

ABSTRACT

LUO WOMEN'S NEGOTIATION OF MISSION EDUCATION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ANGLICAN WOMEN IN NYANZA KENYA, FROM 1895

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The aim of this thesis is to reconstruct an engendered history of Anglican missionary education in colonial Nyanza. It is based on an analysis of local written sources, oral sources and archival material. The reconstruction is also based on analysis of Luo language and concepts as a way of understanding Luo ideas about women and school. The thesis is a contribution to the study of African history, specifically the study of Luo Christian women. It is also a contribution to mission history, specifically focusing on CMS work on the education of girls by means of a case study of CMS Ng'iya girls' school.

The central argument of the thesis is that Luo Christian women used resources from their faith, culture and mission education to bring change and transformation in Church and society. They managed to negotiate positions of leadership in Church and society and contributed to the general development of these societies. Equipped thus with their new identity as Luo Christian women, they challenged hegemonic forces within Luo culture and in the wider society to work towards justice, peace and reconciliation.

Although Luo society was patriarchal some women had the opportunity to reach positions of leadership. Luo women had property rights like all members of the community, and could use this as a stepping stone for accumulating individual wealth. All members of the community had access to cultural education. However, the women lost their privileges in the early twentieth century and their position declined because of two main factors. First, was the change in the natural environment that resulted from migration and settlement in Nyanza. The second factor was colonial rule.

The main colonial and missionary actors in education were not interested in educating women for employment. They believed the main aim of education was to prepare women for marriage. The focus of Ng'iya girls' school was therefore to train women as teachers who would be married to the village Christian elite. Luo women however negotiated this education for their empowerment.

They could do so for two reasons. First Luo Marriages reflected women's philosophy of life and their economic and political theories. By focusing on Luo marriage, missions therefore interacted with much of the positive in Luo philosophy. Second, the use of the vernacular at school also meant that there was engagement between Luo and western-Christian ideas. Luo women therefore came up with their own philosophies of life, which became a springboard for their participation in society.

The condition of women in Nyanza has suffered again in recent times due to globalisation, ethnicity, gender disparity and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Many people, especially girls do not have access to education. Since the early Christian women used their faith, culture and education to bring change in Church and society, Luo Christian women need to be empowered to do the same in present day society.