peterson, "Wordy Women" 2001, 483

Philista decided to take issue with the husband's responsibility and even gave a testimony before the Kirk session. She said she would not go home with Ruheni until he stops taking beer and bringing other beer drinkers in the house as they disturb her.

Ruheni also got an infection and therefore she was not going to have sex with him until he treated the infection.<sup>18</sup> Women spoke of the private issues publicly so that they would hold men accountable.

In Nyanza, women in the EARM decided to stand their ground and even take up responsibilities which were previously in the domain of men. Due to labour migration most men failed to build houses at home and take responsibility over their families. Women in the revival decided to build their homesteads and even acquired authority in those homes. Women became the heads of these homes and the homes were even referred to by the names of the women, for example people said they were going to Dorka Okinyo's home.<sup>19</sup> Women in the revival also protested against their husband's habit of keeping concubines in the urban areas. Most of the concubines had long plaited hair, which was the sign of beauty. Amina, the town girls' hair was seen as the greatest attraction especially to Luo men and therefore long hair was synonymous with immorality.

The Luo women had composed a song '*Lo your mother may streak, when your wife deserts you for hanging out with Amina, the town girl, who is ..... (Unmentionable)*'<sup>20</sup> Women of the revival therefore resolved that any lady who was saved would not plait their hair or put on jewellery. Women who got saved would also shave their hair as a sign of resistance against their husband's concubines.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Derek Peterson, "Wordy Women", 2001, 474.

<sup>19</sup> David Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo, *Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape* (London: James Currey, 1989), 114-15

<sup>20</sup> Atieno Odhiambo & Cohen, 1989, 99

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Perisis Omollo, Gem, Siaya May 2003

Through public confession and testimonies, revivalism invited men and women to take an inventory of their deeds and their possessions.

Bugufi people, from Kagera District, Tanzania began to travel northwards, where they worked short term for Ganda cotton farmers. The husbands' constant absence from home left wives with heavy duties. In 1939, revival evangelists from Buganda and Kigezi preached in Bugufi. Bugufi Christians owned up to their dark past, took stock of their lives and evaluated their actions and possessions.<sup>22</sup> Labour migration also led to masculine bravado, and women observed that when labour migrants returned they had a lot of arrogance and contempt to those they left at home. Bugufi migrants demanded that their wives practice rigorous sexual discipline. Women in the revival decided to bargain with their husbands:

Mary and Raymond Kagero discussed their priorities before Raymond's departure from home. If money was needed to improve the condition of the house, he stayed in Buganda only for a short time. But when they wished to purchase livestock, Raymond would stay for a longer period of time at work. Mary was able to bargain with the husband, agreeing to shoulder a greater burden at home in the expectation that the husband's cash earnings would help their collective welfare.<sup>23</sup>

Women in the revival walked in the light leading to their empowerment, unlike other women who were abandoned to shoulder all the responsibilities in the family.

### **Women in the Revival and Culture**

Women in the East African revival movement challenged cultural practices which dehumanized women. They did not just talk or use language of dialogue but after salvation lived a completely different life. The members of the revival challenged practices like forced marriages, widowhood rites and widow inheritance and polygamy.

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<sup>22</sup> Derek Peterson, "Revivalism and Dissent in Colonial East Africa" in *East African Revival*, 2012, 107.

<sup>23</sup> Derek Peterson, "Revivalism and Dissent in Colonial East Africa", 112

Anastasia, a girl from Bukoba in Tanzania refused to enter into a forced marriage arranged by her father. She refused to marry the man that her father had chosen because the man's home was a place for spirit worship.

The bride-groom's parents had already demanded that if she was to marry in their home, she had to give up contacts with the Balokole or the EARM. Anastasia realized the danger of this as she wanted to continue with her Christian faith. Her father forced her to write a letter to her fiancée's relatives to say that she was prepared to be married under their conditions. However, she wrote a letter and concluded with her own protest using the words 'Jesus Satisfies'. The relatives of the man interpreted this as pride and rejected her saying:

What does Jesus satisfy, what will happen when this girl comes here?  
She is not afraid of anything. If she comes here and gets married, after  
sometime, when she is inside all on her own, she can put the whole  
house on fire, and she can burn all the tools of *Embadwa* (Spirit medium)<sup>24</sup>

Anastasia's father was very upset with her. One Sunday as Anastasia was attending a Church service in the Church in Ruzinga, the father came to attack her with a big knife as the service was proceeding and he gave her daughter four blows. The father was ordered out of the Church, he disowned Anastasia, and she had to be given protection by the local Lutheran priest.

Women in the revival also challenged widowhood practices. They challenged the widowhood rituals which were both dehumanizing and disempowering to the women economically. According to Luo cultural practices, when a husband dies, the woman is viewed as unclean due to her contact with death.

Therefore, before the widow is officially inherited by the husband's male relative, she must undergo sexual cleansing. This involves having sexual intercourse with a stranger, so she can be cleansed.

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<sup>24</sup> Brigitta Larrson, "Haya Women's Response to the Revival" in *East African Revival Movement*, 121

The widow is considered unclean before cleansing and therefore is not supposed to go to other people's houses, perform economic activities like fetching water, firewood and going to the market or the farm.

The widow, then had to be inherited by a male relative of the husband. If a widow is not inherited, all her economic activities would stall as these activities were always accompanied by sex. In the Luo community, a person cannot build a house, if it is not preceded by sexual intercourse between the couple. Cultivation of the land, planting and harvesting were all accompanied by sexual activities, which implied that without being inherited the widow was doomed.

Judith Ochieng refused to be taken into leviratic marriage or be inherited after the death of her husband. She refused to tear her clothes, mourn naked and wail at her husband's death, as was expected by the culture. Judith succeeded the husband as a '*Jagolpur*' or leader of cultivation in the home, which was against custom. Judith was a skilful cultivator, and her undisputed skills in agriculture propelled her to wealth and a position of leadership in the society.<sup>25</sup>

Mary Omollo's husband died before he could build for her a home. Mary decided to call members of the Church to lay for her a foundation for building a home. She built her home independent of any man and therefore declared that no cultural practices are allowed in her home. Lucia Okuthe, the first woman Anglican priest in Kenya refused to undergo widowhood rituals after the death of her husband. Lucia bought a farm in Muhoroni settlement scheme and built for herself a permanent house. She became an established sugarcane farmer and also kept a fruit orchard.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Emily Onyango, 2006, 225

<sup>26</sup> Emily Onyango, *Gender and Development: A History of Women's Education in Kenya* (London: Langham, 2018), 225

Joyce Otieno from Ugenya warned people at the funeral of her husband that she did not want to see any man around her home, and declared that from then on, Jesus was her husband, she was satisfied and did not need any male person for security.

The members of the revival helped her to sing a defiant song, which warned people that they were not going to undergo sexual or widow cleansing:

*Jokabut wasiemou, ok wadwar jokabut maluchre biro e dala Yesu Oromo*  
We are warning you widow cleansers who come with overcoats  
at night, we warn you that your services are not needed in this  
home as Christ is in charge and it is Christ who satisfies.

According to Luo culture, if a widow was not inherited, it was a taboo to dig her grave or even to participate in her burial. Women in the revival decided to exclude people from the burial of their sisters in Christ. The ladies put on white dresses, white headgears and white gloves to symbolize that they were victors as they dug the graves of their colleagues and gave them descent burial ceremonies. They sang defiant songs as they dug the graves.<sup>27</sup>

### **Women Martyrs**

Women in the East Africa Revival Movement were among the first martyrs in the church in Kenya. The women were ready to stand for their faith, even at the face of death. The women were ready to overcome both racial and ethnic barriers and show that they belonged to the body of Christ. The Women stood for their faith both during the Mau Mau and the 1969 Oath taking which were major challenges in Kenya.

The Mau-Mau movement arose in the late 1940's and was a response to the European colonial rule in Kenya. The Mau Mau resistance was mainly concentrated among the Agikuyu community. First, they were responding to African economic disempowerment through colonial rule. Secondly, they wanted the British to return back the land which had been taken away from the Africans.

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Peresis Omollo, 2003, May

Third, they were protesting the lack of representation of Africans in the legislative council. The Mau Mau movement was therefore fighting for independence from colonial rule. In order to achieve their aim, they needed complete unity among the people.

For fear of betrayal they developed a means of ensuring loyalty among its members and the general Agikuyu community. They developed oaths, which were administered to people secretly. Most of these oaths were controversial and sacrilegious to the Christian ethos, and the conditions varied from place to place.<sup>28</sup> Among the requirements of the oaths was to denounce the Christian faith and to go back to Gikuyu traditional religions. However, the Mau Mau oaths were a perversion of the traditional oaths. According to tradition, women were not to participate in oath-taking, while during the Mau Mau oathing, women were also expected to take the oath.

The major type of oath adopted by the Mau Mau, consisted of the lamb which was killed and the contents of the stomach mixed with herbs, water and a little of the blood of the animal. The administrator of the oath then placed a loop made of grass over the head and hands of the initiate. The mixture described above was then placed in the hand of the initiate and a banana leaf containing the mixture was circulated over the head of the initiate seven times, the administrator then held the banana leaf before the initiate and described the oath they were about to take. Initiates repeated the terms of the oath as the banana leaf was again rotated over his head seven times.

They were then made to put the tongue on the blood and the earth on the banana leaf seven times. The initiates would then be explained to what would happen to them and their families should they abandon or betray the course.

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<sup>28</sup> Roberts Granville (ed.), *The Mau Mau In Kenya* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Publishers, 1954), 48

There was only one punishment for doing so, death of the person and the entire family.<sup>29</sup>The members of the revival refused to take the oath because it involved denouncing the Christian faith.

They felt that the blood of Jesus was superior to the blood of goats and they would not mix the blood of goats with the blood of Christ. The members of the EARM were also against oath taking, which involved mixture of both human and animal blood.

They also felt that they could not betray Christianity to support violence and tolerate killing, stealing and betraying fellow believers.<sup>30</sup> Mary Wangechi, Rebekah Waceke and Rahab Ng'endo all members of the East African Revival were killed because of their faith in Jesus and their stand against participation in any kind of oath taking.

a) **Mary Wangechi**

Mary Wangechi, was a monitor teacher at Keri school. She received Jesus Christ as her personal saviour on Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1947, at the age of eighteen, when members of the EARM came to preach at her school. Mary confessed that she had been a hypocrite, could not take a stand because she wanted people to think well of her. However, now Jesus was her rock and she refused to take part in old customs and practices, which she felt were dishonouring to a Christian. Mary was engaged to Joshua before she got saved and therefore decided to write to him telling him of her new life, and proposed that they should break off. However, Joshua maintained that they would get married according to her conditions and therefore they wedded in Church. Mary stayed back at home in Njumbe, while Joshua continued to work in Nairobi. Mary was a great preacher and a witness to Christ's power in the village.

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<sup>29</sup> Roberts, *The Mau Mau in Kenya*, 15-33

<sup>30</sup> Johnson Nganga Mbugua, "Agikuyu Christian Martyrs: An Exploratory Study of Selected Agikuyu Martyrs During the Mau-Mau Period in Kenya 1952-1960, MTh Thesis, South African Theological Seminary, February, 2011, 62

When the Mau-Mau shadow appeared, all the people in Kikuyu land were expected to take the oath. Joshua did all that he could to make his wife join him. When Mary persisted in refusing despite the beatings, Joshua took her back to her father, claiming that he had no further use for her. Mary decided to put a tiny shelter for herself in Njumbe and sold garden produce, so that she could take care of her children. Mary's neighbours all took the oath and she was the only one who remained. One morning the neighbours woke up to find her two children crying by themselves.

The dreaded men had come at night and slashed her to death, and her body was thrown in the latrine hole. Mary was given a Christian burial and was laid to rest in the compound of Njumbe Church.<sup>31</sup>

**b) Rebekah Waceke**

Rebekah Waceke was a trained teacher and was teaching in Njumbe School. Rebekah was an adopted daughter to Rev. Elijah Gachanja. Rebekah got married to Gathoni Gacigi who was also a trained teacher but later opted to do carpentry. Both Rebekah and Gathoni were saved and members of the EARM. Rebekah joined the husband after marriage and she became a teacher at Mioro School near the Aberdare Mountains.

Mau Mau finally reached the hill country of the Aberdares and oath taking ceremonies were held. The members of the EARM arranged for a two day convention near the Nyeri border. Rebekah, Gathoni and other members of the revival walked over on Friday evening and spent the whole of Saturday at the convention, where Gathoni was one of the speakers. On Saturday evening they agreed that Rebekah should walk back to Mioro on Sunday morning so that she could lead the Church service. Gathoni walked back on Sunday evening, meeting several Mau Mau scouts on the way. In the night the Mau Mau scouts forced open the house of Rebekah and Gathoni. The two were strangled and their legs tied on the bed.

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<sup>31</sup> E.M. Wiseman, *Kikuyu Martyrs: Stories Collected by Wiseman* (London: Highway Press, 1958), 11-14

Their little son was unharmed and was left seated at a nearby chair. Rebekah had been accused by the Mau Mau scouts of giving water to the tired and thirsty British policemen, who were on their way to search for oath takers. Rebekah had even given each of them a cup of tea which they found her making. That deed of kindness cost her her life. Gathoni and Rebekah were buried together at the edge of the Church plot.<sup>32</sup>

### **c) Rahabu Ngendo**

Rahabu was a Christian and lived with her parents in Limuru. The husband was attracted to the patriotic Mau Mau movement, and was among the first people to take the oath. However, Rahabu was a member of the EARM and a lady of staunch faith, and therefore decided to stand against the oath. She believed she was not alone but with Christ.

One night she refused to go for the oath taking which had been arranged, and instead locked herself in with her children. However, the neighbours came to fetch her and after battering her at the door, took her and her children along to the ceremony. Here, she found a banana tree trunk, some Sodom apples and various other things lying on the ground, a hole in the trunk was filled with goat's blood. Each initiate was to jump over these things seven times saying certain words and curses, and drink and be smeared with blood. A crowd was already there, having paid the subscription and ready to take the oath, but Rahabu refused. The crowd shouted, 'we will make her take it, we are stronger than you', showing her the strap hanging from the cave of the nearby house, to strangle those who refused. Rahabu responded, 'I am not afraid to die and go to God, even with the spade and things for digging the secret grave near, I have drunk the blood of Christ, how can I return to drink your goat's blood?'. With these words they hoisted her up by the neck, slowly strangling her to death.

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<sup>32</sup> EM Wiseman, *Kikuyu Martyrs*, 15-17

Women in the East African revival movement were also persecuted when they refused to participate in oath taking in Central Province in 1969. The oath taking was instituted after the death of Tom Mboya. Mboya was the Minister of Economic Planning and Development and was also the Secretary General of KANU which was the ruling party. The assassination of Mboya was blamed on the Kikuyu dominated government.<sup>33</sup> The 1969 oathing was reminiscent of the oath taking during the Mau mau movement. The assassination had resulted in a crisis and riots in different parts of the Country.

The oath was meant to maintain unity among the Kikuyu. During oath, people also had to swear that power would never leave Kikuyu land. Mary Wambui Chege was not ready to take any oath even at the pain of persecution or even death. Mary had been converted during a revival convention, and got married to Chege also a member of the Revival. They both refused to take the oath because they believed that they had already partaken of the blood of Jesus. One Friday evening, they were rounded up and taken to Gatundu in a lorry and told that they must take the oath. They refused to co-operate and therefore first they were left for a whole day without any food. After that they were given a thorough beating, their hands and feet were tied and the guards tried to force them to drink the blood, but they spit it out. Mary and other members of the revival were beaten up and left for dead. However, they maintained that they will not take any oath, and maintained that for them they were brothers and sisters with the Luos as Christ had broken down all barriers.<sup>34</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The East African Revival greatly displayed equality between men and women. Gender equality was due to the message of Pentecost which underlines that in Christ there is no male or female. The revival led to a transformation of people's attitude and worldview.

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<sup>33</sup>David Goldsworthy, *Tom Mboya: The Man Kenya Wanted to Forget* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1988), 284

<sup>34</sup> Mary Chege, testimony at St. Paul's University Chapel, October 2017

Members of the revival were empowered by the gospel which led to mutuality and partnership in marriage. The members of the East African revival walked in the light, which led to openness and democracy. The women in the revival got voice and were empowered through speaking up as they gave testimonies and made public confessions. Women got opportunities to be preachers and leaders in the revival and some were persecuted and even killed for their faith.

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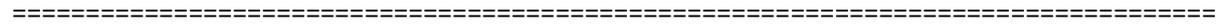
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