

The Luo of Kenya's Concept of *Jo-Kang'ato* as a Model for Christian Unity in the Ecclesial Life of the Church in Africa

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Abstract

Owing to the failure of familial and communitarian ecclesial models in their current condition to adequately clarify the concept of Christian unity, revamping them becomes necessary. While the Luo of Kenya's concept of jo-kang'ato is familial and communitarian, it presents a departure from the contemporary understanding of these two models which are filled with the individualistic elements of Western culture. The terminus a quo is brought forward through the ideals embedded in the concept which enrich the understanding of unity and mitigate the causes of disunity. The study on jo-kang'ato as a model for Christian unity in the ecclesial life of the Church in Africa is advantageous for the Church as it presents the potential to help Christians in Africa to discover deeper relationships with one another. It also contributes to scholarship by presenting jo-kang'ato as another way of addressing ecclesial disunity. The mission of the Church is enhanced when Christian unity is adequately understood and practiced. The concept did not lose significance in the past despite the changes which affect social life among the Luo. Jo-kang'ato binds people together in the present time too. Its strengths by far exceed its weaknesses. The analysis of interview data gathered in Kenya's four counties that are inhabited by the Luo established that the concept of jo-kang'ato could inform the understanding of unity among Christians in the ecclesial life of the Church in Africa on account of its potential to bring people together through the sibling relationship which it fosters. On this basis, jo-kang'ato is recommended as an ecclesial model to the Church in Africa.

Key Words: *Jo-kang'ato*, Christian Unity, Ecclesial Life, Family, Community

1. Introduction

A model becomes effective in theological reflection when it takes the *Weltanschauung* of the people into account. The familial and communitarian ecclesial models in their present shapes fall short of providing adequate clarification on Christian unity in the ecclesial life of the Church in Africa due to a lopsided emphasis on idealism elevated above reality. African Christians need a theology that speaks to their hearts. Moripe describes it as theology which is generated "through the African and for the people of Africa."¹ On account of the limitations, the need to revitalise and enable them to transition beyond individualism and achieve relevance cannot be wished away. The process would ensure that these models are rid of Western perspectives that are laden with the elements of isolation, prejudice, and exclusion which are known for setting the stage for conflicts among Christians. It would also facilitate an extension of the models to include the "other" despite their social and denominational affiliations.

1.1 The Background of the Study

¹ S. Moripe, "The Notion of Independence and Rendering of Service to the African Independent/ Indigenous Churches." 49, no. 4 (1993): 866.

Polarisation was a piece of baggage that the Church in different parts of Africa inherited from missionaries from Britain, other European countries, and America in the 1960s when the control of the Church landed in the hands of the indigenous people. African Christians emulated the rivalry and conflict experienced among missionary societies following the breakthrough in mission manifested in the acceptance of the Gospel by the indigenous populations and their leaders in the nineteenth century.² To each missionary society, the dissemination of the Gospel became a means of enlarging the scope of their Christendom by way of triumphing, conquering, subjugating, and assimilating.³ African Christians were guided by the same spirit when they took over the task of promulgating the Gospel, leading to unfriendliness and undesirable treatment of each other.⁴ While describing the developments of that time, Waruta says that “The era of denominationalism and religious competitiveness dawned in Africa.”⁵ Disunity remains a major dilemma that the Church in Africa faces at all levels.

Family and community are among the models proposed by ecclesiologists for addressing disunity in the ecclesial context. These models, however, suffer from factors which incapacitate them. For instance, the misapplication of the familial model is the catalyst of the autonomy and patronisation by the clergy.⁶ Furthermore, certain denominations have used this model to tolerate an argument that they are more family-oriented than the rest. The communitarian model too presents handicaps as it promotes contentment with division rather than enhancing the intimate relationship among Christians.⁷ Failure to revamp both models could further promote the deprivation of a sense of belonging.

This work was an attempt to establish the connection between the Luo’s concept of *jo-kang’ato* and Christian unity by pointing out the bearing that the former has upon the latter. The author envisaged as outcome implications on the latter by way of enrichment of understanding. As the gems gleaned from *jo-kang’ato* enhance comprehension, the problem of disunity is addressed. This endeavour is in tune with Waliggo’s proposition of a “need for the creation of a deeper sense of brotherhood and sisterhood as was found in African traditional society, a spirit of togetherness and concern.”⁸

1.2 The Problem Statement

Even though the author’s intention is not to deconstruct the familial and communitarian models but shed additional light upon them, it suffices to say that as prominent as they are, these ecclesial models in their current form do not satisfactorily clarify Christian unity. The deficiency results in remote relationships among believers and even the disowning of each other. For example, the familial model itself is laden with Western cultural overtones which are alien to Africans. While from a sociological angle, the word “family” does not have one definition, Murdock advocates for its understanding as “a social group characterised by

² David Waruta, “Towards an African Church: A Critical Assessment of Alternative Forms and Structures,” in *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays* (Nairobi: Initiatives Publ., 1990), 33.

³ Ibid., 40.

⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 121–122.

⁷ Ephraim Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2012), 455.

⁸ John Mary Waliggo, “The African Clan as the True Model of the African Church,” in *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology* (Nairobi: Initiatives Publ., 1990), 117.

common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction, including adults of both sexes, at least one of whom maintains a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.”⁹ In this definition, several aspects of the contemporary family have not been taken into account. Firstly, Murdoch did not consider couples who have no offspring and situations where only one parent exists.¹⁰ Besides, it is not always the case to have family members residing together under one roof.¹¹ People could also be family economically, socially, based on shared ideas and ideals, because they share “political” views, and on the grounds of a common faith.¹² The individualism that mars the family presently causes it to obscure the meaning of Christian unity when used as an ecclesial model as it leads to misappropriation, mainly arising from the discriminative application. According to Uzukwu, it smacks of autocracy perpetrated by the clergy and elders.¹³ Such kind of dominance begets disunity, animosity, and subjugation.¹⁴ Msafiri, a priest in the Roman Catholic Church in Tanzania points out the weakness of the familial model in its current form as follows, “When understood or interpreted from an exclusivistic Catholic oriented or Euro-American understanding, the family model can have very negative ecumenical consequences.”¹⁵ Tien, on his part, says that the familial model is supposed to demonstrate “the universality of the Church because it includes all peoples. Therefore the new family of Christians should overcome the negative aspects of the human family.”¹⁶ The model of the community too distorts the meaning of unity and inculcates a strange kind of engagement which is neither Scriptural nor African. It has an assumption as its basis as it leads people to live, hoping that somehow tranquility and meaningful coexistence would be realised amongst them even without their input. According to Schmitt, they do so with the consciousness of their misgivings outstanding, but somehow regulated, and as a “community of enemies,” or people “who cannot reach agreement on important matters.”¹⁷

Prompted by the misunderstanding of Christian unity in the ecclesial life of the Church which the familial and communitarian models have been unable to address, and the acceleration of disunity resulting from such failure, this research becomes inevitable. The researcher has attempted to address this problem using the concept of *jo-kang’ato*. As a concept which is drawn from the rich heritage of the Luo, *jo-kang’ato* presents refreshed revelations about God and His Church. Healy and Sybertz maintain that, when the culture of the African person interacts with Christianity, Christianity gets flavour even though this engagement is not about transferring customs of African tradition into Christianity.¹⁸ To the outsider, this would “awaken theological and pastoral themes that are dormant or latent in world Christianity.”¹⁹

⁹ George Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 1.

¹⁰ Donatus Chukwu, *The Church as the Extended Family of God: Toward a New Direction for African Ecclesiology* (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris, 2011), 76–77, 78.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 121–122; C.f. Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives*, 29.

¹⁴ Ibid.; Stephanie Lowery, *Identity and Ecclesiology: Their Relationship Among Select African Theologians* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 163.

¹⁵ Aidan Msafiri, “The Church as a Family Model: Its Strengths and Weaknesses,” Accessed August 24, 2020, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6b59/813e7f8f7789c4fb39a3a2e5cec6a427486a.pdf?ga=2.119494602.2116468974.1598167077-1515817833.1598167077>.

¹⁶ Ngo Tien, “The Church as Family of God: Its Development and Implications for the Church in Vietnam,” (PhD Thesis, Australian Catholic University, 2006), 25.

¹⁷ Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church*, 454.

¹⁸ Joseph Healy and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 1996th ed. (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines, 1996), 13–61.

¹⁹ Ibid.

1.3 The Purpose of the Study

The study sought to expand the understanding of Christian unity through *jo-kang'ato*, whose source is the family and community. The researcher also intended to show how the adoption of this concept as a model could help the Church in Africa to achieve unity.

2. The Luo of Kenya's Concept of *Jo-kang'ato*

2.1 The Definition of *Jo-kang'ato*

Jo-kang'ato is a compound word formed by *joka*, “the people of,” and *ng'ato*, “a person.” It refers to people who share a common descent in terms of a grandfather, lineage, or parentage.²⁰ Luos understand members of a common lineage as “a people of one person” (*Jokang'at'achiel*).²¹ Its synonyms are *jokakwaro* (descendants of a common progenitor), and *anyuola* (clan). The concept of *jo-kang'ato* is the cord that binds and holds together various social units and relations among the Luo. It manifests in various levels of social relations, one of which is the household whereby in a polygamous family setting, uterine siblings show closeness to each other and form a protective bond.²² From there, *jo-kang'ato* stretches to bind members of the homestead together. It ensures that family members remain together under all circumstances. It is also the basis of unity and solidarity enjoyed widely among the Luo. The concept could also refer to those who are brought together through belonging to an organisation.

2.2 The Relationship between the Concept of *Jo-kang'ato* and *Ubuntu*

To some extent, *jo-kang'ato* manifests features that are also present in *ubuntu*. Both concepts foster intimate relationship which translates into appropriate regard, treatment, and support based on people's humanness in a broader rather than immediate and individualistic sense.²³ Besides, they both emphasise the importance of diversity and the pivotal part it plays, and the need to be united despite it. Again, both offer a challenge to Christians to stretch their borders beyond "us" to include "them" for the realisation of a more strengthened than fragmented and prejudicial Church because every person counts.²⁴ They also condemn exploitation and all forms of immoral conduct.²⁵ What they stand for resonates with the perspective of Desmond Tutu who says that when we are nasty to others, we are nasty to ourselves.²⁶ However, while these features run across the two concepts, *jo-kang'ato* is more intimate than *ubuntu*. Whereas it is rooted in the family, *ubuntu* is generic in a sense and therefore, somehow remote. *Jo-kang'ato* brings in the aspect of kinship, blood ties, among other benefits, while *ubuntu* talks about humanity. *Jo-kang'ato* is richer in implication if extended to include all of God's

²⁰ Aidan William Southall, *Lineage Formation Among the Luo* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1952), 6, 35.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²² *Ibid.*, 12, 18, 20.

²³ Wonke Buqa, “Ubuntu Values in an Emerging Multi-Racial Community: A Narrative Reflection,” (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2016), 72, 73, 100; Mogobe Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books Publishers, 2002), 155; A. Shute, “Ubuntu As the African Ethical Vision,” in *African Ethics - An Anthropology of Comparative and Applied Ethics* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2009), 85; Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1995), 624; Segun Gbadegesin, “An Outline of a Theory of Destiny,” in *African Philosophy: New and Traditional Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 61.

²⁴ Buqa, “Ubuntu Values in an Emerging Multi-Racial Community: A Narrative Reflection,” 73, 52, 53, 76; Mogobe Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books Publishers, 2002), 143.

²⁵ Buqa, “Ubuntu Values in an Emerging Multi-Racial Community: A Narrative Reflection,” 224.

²⁶ Leonard Hulley, Louise Kretzschmar, and Luke Pato, eds., *Archbishop Tutu: Prophetic Witness in South Africa* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1996), 102.

children. It is an excellent concept with great potential to enrich the understanding of Christian unity.

2.3 The Origin of the Luo's Concept of *Jo-kang'ato*

Jo-kang'ato is a concept that Luos have been using over the years to guide relationships amongst them as a people. The main factor which prompted its origin was the need for togetherness within the Luo community, and especially among people of the same lineage. The Luo sensed the need to be there for each other to protect and help. The concept of *jo-kang'ato* was to provide the context for assisting each other in various tasks which included farm work and other duties. Furthermore, by coming together, the Luo could secure their territories and fight for resources and identity. As *jo-kang'ato*, people could defend each other from inter-clan wars and external aggression from other tribes. The occurrences of misfortunes and calamities of various forms also informed the development of the concept among Luos. To date, it continues to bind them together.

2.4 The Ideals Embedded in the Concept of *Jo-kang'ato*

Jo-kang'ato gives life to the familial and communal ecclesial models and clarifies Christian unity through various ideals that are embedded in it.

2.4.1 Solidarity and Support for Each Other

Over the years, the Luo have been showing generosity to each other in among other areas, raising the bride price to help their members marry; working together in the farms through the *saga* (pooling together) arrangement during ploughing, sowing, weeding, harvesting seasons, and in other areas.²⁷ Amidst the adjustments that take place in African society, which affect relations, their support system continues to be robust. *Winjruok* (understanding) and *romruok* (equality) are understood as essential features of egalitarianism as they strengthen oneness and solidarity.²⁸ Support is shown among the Luo in many other ways, for instance, during childbirth plenty of food is made available for the new mother who is referred to as the *ondiek* (hyena). At the *goyo dala* (building a new home) too, support is readily provided as people come together to help an individual to finish working on his new home.²⁹ Help in various forms is also available in times of disasters of any kind within the clan for instance, during bereavement, the community takes care of feeding in the deceased person's home and pools resources together to give one of their own a befitting send-off.³⁰ If the death occurs in the city or town far away from the deceased's home, monetary contributions are made through the funeral association to help with the transportation of the body to the ancestral home.³¹ When there is need for a bull to slaughter during the funeral or other ceremonies, cattle to pay dowry, or money to lend, it is given to the person needing it through the *singo* (a form of the promissory note) system.³²

²⁷ Oginga Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru: An Autobiography of Oginga Odinga*, African Writers Series 38 (London, United Kingdom: Heinemann, 1967), 13–14, 64.

²⁸ David Parkin, *The Cultural Definition of Political Response: Lineal Destiny Among the Luo* (London: Academic Press, 1978), 87.

²⁹ Peter Firstbrook, *The Obamas: The Untold Story of an African Family* (London, Great Britain: Preface Publishing, 2010), 57, 73; C.f..

³⁰ Firstbrook, *The Obamas: The Untold Story of an African Family*, 82, 83.

³¹ David Cohen, and E.S. Atieno Odhiambo., *Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape*. Eastern African Studies (London; Nairobi; Athens: James Currey; Heinemann Kenya; Ohio University Press, 1989), 87; Parkin, *The Cultural Definition of Political Response: Lineal Destiny Among the Luo*, 168, 233.

³² Firstbrook, *The Obamas: The Untold Story of an African Family*, 75; Southall, *Lineage Formation Among the Luo*, 38.

Support is also extended to the woman who is bereft of her husband by way of marriage to one of her late husband's brothers or kin coming from within the immediate circle of relatives after about twelve months following the death.³³ Firstbrook contends that “This tradition of wife inheritance might seem bizarre, but in an environment where survival is tough and tenuous, it does guarantee that any widowed woman and her children will be looked after within an established family unit, and not abandoned.”³⁴ A widower is also allowed to take the sister of his deceased wife in a sororate marital arrangement.³⁵ Mbiti observes that in this arrangement, “the elaborate kinship system acts like an insurance policy covering both the physical and metaphysical dimensions of human life.”³⁶

In urban settings, there are other forms of support which are provided. These include the provision of shelter, meals, and even monetary assistance to desperate “job-seekers.”³⁷ Some “lodgers” are usually “agnates” like sisters and stepsisters who could be there to be helped through education or training; kin like the “matrilateral cousins”; and affines who are female in most cases.³⁸ Hospitality is often extended beyond kinship affiliations to include friends as well.³⁹ Hosting could be very strenuous due to an inundating number of people accommodated by one person. In any case, *jo-kang’ato* extend support to each other to ensure that the needy are catered for. As Southall puts it, the “Anyuola segments within the minimal dhoot and gweng’ also act as mutual assistance groups...They tend to meet for consideration of any matters of common concern.”⁴⁰

The Luo also offer support during happy moments like parties where the sharing of food and drinks take place from time to time among the members of *anyuola* (clan).⁴¹ In the past, during these parties, the *otia* (an alcoholic drink made from ground sorghum) was served in jugs, or sipped with the *oseke* (a long wooden straw measuring about three meters in length) from a joint pot according to a prescribed order — beginning from those who stand for the “major segments of superordinate lineage.”⁴²

2.4.2 A Sense of Belonging

The other ideal enforced by *jo-kang’ato* is the sense of belonging. *Jo-kang’ato* are people who belong to each other, and related by blood — in our case by Christ's blood. It encapsulates other references of each other like “*jowa* (our people), *yawa* (our agnates), *langwa* (our valiant ones), *kothwa* (our seed).”⁴³ They also understand culture as *timbewa* (our customs).⁴⁴ Other

³³ Margaret A. Ogola, *The River and the Source* (Nairobi, Kenya: Focus Publishers Ltd, 1994), 12-47; A. Southall, *Lineage Formation Among the Luo* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1952), 23.

³⁴ Firstbrook, *The Obamas: The Untold Story of an African Family*, 84.

³⁵ Southall, *Lineage Formation Among the Luo*, 23; Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 144, 145.

³⁶ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1969), 145.

³⁷ Parkin, *The Cultural Definition of Political Response: Lineal Destiny Among the Luo*, 87, 88, 91, 93, 89.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 93-102, 114.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 87, 88, 102-104.

⁴⁰ Southall, *Lineage Formation Among the Luo*, 38.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴² Firstbrook, *The Obamas: The Untold Story of an African Family*, 37, 62.

⁴³ Cohen and Odhiambo, *Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape*, 9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

terms of identification include *dalawa* (our home), *thurwa* (where we hail from).⁴⁵ As Cohen and Odhiambo pointed out, with this kind of identification, “You do not in an important sense exist until you reveal your networks...Identity then is the composition of oneself by others in a constellation.”⁴⁶ This approach is generally consistent with the collective view among the African people to life whereby a person is defined in the context of a group to which he or she belongs. Mbiti states that “To be human (as far as the African worldview is concerned) is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involve participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community.”⁴⁷ In conformity with the Luo people’s philosophy of belonging, the *biero* (placenta) is buried by the child’s mother at birth in a hole dug somewhere within the homestead to show that the new baby is part of, or genuinely belongs to a particular family.⁴⁸ It is in this sense that one’s ancestral home remains a place of significance and insistence on interment there at the end of one’s life.⁴⁹ The sense of belonging is also demonstrated in the way dispute resolution is undertaken. A commission could be formed to delve deep into a matter and present its findings upon completion of the investigation before a verdict is issued to avoid unfair judgments and decisions.⁵⁰ It would be followed by reconciliation or punishment. The latter is often administered in the spirit of redemption.

2.4.3 Inclusivity and Incorporation

Since the Luo perceive themselves as descendants of a particular ancestor, a sense of relationship is experienced among them. The outcome of such experience is mutuality in all aspects of social life within the Luo society. The circle of relationship often widens to incorporate even those who are not of the same consanguinity. The belief is that through their ancestor Ramogi Ajwang', Luos are related to each other no matter what their geographical locations are – they are all part of a broader kinship. As with the case in other African communities, Luos believe that human beings are not supposed to lead isolated lives, but to interact with each other.

2.5 The Weaknesses and Strengths of the Luo’s Concept of *Jo-kang’ato*

The main loophole in the concept of *jo-kang’ato* is that it becomes ambiguous the moment its inculturation is not appropriately undertaken. As a result, restrictive behaviours, separation, and prejudicial distinctions arise, the consequence of which could be tension among Christians. However, *jo-kang’ato* cannot be invalidated on this ground as a concept for theological reflection since its strengths outweigh the limitations. It has the potential to sort out the ecclesial relationship in its present condition — marred with insincerity to each other, unresolved and long-standing disputes, and partisanship. It would also offer a panacea for the superiority and inferiority complexes which are deeply entrenched within the Church. It proposes “sibling fellowship” as a way of understanding the Church. Volf states that, “the person is not a self-enclosed substantial entity, but open relational entity.”⁵¹ Through the understanding generated by the rich ideals of the *jo-kang’ato*, a sense of respect could be

⁴⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 27–28.

⁴⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2.

⁴⁸ Cohen and Odhiambo, *Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape*, 9, 25; Firstbrook, *The Obamas: The Untold Story of an African Family*, 57.

⁴⁹ Firstbrook, *The Obamas: The Untold Story of an African Family*, 45, 52, 85.

⁵⁰ Parkin, *The Cultural Definition of Political Response: Lineal Destiny Among the Luo*, 230.

⁵¹ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 82.

inculcated, and tolerance and harmony realised among various denominations. As Dexter puts it, churches at the local level “necessarily owe to each other sisterly affection and activity.”⁵² Its members are both “siblings” and “friends” in the sense that they are cordially related.⁵³ Volf expresses the same idea – “the church is an 'open' fellowship of friends and siblings who are called to summon enemies and strangers to become friends and children of God and to accept them as friends and siblings.”⁵⁴ In addition to enhancing kindness and regard for each other, the understanding facilitated by *jo-kang'ato* could also ensure checks and balances inter-denominationally.⁵⁵ Besides, denominations would complement each other as they learn and borrow ideas among themselves.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research was conducted to find out how the concept of *jo-kang'ato* could inform the understanding of Christian unity in the ecclesial life of the Church in Africa. The descriptive design facilitated the establishment of facts and generation of further knowledge on Christian unity as well as the means of solving the problems related to its misunderstanding. The research was conducted in the four counties within the Republic of Kenya, which are home to the Luo namely Migori, Homa-Bay, Siaya, and Kisumu since the concept under study is embedded in their culture. Information was solicited for through a non-probabilistic sampling which resulted in a particular group of people being relied upon for the type of information needed by way of purposive sampling based on the respondents' ability, competence and readiness to share their knowledge and experience. The village elders, being familiar with and knowledgeable of their history and culture, provided information that is not obtainable through secondary sources for instance, on the origin of *jo-kang'ato* and how it might have helped in bringing the Luo together in the past and in present time. Responses from selected church members helped the researcher to establish the connection between the concept with Christian unity. The study relied on information provided by the interview data from 40 village elders and 200 church members across different Christian denominations. Ten elders and 50 Christians drawn from each of the four counties were interviewed. Respondents from the Church included 100 women and 100 men. Structured interviews facilitated the presentation of intentionally prepared questions orally before the informants for the response. With the help of NVivo software package, raw data gathered in the research study about *jo-kang'ato* as a model for Christian unity in the ecclesial life of the Church in Africa was analysed. The interview data obtained was expected to enrich understanding in Christian unity in the ecclesial life of the Church among the Luo. The outcome of the data analysis was then expanded to demonstrate the kind of unity expected of Christians in the ecclesial life of the Church in Africa as a whole. The analysed data was used as a *posteriori* which upheld the validity of *jo-kang'ato* in theological expression.

4. Results, Discussions and Findings

The findings of the study were based on the interview data collected among the target population. These findings are critical in understanding the concept of *jo-kang'ato* for the Luo and how it could be applied as a model for Christian unity in the ecclesial life of the Church in Africa. The analysis presents the findings of data collected from the Luo elders at the

⁵² Henry Martyn Dexter, *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980), 523.

⁵³ Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, 180, 181.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁵⁵ Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 79.

community level as well as from members of various Christian Churches.⁵⁶

4.1 Using the Concept of *Jo-kang'ato* to Solve the Problem of Disunity in the Church

Mixed reactions were recorded concerning the ability of the concept of *jo-kang'ato* to solve the problem of disunity in the Church. About 63% of the respondents indicated that the application of values that are presented by *jo-kang'ato* could play a significant role in solving the problem of disunity among Christians in the ecclesial life of the Church. On the other hand, 37% expressed a contrary view. The two positions are captured in Figure 1 below.

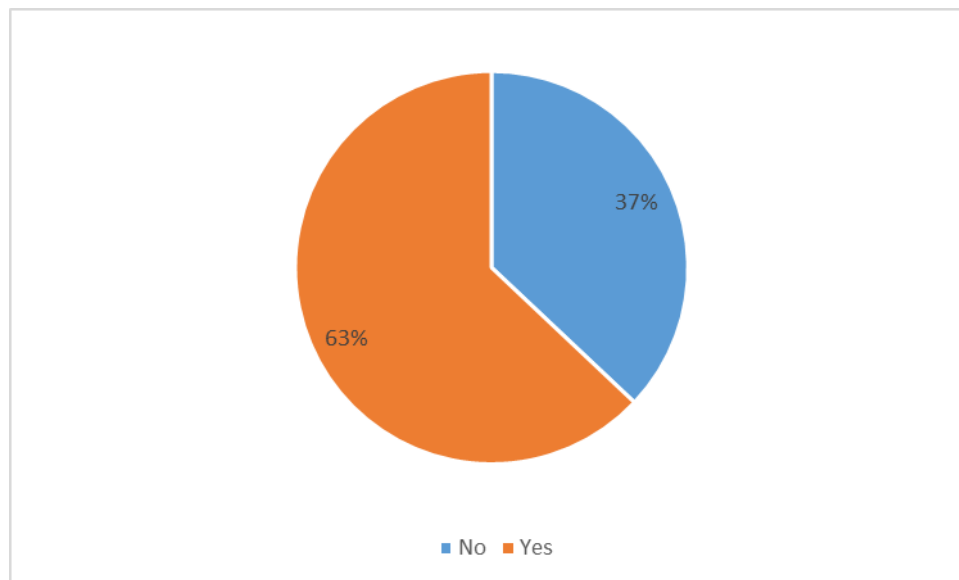


Figure 1: The Ability of the Concept of *Jo-kang'ato* to Build unity in the Church

The analysis established that *jo-kang'ato* could be critically applied to solve the problem of disunity among Christians in the ecclesial life of the Church because of its potential to bring people together. Through it, a sense of brotherhood among Christians could be enhanced. Naturally, its members share the same ancestry and blood connections while spiritually and in the context of the Church, Christians are connected by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It also emerged that the concept provides an environment within which Christians could amicably solve their disputes. When the sense of belonging to one God is awakened in Christians, they replicate the dispute resolution mechanisms provided by *jo-kang'ato* within the church setting whenever misunderstandings arise.

Contrary views on the potential of *jo-kang'ato* to help in solving the problem of ecclesial disunity were also expressed in the responses. However, the validity of the concept was not utterly refuted in the disputing views. Pastor Peter Jaoko (Holo Community Church) for instance, said that “*jo-kang'ato* may have favouritism and hence, will not be efficient in solving the problem of disunity in the Church. *Jo-kang'ato* may bring destructive behaviours and squabbles into the Church and force some unpopular decisions on people.”⁵⁷ On the other hand, Jaoko agreed that the concept “could also bring unity and positively influence the Church in many other ways.”⁵⁸ The general view was that in cases where *jo-kang'ato* is not appropriately

⁵⁶ Pseudonyms have been used instead of the respondents' actual names.

⁵⁷ Peterson Jaoko, interview by the research assistant, Holo in Kisumu County, July 10, 2020.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

applied, an increase in incidents of disunity catalysed by personal interests and leadership wrangles would be experienced.

The overriding view out of the responses was that the concept of *jo-kang'ato* could mitigate the causes of disunity among Church members as it is laden with values which enhance oneness. It could stimulate an appreciation and treatment of each other as God's children and as belonging to Christ. This approach to relationship is critical in ensuring that unity prevails among Christians. Joshua Abura (Israel Church of Africa) observed that the concept would promote love and generate peace and development in the Church.⁵⁹ According to Hezborn Odero (pastor of the Deliverance Church) and Simon Oduor (vicar of the Nomiya Roho Sabato), the growth which is likely to be spurred would be numerical since more converts would be won, infrastructural, and spiritual in form.⁶⁰

The findings further established that treating one another as *jo-kang'ato* would alleviate disunity and usher in love, togetherness and peace irrespective of denominational affiliations. The concept could give Christians an attitude which is free from denominationalism and relationships which are not hindered by doctrinal barriers. Their focus would be the proclamation of the Gospel. Fellowship, coexisting in unity, the spirit of community, cooperation, selflessness, harmony, and the sharing of ideas would be enhanced among Christian denominations.⁶¹ Some respondents observed that in addition, missionary work, and the freedom to worship in any church would be enjoyed and conflicts lessened.

4.2 The Unity of the Luo People before the Colonial and Missionary Era

Unity existed among Luos to a greater degree before the colonial and missionary era. They lived and worked together, and supported each other as was necessary. The sense of belonging which informed their egalitarian approach to life did not allow them to fight with each other as there were channels of dispute resolution based on the spirit of *jo-kang'ato*. With the arrival of the colonialists and Western missionaries and their activities among the Luo, divisions emerged. According to retired Chief Magero Kungu, their divide-and-rule policy brought a lifestyle that almost eroded *jo-kang'ato*.⁶² Their divisive activities compelled the Africans to unite and fight back.

A small section of the elders expressed a contrary view concerning the activities of the colonialists and Western missionaries and whether they enhanced unity among the Luo. According to them, the colonialists and western missionaries to an extent brought unity among the Luo. Ogwel Menga stated that "the churches they brought made people learn that they needed to coexist under the love of Jesus Christ. The schools also provided an avenue for socialisation."⁶³

4.3 The Influence of *Jo-kang'ato* on the Luo People's Lives in the Present

⁵⁹ Joshua Abura, interview by the research assistant, Kisumu County, July 14, 2020.

⁶⁰ Hezborn Odero, interview by the research assistant, Kisumu, July 10, 2020; Simeon Oduor, interview by the research assistant, Uyoma in Siaya County, July 18, 2020.

⁶¹ The sharing of ideas was part of the original concept.

⁶² Magero Kungu, interview by the research assistant, Koru in Kisumu County, August 16, 2020.

⁶³ Ogwel Menga, interview by the research assistant, Oneno Nam in Kisumu County, August 16, 2020.

To date, life among the Luo is guided by the concept of *jo-kang'ato* whose application in the corporate sense manifests in various ways. One of its features is the reckoning of one another as people from the same family, blood, and ancestry even when in fact they are from different places and unrelated. The term is often stretched beyond natural relations to encompass people who would, in most cases, be considered as outsiders, for instance, work colleagues and even people from foreign lands. Furthermore, *jo-kang'ato* is often extended to include enemies, thus becoming a panacea for feuds and disputes. It has always been unconsciously stretched to include tribes in Kenya who are perceived as the Luo people's perennial enemies and manifests in intermarriages and political pacts. As a concept which is laden with a great potential to unite, it has seen rival Luo clans getting into marriage over the years to become part of the adversary's family to stop fighting, since the *wasigu* (enemies) would turn into *oche* (in-laws).⁶⁴ It is through the extension of *jo-kang'ato* that Luos have been able to embrace people from other ethnic groups. In the run-up to independence, for instance, Luos teamed up together with Kenyans from other tribes to agitate and fight for the country's liberation. *Jo-Kang'ato* challenges Christians at all ecclesial levels to set aside their differences and cooperate thus exerting a united effort in mission for this would enable them to unleash their full potential and influence their societies for good. The concept of *jo-kang'ato* especially spells out a new engagement among denominations whose characteristics are due regard for each other, acceptance, respect, friendliness amid differing features, and a positive and constructive ecumenism. These are necessary components of unity.

The welfare activities are among the areas where *jo-kang'ato* is demonstrated among the Luo. During moments of need, for instance, at funeral ceremonies, the unity of the community manifests in coming together to help one another. In the 2007 and 2008 post-election violence in Kenya, the solidarity of the Luo came to fore when they, in the spirit of *jo-kang'ato* provided support to the victims. Odwogo Semo says that "the many Luos who were displaced were received back in their clans, given land, and helped to settle down as compared to other communities who had to stay in tents and public institutions for lack of support from their communities."⁶⁵ Sporting events also present some of the moments for the demonstration of this concept. Football is a perfect example of such moments. In politics too, that unity is manifested. Chief Awiko K'Obondo articulates that, "Luos still organise themselves whenever they have to achieve a common goal. In politics, for example, they still consider voting in one of their own as a priority, or voting in a candidate preferred by their elders."⁶⁶

4.4 Ways through which *Jo-kang'ato* could Address the Generational Gap and Tensions Associated with it in the Church

Most of the respondents agreed that *jo-kang'ato* could be effectively applied to address the generational gap and tensions which it raises from time-to-time in the Church. As members of different age groups cultivate respect for each other, barriers give way to unity. Ezra Oriko (youth leader at the African Inland Church at the district level) observed that through the application of *jo-kang'ato*, "the elders would properly guide the youth. Understanding and respect between the two generations would also be enhanced. The youth would look at the elders as their parents while the latter treat them as their children."⁶⁷ The approach to the relationship in light of *jo-kang'ato* would address conflicts between the young and old in the

⁶⁴ Southall, *Lineage Formation Among the Luo*, 22.

⁶⁵ Odwogo Semo, interview by the research assistant, Migori, August 13, 2020.

⁶⁶ Awiko K'Obondo, interview by the research assistant, Kadongo in Homa Bay County, July 14, 2020.

⁶⁷ Ezra Oriko, interview by the research assistant, Holo in Kisumu County, July 14, 2020.

Church as it deals with discrimination and ushers in a peaceful and loving atmosphere which is the ingredient of unity. When the generational gap is addressed in the Church, spiritual nurture and growth among the youth are succoured. It all begins with the removal of barriers and making it possible for the elders to educate, mentor, counsel, and guide the youth accordingly thus preparing them to take over the operations of the Church in the future. It would also enable the latter to experience a sense of belonging and freedom to share and consult with the former.⁶⁸ The spirit of teamwork in ministry is enhanced in the process.⁶⁹

4.5 The Summary of Findings

One of the factors which emerged from the analysis of data is that while *jo-kang'ato* is laden with connotations of common descent and blood ties, it neither emphasises clannism nor lineal leanings which could turn prejudicial and discriminative. While facilitating an expansion of relationships beyond immediate to intermediate levels, *jo-kang'ato* creates a tight bond that holds people together and manifests in solidarity with each other; support for those within its circles; and protection of one another. These qualities are not just necessary but demonstrate Christian unity. Given the facts, the concept could be critically applied to solve the problem of disunity or mitigate the causes of the same among Christians. It has the potential to bring Christians together and instil a sense of brotherhood in them. As such, it is an appropriate philosophy for defining relationships among Christians in the ecclesial life of the Church in Africa. Their relationship is defined by a bond created through the blood of Christ. To regard others as belonging to God just as oneself regardless of denominational affiliations marks the beginning of that condition. *Jo-kang'ato* fosters an appreciation and treatment of each other as *jo-kaYesu* (all belonging to Jesus) who are willing to edify each other and minister together.

5. Conclusion

While the Luo's concept of *jo-kang'ato* is familial and communitarian, it presents a *terminus a quo* from the conventional view of these two social units. The concept brings to fore the African people's broadened view of family and community. With improved understanding, appropriate conduct ensues, and optimum conditions for the thriving of unity created among Christians. It encourages members to stand with each other and offer support both in good and bad times. It also eradicates the feeling of being unwanted as members accept and embrace each other as siblings. New members are also incorporated into Christian society. In it, aloneness is discouraged and cooperation encouraged as this could ensure the availability of help when needed. The connection that *jo-kang'ato* creates intergenerationally is also remarkable as it draws the younger and older members together and removes generational chasm. At the same time, it ensures a link between the past, the present, and the future. The ideals of the concept of *jo-kang'ato* could be applied in the ecclesial life of the Church, and Christian unity realised.

6. Recommendations

7.

1. Churches should revisit their structures and adjust them accordingly to be more accommodative, inclusive, and incorporative. As such adjustments allow the laity to also participate in the running of the Church as leaders, the Church will begin to be genuinely a "polycentric community" where all believers being priests, are accorded

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Lilian Ong'ow, interview by the research assistant, Migori, August 14, 2020.

the opportunity to contribute towards its wellbeing as they utilise the charismata bestowed upon them in a “pluriform service.”⁷⁰ Many a church in Africa has adopted structures which do not provide that opportunity. The adjustments would also address marginalisation based on gender which is often manifested in the denigration of women; and age as shown in the deprivation of meaningful participation of the youth in the affairs of the Church which includes leadership. Unity does not thrive where marginalisation reigns, hence the need for the Church to provide space for all to make their contributions without feeling discriminated.

2. Christian denominations should form forums which bring denominations together to work jointly on issues of interest to society and make the world a better place. They could direct their joint efforts in alleviating humanitarian crises within their communities and beyond; mediating peace and reconciliation; and speaking on universal issues affecting the society, for instance, environmental conservation, crimes, injustices, and etcetera rather than the isolationist tendencies currently witnessed. While there may not be uniformity among them in theological, doctrinal, and dogmatic convictions and reflections, they could still find unity in purpose.

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⁷⁰ Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 126; Michael Welker, *Kirche Im Pluralismus*, vol. 136, Kaiser Taschenbucher (Guttersloh: Kaiser, 1995), 125; Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, 223–225, 227, 228, 231, 237–239, 243; 1 Cor 14:29,33, 31.

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