

Historical Trajectory of the New Jerusalem Church of Tongaren, Bungoma County, Kenya

By

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Abstract

This article investigates the socio-religious transformations within NRMs using a case of TNJC in Kenya in the 21st century. New Religious Movements (NRMs) have been confronted with rapid social and cultural transformations which have led to the rise of conflicts and struggles over collective identities. This case applies to The New Jerusalem Church (TNJC) founded in Tongaren, Kenya by Eliud Wekesa who is identified by his followers as "Jesus" of Tongaren. The study sought to explore the history of TNJC in Tongaren. The article was guided by the Social Movement Theory coined by Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2004) to analyze the group's emergence and socio-transformation between 2011 and 2023 in Tongaren sub-county Bungoma, Kenya. This was a qualitative study that adopted the exploratory cross-sectional research design. The target population was TNJC members and non-TNJC members of Tongaren, Bungoma County. Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized to obtain information. Primary data was gathered from 22 key informants who were purposefully sampled for interviews and focus group discussions while secondary data was gathered from secondary literature in libraries. Collected data was analyzed through content and thematic analysis. This study found that the emergence of the TNJC movement was a result of the call of the founder (Eliud Wekesa), and religious and cultural factors. The religious factors included the need by members of TNJC for a satisfying religion while the cultural factors included the forces of globalization such as freedom of religion. The study concludes that, other than having a deep history TNJC has a variety of religious beliefs and practices. The movement has transformed its members' way of life. This study recommends that there should be the registration of NRMs by the government where their objectives must be scrutinized, the society should be aided in understanding NRMs and their practices.

Keywords: Kenya, New Religious Movements, The New Jerusalem Church, Socio-Religious Transformations, Tongaren, Church

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1.0 Introduction

New Religious Movements (NRMs) have been confronted with rapid social and cultural transformations which have led to the rise of conflicts and struggles over collective identities. This case applies to The New Jerusalem Church (TNJC) founded in Tongaren, Kenya by Eliud Wekesa who is identified by his followers as "Jesus" of Tongaren. The purpose of this article was to investigate the socio-religious transformations within NRMs using a case of TNJC in Kenya in the 21st century. Currently, different confusing explanations on the founder, origin, history and doctrines of TNJC have led to continuous suspicion and accusations on its followers by society. The general objective of this article was to investigate the socio-religious transformations of the New Jerusalem Church. Specifically, it sought to examine the history of TNJC in Tongaren.

The study took place in Tongaren Sub County, Kenya. It was guided by the Social Movement Theory coined by Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2004) to analyze the group's emergence and socio-transformation in the Tongaren sub-county, Bungoma County, Kenya. To answer the question of what is the history behind the formation of The New Jerusalem Church of Tongaren, this article starts by addressing the early links of the Ababukusu with the world, the introduction of Christianity to land and Christian missionary work in Ababukusu land. It will later on look at the history of The New Jerusalem Church and the possible factors that led to the emergence of The New Jerusalem Church.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kenya is home to many religions. Apart from the mainline churches, the country has many NRMs. Some of these NRMs were founded to oppose colonization and to challenge some doctrines introduced by the early missionaries. However, after the end of the era of colonization, more new religious movements have kept springing up with unclear motives. Some of them such as the Good News International Church of Paul Mackenzie have proven to be dangerous to society through indoctrination leading to massive loss of lives. Just like other parts of Kenya, we have NRMs springing up in Bungoma County such as the Lost Israelites Church of Jehova Wanyonyi and TJNC of Yesu wa Tongaren. There is scanty information on reasons for the emergence of these NRMs and the role they are playing in promoting the socio-religious transformations of their members. There is a need to answer the question; what are the motivations for the formation of NRMs in Kenya in the 21st century? We take the case of the New Jerusalem Church (TJNC) which emerged in 2011 with an overall objective of investigating the socio-religious transformations of NRMs in Kenya in the 21st Century. Specifically, this article sought to fill gaps of knowledge on the history of the formation of TNJC of Tongaren between 2011 and 2023.

1.2 Research Objectives

The research objective of this article was to examine the history of the New Jerusalem Church of Tongaren, Bungoma County, Kenya.

1.3 Historical Background of TNJC

TNJC has its roots in the Christian missionary activities that took place in the Bungoma County region of Kenya during the early 20th century. The church's history can be traced back to the arrival of European missionaries, particularly representatives of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) from Britain. The CMS missionaries began their work in the area around Tongaren in the early 1900s, introducing Christianity and establishing schools and churches. The missionaries focused on preaching the Gospel, teaching Christian doctrine, and providing education and healthcare services to the local population (Owino *et al*, 2017).

As the Christian faith took root in the Tongaren area, a local young man who belonged to one of the Catholic Churches in Tongaren claimed to have received a call from God to start his religion. The young man, Eliud Wekesa Simiyu known as *Mwalimu* declared himself Jesus. The TNJC was established as an independent Christian denomination that emerged out of this community. The exact date of its founding is not readily available, but it took shape in the year 2011.

The TNJC has its unique characteristics and practices, influenced by the cultural context of the Tongaren community. It combines Christian teachings with traditional African elements, incorporating local cultural expressions into its worship and spiritual practices. The TNJC has grown to become a significant religious presence in the Bungoma County region, with a network of churches and a community of believers who identify with its teachings and practices. The denomination continues to play a vital role in the spiritual and social life of its members and contributes to the broader religious landscape of the region.

Christianity was introduced to Ababukusu Land, in Western Kenya, during the colonial period in the late 19th and early 20th century. Christian missionaries from various denominations, including the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations such as the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches, established missions in the area and began to evangelize the local population.

The Swahili and Arab trade caravans that travelled to Buganda in pursuit of ivory and slaves before the arrival of the Europeans trekked through the Nandi Hills (Reid, 2020). Along with pillaging and robbing rural people, coastal traders introduced new forms of exchange, such as cowrie shells and beads, which took on a monetary function, and increased demand for imported commodities from other countries (Ibid). The Berlin Conference and the division of Africa, which were completed in 1885 and 1890, respectively, marked the beginning of the British taking control of her area of influence. Once the Royal Charter was obtained in 1888, the British decided to transfer the administrative responsibility to a private business to save money. Ivory and rhino horns from the interior were traded by the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEACO) with textiles, copper wire, iron, and porcelain goods from abroad (Kimani, 2018).

However, IBEACO was compelled to give up its charter to the government in 1894 due to a lack of funding and a variety of other issues. In July 1895, after the Company was dissolved, the British government directly took over management of the region. The region between the coast and Lake Victoria was initially deemed unprofitable by the British administration, but the need

to protect the road to Uganda led them to designate the region as the British East Africa Protectorate. During the British occupation, there were violent outbursts in Western Kenya. The first contact between the Ababukusu and the Europeans was in the years 1886 and 1918. This was the period when the British organized military expeditions against the tribes in the region such as the Agiriama, Aembu, Abagusii, Kipsigis and Ababukusu. The military expeditions against the Ababukusu were so disastrous that they came to be known as the 'Lumboka' and 'Chetambe' massacres (Makila, 2014).

With the establishment of colonial rule, the Ababukusu became subject to several forces working toward change. Their incorporation into a new and very large political entity threw together many former independent African nations. The political entity was also responsible for attracting European and Asian immigrants.' This created an entirely new context which had far-reaching effects on them. More specifically, there followed some colonial policies which sought to marginalize and control their nationalistic spirit. This aimed at assimilating the people into colonial systems (Branch, 2017).

The religious specialists, medicine men and council of elders were no more. The community lacked leaders. This was evident in how community support and care vanished. As this was going on, missionaries from Europe and England continued to spread the message of a loving, caring and invisible God. Many people embraced this message of missionaries but then, they started resenting it with the emergence of the brutality of colonialism propagated by the Whites from Europe (Ogolla *et al*, 2019). Kenyan ethnic groups were not willing to forego their old-age independence (Ogolla *et al*, 2019). The few sampled works concerning the Ababukusu reception of Europeans and their histories clearly show that the puritanical adoption of Christianity was the goal of the mission churches. However, this did not go well with the Ababukusu African traditional culture.

The studies above were informative to this article as they provided an impetus for understanding how Christianity arrived in Ababukusu land. It is at Ababukusu land where TNJC is stationed. Initially, the Ababukusu people were resistant to the introduction of Christianity, as they were deeply attached to their traditional religion and way of life. However, over time, the missionaries were able to gain converts by offering education, medical care, and other forms of assistance to the local population. As more and more Ababukusu people began to convert to Christianity, the religion began to have an impact on Ababukusu culture and society. Christian values such as charity, forgiveness, and love began to influence the social and moral norms of Ababukusu society. In addition, Christian schools and hospitals became important institutions in the area, and many Ababukusu people began to adopt Western-style education and medical practices.

Today, Christianity is one of the dominant religions in Ababukusu Land, alongside traditional African religions and Islam. The majority of Ababukusu people are either Roman Catholic or Protestant, with a smaller number of Anglicans and members of other denominations. Christianity continues to have a significant impact on Ababukusu culture and society, influencing everything from family values to political beliefs. Christianity experienced a renaissance in the 18th century, and there was a pressing desire to take the gospel abroad. African nations were seen by Europeans as urgently in need of the message of Christ. This resulted from European explorers' accounts that Africa was a gloomy continent and a haven for sorrow, crime, and devastation (Earle, 2005). The people of Africa were thought to be barbaric

and primitive. As a result, missionaries felt compelled to visit the "black" continent and its inhabitants as soon as possible.

The early Christian missionaries who came to Ababukusu Land were mainly from European countries such as Britain, France, and Italy. These missionaries came intending to spread Christianity and "civilize" the local population (Wasike *et al*, 2020). One of the earliest missionaries to the area was the Catholic priest, Father Louis van der Heyden, who arrived in Ababukusu Land in 1902. He was followed by other Catholic missionaries, including the Holy Ghost Fathers and the Mill Hill Fathers, who established mission stations in various parts of the region.

Protestant missionaries also arrived in the area around the same time (Amatsimbi, 2013). The Church of Scotland Mission established a mission station in Kima, while the Church Missionary Society (CMS) set up stations in Kandunyi and Kimilili. The Anglican Church also established a presence in the area through the CMS. The Friends Church which was originally called 'The Religious Society of Friends' arrived almost at the same time. It began in England under the leadership of George Fox who was the founder of a movement known in the beginning as "publishers of the truth and children of the light". George Fox's experience led to what is called the light of Christ (The Holy Spirit) that dwells in the hearts of ordinary people. He saw this as a seed that was planted by God inside a person which would only grow when it was cultivated by the Holy Spirit. He believed that to those who repented, there was no longer any need to wait for the second coming of Christ, that Christ was already here and He could be known through the inner light (Gushee & Stassen, 2016).

Willis Hotchkiss became the first Friends missionary to arrive in Kenya in 1902 after a long history in which the church had undergone periods of transformation, both in England and the United States of America (Simwa, 2015). Once in western Kenya, the pioneer FAM missionaries established the first station in 1902 at Kaimosi, among the Tiriki. The Tirikis are among one of the Ababukusu sub-ethnic groups. At the same time, the Ababukusu were also undergoing a process of change, which had been introduced with the establishment of colonial rule.

Willis Hotchkiss, a FAM minister provided the first link that brought Evangelical American Friends' mission to Western Kenya. Hotchkiss had received his initial training at the Cleveland Bible Institute and while there, he received the "call" to work in Africa. He had earlier tried to work with the Africa Inland Mission among the Akamba community of Kenya. However, they failed due to lack of financial support. The missionaries had earlier hoped simplistically for the consequent development of a self-supporting African church but contrary to their expectation, the missionaries did not find the Akamba eager to accept the Christian message. This, among many other factors, resulted in the Akamba becoming Christians, they had to be converted to the belief of faith in God, repentance of what Christians perceived as sin, and confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. It was after the failure to convert the Akamba that Hotchkiss changed tactics to the industrial mission concept and the holistic development policy, which entailed both evangelical and secular propagation of Christianity. After what was supposedly a failure in Ukambani, Willis Hotchkiss returned to the USA for a reorganization trip. While in the USA he got support from Arthur Chilson and Edgar Hole who were ready to accompany him to East Africa to engage in missionary work.

In April 1902, the trio sailed to East Africa to initiate the work. The three missionaries stopped

over in England and Ireland, where members of the British Yearly Meeting donated the metal Devonshire house which was shipped to Kenya in 1903. The three missionaries arrived at Mombasa on June 24, 1902. Using the newly constructed railroad, they arrived at Kisumu in July confirming the significance of the Kenya – Uganda railway in the inland missionary work. When the three pioneers arrived at the then-railway terminal on Lake Victoria, the railway officials and C.W. Hobley, the District Commissioner, were very helpful (Omulokolii, 2004). Hobley, a scholar as well as a government official, had collected valuable information on the local people such as the Maragoli. He gave a missionary dictionary with several hundred Luloogoli (Maragoli language) words, which became the basis of the Friends Church study of that language (Simwa, 2015). Hobley also assisted the missionaries with planning a tour through the North Kavirondo and Nandi districts and invited them to accompany him on a visit to Mumias, his district headquarters. Thus, the Friends Church arrived in western Kenya with a clear advantage and a considerable fund of goodwill from other missions and the colonial administration.

After eight weeks of walking both Hotchkiss and Hole were often disabled by malaria, a suitable site was found on the 10th of August at Kaimosi. The missionaries decided to work among the Tiriki in what had become the North Kavirondo District of Western Kenya. The area seemed suitable for implementing the Friends' ideas about salvation and civilization. Events leading to the selection of the Kaimosi site were recorded in a letter by Chilson; He reported that Kaimosi was a place with many things favourable for a mission location. There was vast land unoccupied by the natives, and splendid drinking water. Hundreds of natives lived within reach (Wekesa, 2021).

Wekesa further notes that the establishment of FAM stations in Kenya was a slow process. The early missionaries endured hardships such as uncertain safety as strangers in a foreign and hostile land, personal tragedies and diseases. The first two decades of FAM's work were primarily a pioneer homesteading operation. By 1918, the Friends had established a vibrant and growing church among the Tiriki and spread to other Luhyia regions, particularly among the Maragoli and the Ababukusu. The missionaries had chosen western Kenya for the activities among the Abaluhya (Simwa, 2015). In later years, they embarked on developing the Quakers/Friends Church institutions such as Friends Kaimosi Church, Friends Kaimosi schools (both primary and secondary schools), Kaimosi Bible School and Kaimosi Hospital. The first Africans to be converted to Christianity in the region were Akhonya, Johhane, Amugune Joel Litu and Jafferson Ford. Joel Litu translated the Old Testament into Luloogoli language therefore making it the dominating language in Friends church in Western Kenya.

Later, the FAM missionaries soon began to open new stations that fostered greater success in reaching a larger segment of the Abaluhya. Among the new stations opened was the Lugulu mission station which opened at Lugulu in 1913. The missionaries who were living in Lugulu proudly reported in a conference that over one hundred spoke definitely to being saved and forty-four sought the baptism by the Holy Spirit. This was interpreted as the beginning of revival, (Gushee & Stassen, 2016). Traditional African culture was deeply rooted among the Ababukusu. To the missionaries, these cultural aspects of the Ababukusu were challenging to their mission.

For example, no Ababukusu accepted to be initiated from a hospital because parents feared that the initiates could be forced by the missionaries to reveal secrets of the ceremonies. In addition,

young Ababukusu 'adults' felt embarrassed and humiliated by boys who had undergone circumcision traditionally. Those who were circumcised from hospitals were termed as 'children'. As a result, the missionaries disliked the Ababukusu culture while some of the Ababukusu resisted the FAM missionaries for their stand on these Ababukusu customs (Simwa, 2015). This means that the FAM missionaries were seen by some of the indigenous persons as enemies of the Ababukusu religion as they banned some indigenous practices such as dancing, smoking and beer drinking with allegations that they are sins.

The Friends church also took a very firm stand against polygamy and adopted monogamy as an approval for Church membership (Wekesa, 2021). This requirement proved difficult for the Ababukusu to comply with. The Ababukusu were reluctant to accede to missionary demands that they abandon activities and customs long deemed as socially important. Wekesa further notes that these early missionaries faced many challenges in their efforts to spread Christianity in Ababukusu Land. The Ababukusu people were initially resistant to the new religion and, hence treated the missionaries with suspicion. In addition, the region was challenged by rugged terrain, disease, and hostile climate, making it difficult for the missionaries to travel and establish mission stations. Despite these challenges, the early missionaries persevered and were able to gain converts by offering education, medical care, and other forms of assistance to the local population. They translated the Bible into local languages and worked with local people to establish schools, hospitals, and churches. In doing so, they laid the foundation for the growth and spread of Christianity in Ababukusu Land.

In 1940, a protestant movement; Dini ya Musambwa emerged among the Ababukusu led by Elijah Masinde, a former member of the Friends African mission who had been expelled because of being polygamous (Mukanda *et al*, 2015). This movement had taken root among the Tachoni people neighboring the Ababukusu people. During efforts to resist missionaries, a church building at Lugulu belonging to FAM was set on fire in 1941, by the followers of "Dini ya musambwa". The DYM worshippers offered sacrifices at the traditional family shrines called "namwima" and "wetili". In addition, they read the Bible, used the cross as a symbol and prayed in the name of God the Holy Spirit. They believed and taught doctrines on millennium promises when all the problems of the world would come to an end, when the foreigners would have been evicted and all their wishes would be fulfilled, (Gushee & Stassen, 2016).

Despite taking over several symbols and customs from Christian churches, Dini ya Msambwa remained a movement built on the foundations of their ancestors. Perhaps these may be one of the reasons for the rise of TJNC an aspect that will be investigated in the next sections.

1.4 Early Years and Foundation of TNJC

The New Jerusalem Church is the church of Eliud Wekesa well known as '*Yesu wa Tongaren*'. Its history can be traced a long way from the social, cultural and religious developments of Christian civilization. The members of TNJC credit the formation of this movement to their founder whom they believe is a return of the historical Jesus of Nazareth with the submission to the will of God. TNJC was founded in 2011 by Eliud Wekesa, a Kenyan from Tongaren in Bungoma County. The stories and circumstances surrounding his birth and childhood are mysterious. Wekesa was born in 1981 in a village known as Lukhokhwe in Tongaren. He is the last born among his six siblings. His father's name was Francis Wekesa Simiyu while his mother's name was Cecilia Simiyu. Both of his parents were farmers. His parents died when he

was young but he finally managed to attain basic education. Eliud went through his early formal education in Mukuyuni Primary School from Standard One to Standard Seven just like any other child in Lukhokhwe. As a result of his exposure to formal education, he can read speak and write English, Kiswahili and Abaluhya languages. Eliud is commonly known by his followers as 'Mwalimu' (Teacher) or 'Jesus of Tongaren'. Mwalimu '*Yesu wa Tongaren*' believes he is the real Jesus Christ on a mission to save the world (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). Before his call, he was a committed Christian in the Catholic Church. He was baptized into the Catholic Church in the year 1982 and attended all the Catholic rituals. At the age of 10, Wekesa started having dreams and seeing visions. In one of his visions, he saw prophets and prophetess of the Old Testament such as Abraham, Deborah, Lydia, Elkanah and Joel who descended from heaven and greeted him as 'the mighty chosen one'. Later, on in another vision, he saw himself walking around a world that was full of stars under a blue sky. In another vision, he saw the end of the world and God asked him to enter into the underground world in a journey of three days. After experiencing these dreams, God told him to serve Him. He received another vision at the age of twelve years where he heard a voice call his name and told him to do some calculations with assistance from a prophet whom he recognizes as Prophet Gideon. Wekesa explained as follows:

'When the time came, I chose not to refute this message. On that particular day, I saw the heavens open then God and Prophet Gideon descended. God wore glittering white clothes with a sword in His hands. Using the sword, He drew a square on the ground and told me to help him calculate.'" Immediately the squared box was filled with blood that filled the whole world. Later, I saw different kinds of fish with different colours which God commanded me, to take care of. (Wekesa, O.I, 2022 June 9)

From the vision, it is clear that God called Eliud at his tender age. Mwalimu Yesu believes God gave him the name "*Yesu*" to fulfil his mission on Earth. He was asked to preach to the people and tell those who believe in his world that they will live forever. During the visions, God asked him to quit all that he was doing to serve Him by converting people unto Him. He further explained that the blood in the visions referred to human beings while the fish with different colors referred to people of different races.

He officially received his divine call to his ministry in 2011 while he was 30 years old. The Holy Spirit descended on him commissioning him to establish a New Jerusalem in Kenya. He received a vision while he was at Kamukuywa Market along Kitale – Webuye Road in Tongaren, Bungoma County. During the vision, he saw God's prophets wearing bright clothes with sandals on their feet cotton bags and rods in their hands. Afterwards, a voice from heaven commanded him to leave all that he was doing to accomplish his mission on earth. In a vision, Prophet Moses called all other prophets one by one. He then saw a bleeding human heart he later found out that it was Jesus of Nazareth's heart oozing blood covered with flames of fire. Suddenly, the heart entered into him and a voice was heard from above saying...

'That is my chosen son. Listen to him and you my son, your house is henceforth a house of kings and it is blessed. Your name will therefore be 'Jesus' for you are the saviour of the world.'

From that period henceforth, Wekesa believes that his name is 'Jesus' and his mission on earth

has begun. Consequently, having witnessed the transformations, some people thought he had gone mad because of the expressions he was making.

Though raised in a strong Catholic foundation, he defected in the year 2011 with several others who felt that the Catholic Church was hindering their progress toward salvation. According to him, he felt that the Roman Catholic's mode of worship and religious teachings was not satisfying to his soul's beliefs and practices. He had a genuine thirst for spiritual nourishment that was unexplainable. He explains that through the call he had received from God, it felt like there was a new deeper level of spirituality that only God was directing him to. The foregoing is in line with Pretorius's (2007) discovery that there are people within the mainline churches that feel unfulfilled hence; they experience a desire for a deeper level of spirituality. At this point, Wekesa says that he is ready to give up everything for the sake of God. Later, he formed a movement of his own.

Before his call, Wekesa lived a normal life that included having one wife and seven children and attending beer-drinking parties and discos. After this call, Wekesa changed his lifestyle and devoted his life to prayer and intensive Bible study (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). He started his evangelical activity and teachings in 2009, which drew many people to his group. He preached piety, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and repentance. The majority of the crowd appeared to be drawn to his lectures on repentance. He preached a message of emancipation from missionary churches' enslavement. The teachings of Wekesa, according to a member, were very relevant for the populace at that time, when they desperately needed God to deliver them from the cruelty of spiritual slavery (Njukhilile, O.I, 2022, June 9).

During his home fellowships in his newly formed independent Church, he began to experience more intense regular dreams and visions. He claimed that he experienced spiritual renewal and led his members to non-compulsory prayer meetings where they could publicly confess their sins. As time went on, more individuals started to join Wekesa's church as a result of their newfound personal encounters with the Holy Spirit and their awareness that this church catered for their society's more profound spiritual needs. In 2011, TNJC was founded in Tongaren, Bungoma County, as a result of his work.

He spent a lot of time studying the Bible after receiving his divine calling, focusing on the teachings of the Old Testament. Speaking in tongues, meditations, dreams, and intercessory prayer were all used in conjunction with prayers (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). His entire life was closely entwined with the founding and growth of TNJC, the first such religious organization in Western Kenya. Wekesa is the supreme leader of this church and is usually assisted by 'human angels' like Angel Gabriel, Rueben and Micah to perform his duties. He is the supreme leader with the mandate to baptize new converts and conduct marriages and ordination ceremonies. He chose twelve disciples to help him run his church. The 12 disciples' names are following the descendants of Jacob.

1.5 Factors that led to the Emergence of the New Jerusalem Church of Tongaren

TNJC of Tongaren was started in 2011. Different scholars have cited numerous reasons for the emergence of AICs; among them are non-religious factors, religious factors and theological factors (Meyer, 2004). Joseph Koech (2008) identifies non-religious factors such as historical factors, personal factors, political factors and social injustices whereas religious factors are the need by Africans to have a spiritually satisfying religion. Further, theological factors can

also lead to NRMs due to disagreements over church dogma.

Just like other NRMs, the TNJC came up to create space for religious independence. It is claimed that the TNJC came up as a result of Globalization in Kenya. Globalization has created favourable conditions for the emergence of NRMs in Kenya TNJC not being exceptional. Scholars do not agree on a single term for the definition of globalization. However, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *globalization as a process of gradual integration of the world economy and collapse of trade barriers*. These forces of globalization include efficient transportation, immigration, instant global communication, cultural linkages, cultural liberalism, human rights, democracy, secularization, individualism, freedom of religion, freedom of expression and emerging pluralistic societies. These forces have created a fertile ground for the growth of NRMs in Kenya, particularly in Tongaren, Bungoma County.

Religious and Social liberalism has given people more freedom to join the religion of their choice. Liberalism renders legitimacy to cultural pluralism, which gives rise to a multitude of worldviews in human society (Bamidele, 2017). Moreover, liberalism allows the formation of new religious ideologies to develop and proliferate in the new global world, without unbearable pressure to conform to conventional social norms. Strong concern for human rights in this globalized world also gives shelter and recognition to different types of NRMs. In the case of TNJC, the members are promised a solution to the challenges and hardships they are facing in life by their founder.

Another factor that resulted in the emergence of TNJC is the founder's religious experience. Religious experiences according to Zalta *et al* (2002) are encounters between supernatural beings with human beings. Such encounters seem to have specific realistic objectives towards a specific human being. That reality can be an individual, a state of affairs, a fact, or even an absence, depending on the religious tradition the experience is a part of. Many important founders of religions, both Orthodox and NRMs, were inspired through some religious experiences. During fieldwork, four out of five respondents agreed that they were converted because they had one form of religious experience either directly or indirectly. Other members of TNJC claimed that they had a radical transformation of life or worldview, and adopted a new commitment as a result of their religious experience. Eliud Wekesa, the founder of TNJC believes he got inspiration from God in 2011 to start TNJC because he believed God told them to do so.

The TNJC started after God's calling (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). Wekesa claims that God called him after a revelation to spread the gospel. Wekesa who is also known as 'Yesu wa Tongareni' clearly stated that God called him officially in 2011 when he was 30 years old. He was at Kamukuywa market his home town in Tongaren Sub County to start a ministry of propagating true Christianity. He claims to have heeded the call of God to the important mission of spreading His word on Earth. In turn, he explains that God assured him of protection and guidance. He further claims that he was instructed to begin a Church which should be known as 'TNJC', the mother of all churches on Earth meant for all races, religions and creeds.

In addition, the TNJC started due to the spiritual hunger of the people of Bungoma. Most of the missionary churches in Bungoma could not satisfy the spiritual hunger making some Christians join TNJC for spiritual nourishment. Wekesa claims that members of Bungoma County were in dire need of a satisfying religion. The TJNC addresses most of the people of Bungoma's needs such as their spiritual, psychological, social and physical needs. During fieldwork, most

members of the TNJC explained that this religion gives them self-fulfilment which they missed before joining it.

Wekesa asserts that the Holy Spirit played a role in the founding of his church. Because of this, the followers of this religion refer to themselves as "Watu wa Yesu wa Tongaren," which translates to "the chosen people of Jesus of Tongaren" (Barasa O.I, 2022, June 9). He desired to build a people among the Africans through whom he would reveal his will. Believers in the TNJC hold that these are the final days and that God will shortly begin a brand-new heaven and world. Everyone is asked to live a life that will result in the gaining of salvation because their time in this world is considered to be transitory (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9).

The presence of charismatic leaders who can inspire and mobilize followers is often a key factor in the emergence of this religious movement. Most people are attracted to TNJC because of the fruits of the gifts of the Holy Spirit presented by God to their leader (Barasa O.I, 2022, June 9). After God revealed the founder, they received the gifts of the Holy Spirit of prophecy, healing, and speaking in tongues. Since then, members of this church have displayed spiritual gifts. Eliud Wekesa experienced a Trinitarian vocation to his mission in 2011. According to Eliud, this marked a turning point and hence the birth of his Church. Seemingly, God's revealing his mission to Eliud Wekesa came during the right time when missionary churches were unable to meet the problems of the people such as illness, misfortunes, poverty, encounters with evils, barrenness and most of their social problems like lack of love and understanding towards their adherents. People who go to his church hold him in the highest regard, and they are amazed by his ability to heal the sick and do other amazing things. His wife claims that at one point he performed a miracle by turning water into tea (Khaemba, 2023).

TNJC came up as a rebellion against injustices in the Roman Catholic Church (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). The Catholic Church interfered with some of its cultural traditions by denouncing and rejecting several of its Luhya customs. For instance, the Church of Scotland Mission created a priority list of the customs that needed to be abandoned. According to Mwangi (2016), these were practices that were thought to be at odds with Christian values but weren't necessarily actively hostile to them and were therefore to be permitted to fade away on their own. Respect for ancestors' spirits, the traditional sacrificial system, and the use of sorcery and prophecy all fall under this category. Polygamy and sexually explicit dances were among the customs that were condemned as being incompatible with Christian values and hence inappropriate in a Christian community. The missionaries also objected to practices such as polygamy and the exposing of the dead that were thought to be unhealthy or unsanitary.

TNJC of Tongaren also emerged as a response to a perceived loss of traditional cultural values in the area. The movement sought to reclaim and preserve cultural and traditional beliefs and practices, while also incorporating Christian elements such as the use of drums during worship. TNJC emerged as a response to a perceived loss of traditional culture. Denunciation of the Bukusu culture, which missionaries had perceived as primitive and demonic, went hand in hand with the adoption of previous Christian missionary teachings among the Bukusu population (Wekesa, 2021). Critically, we can deduce that this was accomplished without considering their significance to the Bukusu people's traditional way of life. The missionaries attacked their native healing practices right away since they conflicted with their Christian missionary teachings. European missionaries referred to Bukusu local healing as witchcraft and paganism.

In addition, they were viewed as being anti-civilized (Robert, 2009). The missionaries established health centres in their mission stations where they referred the ill African converts to prevent these practices. The four pillars of Western civilization—the school, the church, a health facility, and a farm to provide some income—were therefore present in the majority of mission stations. Africans were also converted into schools and medical facilities (Robert, 2009). African converts were dissatisfied because mission churches were unable to understand the Bukusu's salvatory demands, which were communicated concerning the illness's causes. The Bukusu converts who returned to their ancient religions that provided supernatural healing left a spiritual void.

Spiritual Revival: The founding of the New Jerusalem Church of Tongaren was sparked by a perceived need for spiritual renewal or a desire for a more personal and transformative religious experience. People felt a spiritual hunger or dissatisfaction with existing religious institutions and sought a new religious movement that offered a different approach or emphasized specific spiritual teachings. **Cultural and Societal Factors:** The cultural and societal context in which TNJC of Tongaren emerged played a role in its founding. This includes factors such as social unrest, economic challenges, or changes in the local community. The TNJC arose as a response to these challenges, offering a sense of hope, meaning, and community. The New Jerusalem Church of Tongaren also presented unique doctrinal teachings or interpretations of existing religious beliefs. These new ideas or interpretations resonated with individuals seeking alternative perspectives or deeper understandings of religious principles. **Community and Social Support:** The establishment of the New Jerusalem Church of Tongaren was driven by the need for a close-knit community that offers social connections, emotional support, and a shared sense of purpose and identity. Religious movements often provide a sense of community, belonging, and support for their members.

Syncretism and Cultural Synthesis: The TNJC emerged through the blending of different religious traditions, beliefs, or practices. It incorporated elements from traditional Bukusu beliefs, Christianity, or other religious influences, creating a unique syncretic expression of spirituality. The African worldview is governed by certain forces, which are thought to act in situations that are beyond the control of humans (Mbiti, 2015). TNJC in Tongaren Sub County adopted the Bukusu way of life and created a movement that believed in and practised the curing of physical illnesses through spiritual practices, an outlook that considered both physical and spiritual well-being. Following the missionaries' prohibition of certain Abaluhya traditional customs such as polygamy, ceremonial dancing, and drinking traditional beer, TNJC supporters in Tongaren withdrew, rejected wearing Western clothing, and refused to purchase Westernized goods. Additionally, they were hesitant to continue tolerating the patronizing behaviour of the missionary-founded churches, whose membership was severely separating them from the mainline churches due to their level of societal integration (Omenyo, 2011). The TNJC of Tongaren in Bungoma rose to prominence as a result of the aforementioned elements, which include receiving God's divine call, the yearning for African self-expression, and religious freedom from missionary influence.

1.6 Jesus of Tongaren's acceptance in the society

During the beginning of his ministry, Wekesa received a lot of backlash from members of his society (Barasa, O.I, 2022, June 9). Having grown up with human parents (Francis Wekesa

Simiyu and Cecilia Simiyu) who were farmers, he faced rejection because the people lacked belief in him. To the people of Tongaren, Wekesa was a farmer's child. He grew up in Lukhokwe Village, and they knew him as just a commoner. To others he was a childhood friend whom they had seen grow, he was a schoolmate and a classmate. And so, the people of this locality took offence at what he was doing and who he claimed to be. They felt entitled to define *Yesu wa Tongaren* according to their terms (Wekesa, O.I 2023, January, 2). He was in turn accused of blasphemy by the local authorities. In their eyes, when *Yesu wa Tongaren* claimed to be the incarnate Jesus he was insulting God. He at some point was arrested with his followers (Mikaili, O.I, 2022, June 9). In response to the people's unbelief, Wekesa quoted Mark 6:1-6 claiming 'a prophet receives no honour in his hometown.'

1.7 Registered membership population of the TNJC

Members of the TNJC movement are united by a belief in each human's ability to enter The New Jerusalem hence the name The New Jerusalem Church. They profess a holiness of all believers inspired by their founder Eliud Wekesa. In 2022, there were an estimated 1000 officially registered members of the TNJC with 18% being youths, 32% children and 48% adults (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). The headquarters of TNJC is located in Lukhokwe village, Tongaren Sub-county Bungoma County. Mostly it operates on a coalition basis with other churches. For instance, it has over 100 Christians who are members of other denominations from other counties in Kenya who come in for prayers and fellowships.

1.8 Education Background of the Members

Initially, most TNJC members of Tongaren Bungoma County did not embrace Western education because their founder, Eliud Wekesa considered it as the root source of all evil. To Wekesa, anything Western in nature except the Bible was opposed by the members of TNJC (Barasa, O.I, 2022, June 9). In addition, he considered education to be worldly and instructed his members to ignore it to concentrate on the heavenly kingdom. However, over time, the current TNJC members have concluded that education is important and that their kids should pursue higher education (Nasike, O.I, 2022, June 9). Thus, a voice of change from the rigid, restrictive views that forbade education inside this movement has been made. Barasa emphasizes that:

'TNJC children should go up to the university just like other children because if they fail to do so, then they will be left behind in terms of development and you know, today everyone is looking forward to development' (Barasa, O.I, 2022, June 9).

The first generation of the educated, committed, and focused TNJC elite class emerged as a result of the rise of the organization's educated members starting in 2012 (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). Following this, TNJC students from Tongaren began to enrol in educational institutions in large numbers by the year 2020 to pursue basic and higher education, which they believe is essential to the growth of the community (Njukhilile, O.I, 2022, June 9).

1.9 Economic Patterns of Members of TNJC

The New Jerusalem Church members are urged by their leader to take on economic responsibilities to help their families and the community. Everyone in the family, even the

children, has a financial responsibility to fulfil. As a result, the division of labour is based on sex and age. Men are known for providing security, supplying the family with food and necessities, clearing ground in front of planting season, erecting fences around farms, and taking care of the animals (Wanjala, O.I, 2022, June 9). The majority of the time, women are considered to be caregivers who raise children, cook, get water and firewood, thatch buildings, plaster walls with clay or cow dung, and perform farm work including planting, weeding, and harvesting. Boys are taught to go to the grazing field with their father or uncles, while girls are taught by mothers, aunts, and grandmothers how to do household tasks, according to the gender of the children in each family of this particular new NRM (Njukhilile, O.I, 2022, June 9). According to four out of five respondents, a male is unlikely to take on a woman's duty unless it is an emergency; the division of work is systematic and orderly to ensure the material well-being of the movement's participants. Laziness is highly condemned.

TNJC accounts indicate that agriculture is the main source of income for their members and it has been practiced by its members for quite some time. This is authenticated by their vast amount of knowledge regarding farming practices. Currently, they grow maize for subsistence and sugarcane as a cash crop as well as wheat and coffee. Cattle and sheep are kept respectively for milk and meat. However, cattle are also kept by members of this movement for offers of sacrifice (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9).

The founder of TNJC Wekesa teaches that 'man cannot serve both God and wealth' He asserts that money is a result of incorporations of the Kenyan culture with the Western society where wealth has triumphed over God. Wealth is generated by members of TNJC through inheritance, leasing of property, and buying of property and land while other members acquire wealth through gifts (Barasa, O.I, 2022, June 9). However, Wekesa claims that there is nothing wrong with wealth in itself if it is acquired righteously; nevertheless, it is wrong to desire to have more wealth. In the case of TNJC, they use their wealth to help the less fortunate members of society. Barasa a member of TNJC claims that they have to help each other as a global family (Barasa, O.I, 2022, June 9).

Tongaren's neighbouring settlements, known as TNJC, were notoriously indolent and seldom bothered to work. Additionally, they opted out of owning property and participating in traditional economic activities (Barasa, O.I, 2022, June 9). They were content to live simply as they awaited their ascension to celestial glory and saw no reason to rise out of their predicament, being the poorest of the poor (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). Since its founding, TNJC members have emerged from self-isolation and started collaborating with the rest of society as they seek other economic endeavours beyond basic farming methods in response to changing conditions. By starting self-help projects and cooperative organizations, they have actively participated in the government's efforts to increase productivity and hence the welfare of the populace (Murumwa, O.I, 2022, June 9). Their commitment to integrity, honesty, and trust propelled many of them to greater economic success across a range of industries (Key respondent 21, O.I, 2022, June 9).

Many people gathered riches and power in society as the elite TNJC class of 2011 emerged. Their passion for making money is evidence of how TNJC has evolved into contributing members of society. Many people in Tongaren engaged in trade activities and got along well with other people in the community (Wanjala, O.I, 2022, June 9). The early TNJC members' reputation for exclusivity and isolation was successfully eradicated by this transition. By 2011,

the TNJC community in Tongaren had quickly caught up with the rest and built more gorgeous churches, permanent residences, and other structures, while others had relocated to urban locations in search of work and business prospects. However, even though the industrial sector of the economy of the nation experienced significant expansion, most TNJC members were still mostly located in rural areas by the year 2020.

In conclusion, Eliud Wekesa's TNJC of Tongaren has made a significant contribution to the economic life of the community by embracing education and participating in economic activities to reduce poverty among its members in the Tongaren countryside. Many TNJC members got interested in dairy and poultry farming, cash and subsistence farming, and commerce, while others found work in the nearby Kamukuywa and Kimilili towns and other areas.

1.10 Hierarchy of TNJC

Hierarchy is a term used in churches to denote how the authority of rank and power is held according to the principality instituted by Christ in his church (Macdonald, 2019). In TNJC, hierarchy involves having the authority to govern and minister God's word. This authority is divinely ordained by God and gave the primacy of authority to *Yesu wa Tongaren* (Wekesa, O.I, 2023, June 9). The TNJC hierarchy is divided into the hierarchy of orders with God the Father as their head. This hierarchical order includes God, The Holy Spirit, Jesus (Jesus of Tongaren), Angelic beings, Disciples, Pastors and Deacons.

The following diagram indicates a hierarchy of beings in TNJC

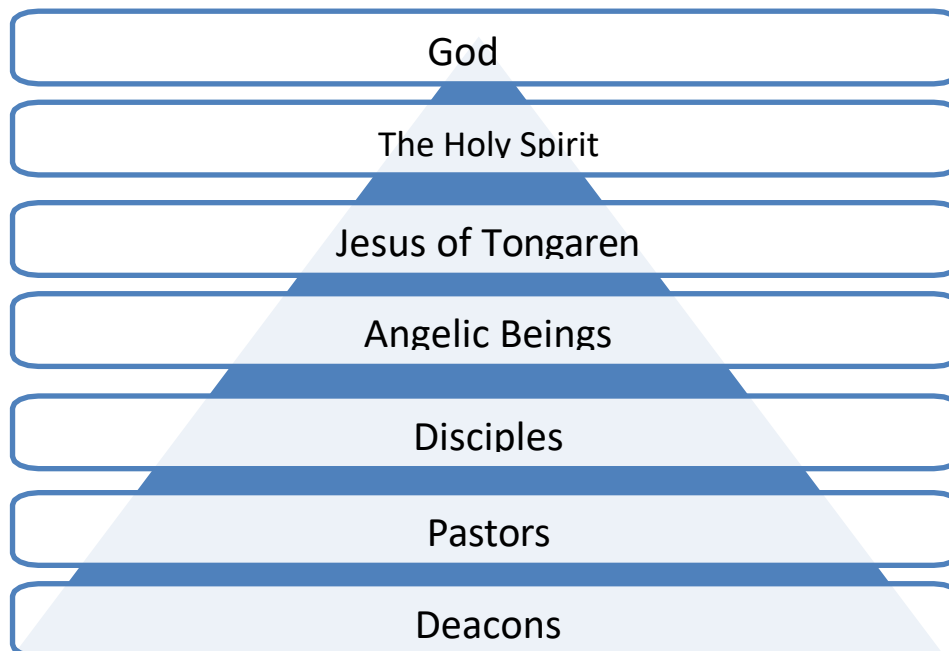


Figure 1.1: Hierarchy of Beings in TNJC

Source: *TNJC records* (2022)

From the above chain of hierarchy, God is at the top above all authority. Members of TNJC regard God as the creator of the entire universe and all things in it. He is attributed to being

omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient (Muloli, O.I, 2022, June 9). Beneath God, is the Holy Spirit who is entirely without material bodies. To members of TNJC, the Holy Spirit was present before the creation of the universe and through his power; everything was made through God the Father. Jesus of Tongaren comes third on the hierarchy. He is the founder, leader and owner of The New Jerusalem Church. To the members of this movement, he is the incarnation of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Barasa, O.I, 2022, June 9). Later on are the angelic beings whose purpose according to Topistar an angel in TNJC is: “*Communicating revelations from God, glorifying God and recording the events of Jesus of Tongaren.*” (Topistar, O.I, 2022, June 9)

The disciples within TNJC are those who have been given the authority by Jesus of Tongaren to preach over all nations to attain unity within the church. Through them, the ministry of Jesus of Tongaren is preserved. Priests appear second last on the hierarchy. By the authority vested in them by their overall leader and founder, they have the power to administer the holy Eucharist and blood of Christ to the members of TNJC the deacons serve as helpers to the pastors in matters about the pastoral care of the sick and poor (Samweli, O.I, 2022, June 9).

1.11 The Growth and Expansion of TNJC

The spread of TNJC spans between the periods of its formation in 2011 and now. This has in turn resulted in a spread that is fast reaching the communities around Tongaren Sub County and far beyond. Wekesa shared his religious beliefs with others. This was done through one-on-one conversation and large gatherings (crusades) (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). His views were seen as a threat to society for he was accused of blasphemy several times. Wekesa however did not give up on his mission since he believed it was the will of God. He continued to share his beliefs without despair. In the same year, 2011 he managed to convert his wife and later his children. The conversion of people to TNJC was majorly boosted by the founder himself. Most of the significant spread occurred in 2012 with the help of his wife Nabii Benjamin (Mikaili, O.I, 2022, June 9).

His home in Lukhokhwe village in Tongaren was used as a gathering place for many of the first converts. As of 2016, 200 members of TNJC had been converted from other denominations (Wekesa, O.I 2023, January, 2). By 2020, the TNJC population had increased immensely to 500 congregants (Kataka, O.I, 2022, June 9). In Lukhokhwe village in Tongaren, one out of four people are members of TNJC. Out of children born within the year 2022 in this locality, 30% are members of TNJC making this movement fast-growing by births. Just like other AICs, TNJC leader and founder Wekesa was opposed to the doctrines and theology brought by the Western Christian missionary churches (Maria, O.I, 2022, June 9). So far, there is only one church of TNJC which forms its headquarters in Tongaren Bungoma County. Consequently, there are plans underway to expand the church due to its massive attraction from all parts of Kenya. Currently, in 2023, the church's population is at about 1000 believers (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9).

1.12 Challenges and Resilience of TNJC

During the beginning of his ministry in 2011, Wekesa, the founder of TNJC was met with opposition from both the people within his locality and the government officials. He disagreed with the Bungoma County officials over indoctrination. In 2012 Wekesa was accused by the

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Tongaren society of being blasphemous leading to constant harassment, arrests, fines and imprisonment together with his followers (Wekesa, 2022). Maria, a member of TNJC claimed: “*Their places of worship could be destroyed by the authorities to some extent.*” (Maria, O.I, 2022, June 9).

During this period, these members of TNJC were suspected of associating with and helping their founder Eliud Wekesa in claiming to be Jesus Christ (Muloli, O.I, 2022, June 9). Most probably, this was because Eliud Wekesa was a strong religious leader who claimed that he was the incarnate Jesus of Nazareth referring to himself as ‘Jesus of Tongaren’. He is since referred to as ‘Yesu wa Tongaren’ by his followers. The members of TNJC claim that they did not view their leader as a claim of being Jesus Christ but instead them as per Samweli a member of TNJC:

“He is the true promised biblical Messiah who only came to fulfil the Old Testament Prophecies” (Samweli, O.I, 2022, June 9).

In one incident, Wekesa was denied a permit to hold meetings both private and public by the local authorities. It was believed that he was exorcising people by the power of witchcraft claiming that he was the ‘Messiah’. His leadership prowess was proven when he led TNJC members to Bungoma Chief Magistrate in 2011 to seek formal permission to hold their meetings freely without Mukuyuni Police Administration interference (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). His request was granted and made it possible for TNJC to hold church services and evangelistic meetings at Wekesa’s home without fear of being arrested.

In 2023, Wekesa was arrested by Bungoma Director of Criminal Investigation officer where he stayed in custody for five days. He was accused of unlawful operation of un-registered church, radicalization of his teachings which were termed offensive and against the law and money laundering through church donations and compulsory tithes. Bungoma Principal Magistrate, Tom Orlando later on released him due to failure to provide sufficient evidence against him (Kiriimi and Anyango, 2023).

1.13 Relationship between members of TNJC and members of other religious movements

TNJC is a 21st Century Christian NRM but they feel that they do not fit within the categories of Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant churches but they choose to remain separate from other Christian groups. They identify themselves with ecumenical movements such as the Pentecostal movements whom they share common religious grounds (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). A concern for religious piety, peace and social justice often brings members of TNJC together with other Christian churches and other Christian groups within the Tongaren sub-county in Bungoma County. Most adherents believe in continuing God's revelation of truth. Eliud Wekesa, the founder claims: “*Christ has come to teach people Himself.*” (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9)

Diverse theological beliefs, understanding of the ‘manifestation of the Holy Spirit’, and statements of ‘faith professions and practice of piety’ have always existed among TNJC adherents (Nanyama, O.I, 2022, June 9). Too much emphasis is laid on guidance from the Holy Spirit. Members of this particular NRM testify their religious beliefs and their spiritual lives from the life and teachings of their founder *Yesu wa Tongaren* (Lucia, O.I, 2022, June 9). Their beliefs and practices are based on biblical texts. Members of TNJC distance themselves from

practices that seem to be worldly or pagan celebrations such as Christmas because they believe Christmas is a pagan festivity (Maria and Nelima, O.I, 2022, June 9). TNJC adherents call denominations within Tongaren in Bungoma County to turn into the New Jerusalem which is TNJC since it is the only gateway to heaven. Members of TNJC believe that the state is an institution just like the family. Wekesa, notes that:

“The issue of governance is well supported from the scripture through the roles played by judges, kings, priests and prophets (Deuteronomy 16:18-22). In a family, each individual is given different roles to play by God.” (Wekesa, O.I 2022, June 9)

Just like kings and judges, members of TNJC believe that the government plays the same role by dispensing justice and protecting the vulnerable people in society. Similarly, the church plays the prophetic role of being the conscience of the nation, proclaiming God's expectations and calling people back when they fall short of the same. (Muthuku *et al*, 2023) Wekesa's respect for governance can be seen when he presented himself before the police in April 2023 after they summoned him to investigate him and his religion.

Members of TNJC believe that the role of the church as far as government is concerned is to equip God's people for works of public service in the various institutions in which God places them. The church's engagement with the government is not about the church members getting into elective positions, but rather about ordinary Christians bringing the kingdom of God by doing his will forever wherever they are (Wekesa, O.I 2022, June 9). *Yesu wa Tongaren* aims to bring people under his rule by creating a new community of people with a whole new identity. During the period of this study, *Mwalimu Yesu* has one wife and eight children. His followers identify his wife as 'The wife of the lamb' and have been religiously renamed as *Nabii Benjamin* while her children have names of the great prophets of the Bible. His wife is quite supportive of her husband's work and she believes her husband is a true prophet. His believers get to see him perform miracles such as healing critically ill people. It is claimed she started her relationship with Eliud after being commanded by a voice from heaven.

"I ascended to the top of the mountain, where I discovered Mwalimu. I cannot express how grateful I am to have been selected out of all the ladies that live on this earth", the wife said." (Khaemba, 2023)

Wekesa believes that because of the level of sin that exists in the world, only a small percentage of its eight billion inhabitants will be able to enter paradise (Wekesa, O.I, 2023, June 9). To him, he will only take 168,000 believers with him to heaven (Khaemba 2023).

1.14 Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to examine British colonial control and missionary doctrine in Bukusu territory. The Bukusu way of life was destroyed by the tremendous socioeconomic, political, and religious changes brought about by this encounter. Teachings from missionaries condemned African traditional practices including polygamy and female circumcision. The Bukusu discontent gave rise to political and militant opposition to the colonial regime, including the Dini ya Musambwa. In light of this, the goal of this study was to comprehend the context in

which the TNJC of Tongaren in Bungoma was established. According to the report, Tongaren, Bungoma County's religious, political, social, and economic systems might all be blamed for the city's explosive rise. The political, economic, and social ramifications of the TNJC's establishment and expansion in Tongaren were profound.

The Tongaren TNJC members, led by Mwalimu, have not been able to go out to other ethnic groups in search of converts, hence the majority of their followers have stayed in Bukusu (Lucia, O.I, 2022, June 9). They have been actively involved in projects supported by the government, such as the building of Harambee schools, cattle dipping facilities, churches, and the planting of cash crops like coffee and tea. The large majority of TNJC members in Tongaren believed that their spiritual well-being should come before all other considerations (Wekesa, O.I, 2022, June 9). According to the TNJC, this life is only temporary, hence one should live a life that will ultimately result in salvation.

The church exhorts followers to raise their level of living and educate their children (Ibid). They supported their kids' pursuit of higher education while enrolling the elderly in adult literacy programs. It is sufficient to say, in conclusion, that TNJC Tongaren members were more deeply and realistically concerned with their fellow members' social and spiritual wellness than political activity. The TNJC movement engaged in politically motivated social programs or government-initiated development projects to enhance the welfare of their constituents.

1.15 Recommendations

The article recommends that, before any church is established, there must be clearly stated objectives why the church must be founded and registered. The reason the founder wants to establish the church and how the church would be able to contribute to the lives of the worshippers both physically and spiritually and also how the church to be founded contributes to the community. Therefore, some legal reforms should be made on the registration of religious institutions to prevent the future emergence of harmful or ill-intended NRMs such as the GNIM that was linked to the Shakahola Massacre. This might in turn help to avoid suspicions that may arise from the challenges of society through accusations.

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