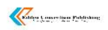
Journal of Philosophy and Religion

[ISSN 2958-1133]
Volume: 05 Issue: 01 | June-2026



JPR

Repentance Made Visible: Embodied Holiness and the Forging of Religious Identity in the Repentance and Holiness Movement, Kenya

Authors

Annette Lukhoni Muleke [(1)]; George Odhiambo [(2)]; Hezekiah Obwoge [(3)]; Naila Napoo [(4)]

Main author's email: annamulex@gmail.com

(1.2.3.4) Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Kenya.

Cite this article in APA

Muleke, A. L., Odhiambo, G., Obwoge, H., & Napoo, N. (2026). Repentance made visible: Embodied holiness and the forging of religious identity in the Repentance and Holiness Movement, Kenya. *Journal of philosophy and religion, 5*(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.51317/jpr.v5i1.982

OPEN ACCESS A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history
Received: 2026-04-13
Accepted: 2026-05-11
Published: 2026-06-15

Scan this QR to read the paper online

Copyright: ©2026 by the author(s). This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Abstract

This article examines how the Repentance and Holiness Movement (RHM) translates theological conviction into embodied practices of dress, ritual, and conduct. Founded in Kenya around 2004, the RHM is a prophetically led New Religious Movement whose theology of repentance extends beyond worship to shape everyday life. The study draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted across six RHM altars in Siaya County, western Kenya, including 85 oral interviews, six focus group discussions, and sustained participant observation. The findings indicate that repentance functions as a comprehensive theological demand that organises dress, economic activity, kinship relations, community membership, political consciousness, and aesthetics. These expectations are embodied through visible practices, structured worship, and ritual observance, while communal surveillance reinforces conformity through mutual spiritual accountability. The study further demonstrates that the movement's local character is rooted in continuities with Luo cosmology and the East African Revival tradition. In addition, prophetic authority serves as the primary source of doctrine, shaping belief and practice throughout the movement. Although women constitute the majority of active adherents, they bear the greatest burden of visible behavioural restrictions, while formal leadership positions remain exclusively male. This gendered asymmetry complicates prevailing strictness theories of religious commitment. By examining five interconnected dimensions of doctrinal embodiment, the article provides the first sustained ethnographic account of how repentance theology is enacted in the daily lives of RHM adherents. In doing so, it addresses a significant gap in existing scholarship, which has largely emphasised prophetic authority and moral demands without exploring their everyday embodied expression.

Key terms: African Pentecostalism, embodied religion, prophetic Christianity, Repentance and Holiness Movement.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Repentance and Holiness Movement (RHM), founded by Prophet Dr David Owuor and present in Siaya County since the mid-2000s, presents an immediately recognisable religious profile. Women wear long, unadorned skirts and white or pastel head coverings, without cosmetics or jewellery, while men wear sober, formal clothing. Worship typically begins in near-silence and moves into extended collective prayer that can continue through the night. These visible markers are not incidental: for RHM adherents, the body is the primary site where holiness is performed, maintained, and contested.

This article is concerned with how doctrine becomes flesh: that is, with how a specific set of theological convictions about repentance, holiness, prophetic authority, and the imminent return of Christ are translated into the visible, disciplined, embodied practices of a rapidly growing religious movement in rural Kenya. Scholars of lived religion have termed this process the embodied turn in the study of religious practice. McGuire (2008) argues that religion is most accurately understood not as a system of beliefs housed in institutions but as something practised, felt, and performed in bodies, homes, and everyday routines, while Ammerman (2007) shows that ordinary believers actively weave theological language into the fabric of daily life rather than simply receiving it from religious authorities. The present study builds on this framework by extending it to a context, an East African prophetic holiness movement, that has received little attention within the lived religion literature, while also showing that embodiment in the RHM is considerably more centrally organised and doctrinally mandated than the more diffuse, individualised practices that McGuire and Ammerman describe in North American settings. Existing scholarship on the RHM itself (Matisi, 2014; Nandi et al., 2015) has documented its prophetic origins, organisational structure, and moral demands, but none of these studies examines how its doctrinal commitments are enacted, negotiated, and policed in the daily embodied lives of ordinary adherents, the gap that this article addresses.

The RHM belongs to a well-documented tradition of African prophetic and holiness movements, yet, read together, its points of departure from that tradition reveal a coherent and distinctive logic. Prosperity gospel movements treat material accumulation as evidence of divine favour (Gifford, 2009; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013); the RHM inverts this logic, building its moral economy on renunciation rather than acquisition. Syncretic African Independent Churches (AICs) have typically negotiated an accommodation between Christian doctrine and indigenous cultural practice (Sundkler, 1961; Daneel, 1987); the RHM instead adopts a sharply exclusivist posture toward both African cultural traditions and mainline denominational practice, refusing the syncretic compromises characteristic of much of the AIC tradition. And while many prophetic movements depend on the founder's continued public presence and fade as that presence recedes, the RHM has converted prophetic charisma into a durable institutional form: radio broadcasts, national rallies, a system of local altars, and a distinctive visual culture that together sustain the movement's identity independently of direct prophetic encounter. What unites these three contrasts is not a single doctrinal innovation but a consistent logic of renunciation, exclusivism, and institutionalisation that runs across the movement's theology, social organisation, and material culture, and it is this logic that the remainder of the article traces in its embodied forms.

This article argues that the RHM represents a distinctive configuration of African Pentecostal piety in which repentance functions as what Mauss (1990) termed a total social fact: a phenomenon that cannot be confined to a single institutional domain because it simultaneously organises dress, economic behaviour, family relations, community membership, political consciousness, and aesthetic life around a single

theological demand. By tracing how doctrine becomes embodied across five interconnected dimensions (historical and cultural roots, prophetic authority, healing and testimony, dress and behavioral codes, and sacramental practice), the article demonstrates that the RHM's power lies not in its propositional theology alone but in its capacity to inscribe holiness visibly and publicly on the bodies of its adherents, thereby forging a bounded moral community in a context of moral uncertainty, economic precarity, and political disillusionment. The purpose of this article, in short, is to provide the first sustained ethnographic account of how this embodiment occurs in practice, and its significance lies in demonstrating how a Kenyan holiness movement converts theological conviction into a comprehensive and self-sustaining social order. The article proceeds as follows: it reviews the relevant literature, outlines the methodology and theoretical framework, presents findings under the headings of historical context, prophetic authority, healing and testimony, dress and behavioural codes, and sacramental practices, and concludes with a synthesis of contributions, limitations, and avenues for future research.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Background and Contextual Literature

Existing scholarship on the RHM itself is limited but growing. Matisi (2014) traced the movement's emergence and the centrality of prophetic authority, while Nandi et al., (2015) have examined its Pentecostal character and moral demands. These studies are valuable for establishing the movement's historical trajectory and doctrinal contours, yet they remain largely descriptive and rely chiefly on documentary and survey-based methods: Matisi's (2014) account, for instance, is based on a single-site master's thesis with limited fieldwork duration, while Nandi et al. (2015) draw mainly on published statements, sermons, and secondary sources rather than sustained immersion in congregational life. What is largely absent from this literature is a sustained ethnographic engagement with how these doctrinal convictions are lived: how they operate through the bodies, relationships, and daily practices of ordinary adherents in specific local contexts.

The RHM is best understood against the backdrop of the broader field of African Pentecostalism and the traditions from which it diverges. Cox (1996) argued that Pentecostalism's global appeal lies in its recovery of a primal spirituality that addresses the immediate, embodied needs of suffering people, and Allan Anderson (2004) showed that healing is not a practical supplement to Pentecostal theology but constitutive of its pneumatology, with the Holy Spirit experienced primarily as a Spirit of power over affliction. Kalu (2008) situates African Pentecostalism within the broader genealogy of African-initiated Christianity, attending to both continuities with revivalist traditions and distinctive innovations, while Gifford (2009) and Asamoah-Gyadu (2013) document the dominance of the prosperity gospel within that genealogy, providing the foil against which the RHM's counter-cultural asceticism, discussed above, is best understood.

The RHM's roots also run through two more local streams of religious history. The East African Revival, or Balokole movement, swept through Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania from the 1930s onward, demanding radical personal conversion, public confession of sin, the testimony of a transformed life, and strict separation from worldly practices (Ward, 1999; Anderson, 2001); as the findings below show, the RHM inherits this testimonial form while intensifying its demands and substituting prophetic authority for revivalist fellowship. At a deeper cultural level, Luo cosmology, in which moral causality, communal accountability, and the therapeutic significance of confession are central, provides the indigenous grammar through which RHM theology achieves local intelligibility (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1976; Ogot, 1967).

This broader picture is enriched by a growing body of ethnographic case studies of African Pentecostal and Spirit-centred movements in other national contexts, which provide useful points of comparison for the RHM. In Ghana, Meyer (1998, 2004) and Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) have shown how Pentecostal-charismatic churches construct converts' identities around a decisive rupture with the past, often expressed through testimony, dress, and the renunciation of indigenous ritual objects and practices. In Zimbabwe, Maxwell (2006) traces how a Pentecostal movement's transnational expansion was accompanied by an increasingly codified set of embodied behavioural expectations, while in Nigeria, Marshall (2009) demonstrates how Pentecostal moral discourse becomes entangled with political subjectivity and critique. Read alongside these cases, the RHM appears as a Kenyan variant of a wider African pattern in which embodied renunciation, testimony, and moral surveillance are mobilised to constitute a bounded community of the saved, even as the RHM's particular theological emphases, its prophetic exclusivism and its substitution of the Prophet's discernment for revivalist fellowship, mark its specific position within that pattern.

Theoretical Framework: An Integrated Model of Embodied Repentance

The analytical framework for this study draws on seven theoretical traditions. Two of these, Mauss' (1990) concept of the total social fact and Weber's (1947) theory of charismatic authority, are the most central to the analysis, supplying its organising concept and its account of doctrinal authority, respectively. The remaining traditions supply complementary lenses on specific dimensions of embodiment and are introduced more briefly below. Considered together, these traditions operate at different levels of the same phenomenon and combine into a single integrated model of embodied repentance.

The broadest premise of the study comes from the lived religion framework associated with McGuire (2008) and Ammerman (2007): religious practice cannot be adequately understood through formal doctrine alone but must be examined as it is lived in bodies, households, and communities. Mauss' (1990) concept of the total social fact provides the framework's organising concept, describing a social phenomenon, such as repentance in the RHM, that cannot be confined to a single institutional domain because it simultaneously shapes religious, economic, kinship, and political life.

Weber's (1947) theory of charismatic authority addresses the question of authority and legitimation, explaining how the RHM is founded and organised: prophetic legitimacy, grounded in the perception of extraordinary personal gifts and divine selection, generates doctrine rather than merely transmitting it. Geertz's (1966) account of religion as simultaneously a model of reality (a diagnosis of the world as it is) and a model for reality (a prescription for how it ought to be) explains how this prophetic authority is translated into a coherent worldview that adherents can act upon.

Iannaccone's (1994, 1998) strictness thesis speaks to community formation, explaining why a demanding religious community such as the RHM can nonetheless thrive: high-cost commitments create strong group solidarity by screening out less committed members. Mahmood's (2005) theory of embodied piety reinforces this dynamic at the level of the body, arguing that outward bodily discipline, such as the RHM's dress and behavioural codes, is not incidental to spiritual formation but constitutive of it.

Finally, two frameworks explain how this embodied discipline is enforced and ritually enacted. Foucault's (1977) analysis of the disciplinary gaze illuminates how power operates through internalised surveillance rather than direct coercion, a dynamic that in the RHM is profoundly theologised through the belief in

prophetic discernment of hidden sin. Turner's (1969, 1979) three-phase model of ritual process (separation, liminality, and reaggregation) illuminates the transformative logic of the movement's baptismal rites at Ndori pool.

Read together, these traditions form a single analytical model operating across four levels: an organizing concept (Mauss, 1990) that names the phenomenon under study as a whole; a level of authority and worldview (Weber, 1947; Geertz, 1966) that explains how doctrine is generated and legitimated; a level of community formation and embodiment (Iannaccone, 1994, 1998; Mahmood, 2005) that explains how doctrine is internalised as commitment and inscribed on the body; and a level of enforcement and ritual enactment (Foucault, 1977; Turner, 1969, 1979) that explains how embodied commitment is policed and periodically renewed. The present study contributes to this literature by providing the first sustained ethnographic account of how these dynamics converge in the embodied daily practices of RHM adherents in Siaya County.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed an ethnographic research design to examine embodied religious practice within the RHM in Siaya County, Kenya. Fieldwork was conducted between January 2020 and December 2023 across six RHM altars selected through purposive criterion-based sampling: Bondo, Gem, Rarieda, Alego Usonga, Ugenya, and Siaya Township. Altars were selected against three criteria. The first was settlement type, to capture variation across rural, semi-rural, and urban congregational settings: Rarieda and Alego Usonga represent predominantly rural altars, Bondo and Gem represent semi-rural market-town settings, and Ugenya and Siaya Township represent the more urbanised altars in the county. The second criterion was altar size and maturity, to include both long-established and more recently founded congregations. The third was accessibility to the research team for sustained, repeated visits over the fieldwork period. The lead researcher, a native Dholuo speaker and non-member of the movement, gained access through community intermediaries.

Data were collected through three complementary methods. Semi-structured interviews (N=85) were conducted with RHM members and leaders, selected through purposive criterion-based sampling to ensure variation across membership tenure (long-term adherents and recent converts), gender, age, and, where applicable, leadership role within the altar. Of the 85 interview participants, 61 (72%) were women, and 24 (28%) were men; ages ranged from approximately 19 to 78 years, with a median age in the mid-forties; and the large majority were engaged in subsistence farming, small-scale trade, or informal employment, reflecting the predominantly rural and semi-rural socio-economic profile of Siaya County. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and two hours and was conducted in either Dholuo or Swahili. With informed consent, the sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently translated into English, with back-translation used to confirm accuracy. Six focus group discussions (6-10 participants each), stratified by gender and length of membership, enabled gender-sensitive exploration of practices such as dress codes and healing. Participant observation included attendance at weekly worship services, overnight revival meetings (keshas), baptismal events at Ndori pool, and informal daily interactions. Fieldnotes were recorded daily.

Data were analysed thematically through a three-stage iterative coding procedure. In the first stage, transcripts and fieldnotes were read closely and coded inductively, generating open codes that captured recurring terms, practices, and experiences described by participants in their own words, including

references to dress, prophetic discernment, testimony, and baptism. In the second stage, these open codes were grouped through axial coding into broader categories informed deductively by the theoretical framework outlined in the Theoretical framework section, bringing the inductive categories grounded in participants' accounts into dialogue with the study's analytical framework. In the third stage, these categories were consolidated through selective coding into the five thematic dimensions presented in the findings: historical and cultural roots, prophetic authority, healing and testimony, dress and behavioural codes, and sacramental practice. Codes were reviewed and refined iteratively across the fieldwork period, with emerging categories cross-checked against new data until thematic saturation was reached. To protect confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms and fieldwork identifiers were assigned to all participants and consistently used in the study. The study received ethical approval from Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Historical and Cultural Roots: Luo Cosmology and the East African Revival

The RHM's theological practices are intelligible only in relation to the cosmological soil in which they took root. The Luo of western Kenya inhabited a world in which the sacred and social were not separable domains. *Nyasaye* (or *were*), the supreme God, presided over a moral order in which misfortune was meaningfully linked to transgression and visible conduct had invisible consequences (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1976). The RHM's insistence that sin has consequences, that hidden transgression will be divinely exposed, and that communal moral accountability is a prerequisite for spiritual wellbeing speaks a language deeply resonant with pre-Christian Luo religious sensibility. One elderly non-member respondent observed*: "The way these people [RHM] talk about sin and its consequences, it sounds like what our grandparents believed, but now with Jesus at the center"* (KII/M/43).

The most direct historical precursor to the RHM in Siaya County is the East African Revival (Balokole movement). The Revival demanded radical personal conversion, public confession of sin, the testimony of a transformed life, and strict separation from worldly practices (Ward, 1999). The RHM has inherited the Revival's testimonial form while intensifying its demands and substituting prophetic authority for revivalist fellowship. The structural parallel between Revival and RHM testimonies is unmistakable across the data: a before/after contrast, specific behavioural markers of the "old life," a public declaration of transformation, and a commitment to non-return.

Prophetic Authority and the Architecture of Repentance

Prophecy in the RHM is not a supplement to doctrine; it is doctrine's generative source. Prophet Owuor presents himself not as a theologian offering systematic arguments but as a messenger delivering divine dictation. This instantiates what Weber (1947) called the charismatic claim in its purest form: legitimacy grounded in the perception of extraordinary personal gifts and divine selection. One cannot disagree with the Prophet's teaching without disagreeing with God, and this concentration of doctrinal authority distinguishes the RHM from both mainline denominations and classical Pentecostalism.

For Geertz (1966), religion provides both a model of and a model for reality. The RHM's repentance theology performs this dual function: it diagnoses contemporary Kenyan society as spiritually fallen and prescribes radical, visible, communal repentance as the only path to restoration. In a context of widespread political corruption and institutional failure, this diagnosis transforms what might otherwise be experienced as meaningless suffering into meaningful moral drama. A respondent in Ugenya articulated

the logic: *"You look at our leaders: they steal, they lie, they worship money. The Prophet came to tell us that God will not bless Kenya until we repent. That is the truth that no one else will speak"* (KII/F/17).

The effects of the prophetic call extend far beyond individual spiritual experience, restructuring social relationships and repositioning adherents within their communities. The prophetic call creates a new community of the saved while simultaneously disrupting existing communities of kinship and tradition. A young man in Rarieda described the cost of his conversion: *"My father is a chief in the [Anglican] church. When I told him I had joined the Prophet, he chased me from home. I have not seen my mother in two years. But I cannot go back because I would have to compromise my holiness"* (KII/M/34).

Healing and Testimony as Empirical Validation

In RHM congregations, healing testimonies are not informal addenda to worship but constitutive theological acts. They function as practical theology from below, with ordinary believers articulating, from their own experience, what they understand God to be doing in the world (Lindhardt, 2011). The collective accumulation of testimonies constitutes an empirical theology continuously updated, shared, and collectively witnessed.

Of the 85 interviews conducted, 61 (72%) were with women, consistent with broader findings from the study of African Pentecostalism that women disproportionately access Pentecostal movements as sites of healing from domestic violence, marital breakdown, reproductive crisis, and the social vulnerabilities associated with widowhood (Parsitau, 2018). However, the RHM's gender dynamics are complex: while women dominate the healing narratives, leadership positions remain predominantly male. All six altar leaders interviewed were men. A female respondent acknowledged this tension: *"The Prophet is a man. The altar leaders are men. That is God's order. But when women pray, things happen. We know our power"* (KII/F/31). This mirrors broader patterns in African Pentecostalism in which women's spiritual authority in healing and prayer does not translate into formal institutional leadership (Soothill, 2007; Mate, 2002).

Dress and Behavioural Codes as Visible Markers of Holiness

The most immediately visible expression of RHM identity is sartorial. The "RHM clothing line," as adherents themselves describe it, governs not only formal worship but daily life. Mahmood's (2005) framework is essential here: when a woman puts on a head covering each morning, she is not merely signalling religious affiliation but disciplining her body, training herself in submission, and creating a physical environment conducive to spiritual attentiveness. A female respondent articulated this precisely: *"When I wear my covering, I remember who I am. I am not a woman of this world. I am a woman set apart for God. The covering helps me remember when I forget"* (KII/F/07).

The dress code is the visible tip of a much larger iceberg of behavioural demands, including abstention from alcohol, tobacco, secular music, dancing, television viewing, cosmetics, and cultural events involving any of the above. These demands constitute what Iannaccone (1994) theorised as the "sacrifice and stigma" mechanism of strict religious communities: high-cost demands screen out less committed members and create strong in-group solidarity among those who remain.

The prohibition on ohangla music is particularly significant in Siaya County, where ohangla is not merely entertainment but a cultural institution central to Luo identity. To refuse ohangla is to refuse full participation in Luo social life. A respondent explained: *"Ohangla is not just music. It is our culture. When*

we refuse it, our families say we have rejected being Luo. But we say we have chosen to be Christian first" (KII/M/19). This explicit prioritisation of religious identity over ethnic identity is a deliberate theological stance: the community of the saved transcends and supersedes the community of blood.

Communal Surveillance and Discipline

The enforcement of behavioural purity operates through what Foucault (1977) theorised as the disciplinary gaze, a mechanism that operates not only through direct coercion but through the internalisation of surveillance. In the RHM, this logic is theologised: the belief that the Prophet can discern hidden sins through divine revelation means that the cost of transgression is not merely social embarrassment but cosmic exposure. Community surveillance is expected and justified as mutual accountability. A respondent described the psychological effect: *"You cannot hide anything from the Prophet. He will know. Even if no one sees you, he will see you in the Spirit. That thought keeps me from even thinking about sin"* (KII/M/08).

This theologised surveillance is also organised through concrete communal structures. Each altar is divided into smaller fellowship groups that meet during the week for prayer and mutual accountability, and members are expected to disclose struggles, doubts, or lapses to their group rather than concealing them. Altar leaders and senior members, often referred to as elders, are responsible for noticing changes in a member's dress, attendance, or demeanour that might signal spiritual decline, and for initiating a private conversation before any matter becomes public. Persistent or serious transgressions may result in a period of exclusion from Communion or from leading prayer, until the member has demonstrated renewed commitment through testimony and changed behaviour. One altar leader explained the rationale: *"We do not punish to shame. We correct because we love the person and we do not want them to be lost. If I see my brother going back to the old life and I say nothing, his blood is also on me"* (KII/M/22). In this way, surveillance in the RHM is experienced less as external policing than as a shared obligation of care, even as it produces the same disciplinary effects that Foucault describes.

Sacred Thresholds: Baptism and Communion

The sacred site of Ndori pool, in Bondo Sub-County, is the exclusive location for all RHM baptisms in the region, a consecrated site charged with the accumulated weight of previous baptismal encounters. Turner's (1969, 1979) three-phase ritual framework of separation, liminality, and reaggregation illuminates what happens at Ndori with unusual clarity. Candidates prepare through extended prayer and fasting, enter the pool in a state of ritual vulnerability, are submerged in a moment symbolising death to the old self, and emerge to receive new garments and a new community identity. One respondent described the experience: *"When I came up from the water, I felt light. Clean. I was not the same person who went in. The old me was gone. The new me had begun"* (KII/F/03).

The RHM's Eucharistic theology departs from classical anamnetic frameworks and substitutes prolepsis, the anticipation of a future reality. Rather than looking backwards to Calvary, RHM Communion looks forward to the rapture and the Wedding Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7–9). Communion is infrequent, preceded by intense preparation, and the elements are treated with extraordinary reverence. Non-members are strictly excluded: because Communion is understood as rehearsal for an eschatological event that only the saved will attend, to admit an unrepentant person would be a theological contradiction. This eschatological intensity, maintained by focusing not on dates but on preparedness as a perpetual state, distinguishes the RHM from movements that fade when predicted ends do not arrive.

Discussion

Marcel Mauss's concept of the total social fact illuminates what repentance has become in the RHM: not merely a theological category or spiritual experience, but a practice that simultaneously organises dress, economic behaviour, family relations, community membership, political consciousness, and aesthetic life around a single theological demand. Across all five dimensions examined (historical roots, prophetic authority, healing testimony, embodied piety, and sacramental practice), the same pattern is visible: doctrine does not remain abstract; it becomes flesh. The body is the primary site of theological inscription; the community is the primary mechanism of theological enforcement; and the eschatological horizon is the primary source of the movement's extraordinary moral intensity.

The findings confirm Iannaccone's (1994) strictness thesis: high-cost demands produce high commitment. However, the costs are not evenly distributed. Women bear a disproportionate burden of visible behavioural restriction, even as they constitute the majority of active participants (72% of interview respondents). This complicates the strictness thesis by revealing a gendered economy of religious cost and benefit. The findings also confirm Mahmood's (2005) argument that embodied piety is constitutive of spiritual formation rather than merely symbolic of it, while Foucault's (1977) disciplinary gaze is shown to operate most powerfully when theologised: internalised surveillance proves more effective than external enforcement because it cannot be evaded by privacy or secrecy.

These findings also carry implications beyond the RHM itself. Read alongside ethnographic accounts of Pentecostal-charismatic movements in Ghana (Meyer, 1998, 2004; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005), Zimbabwe (Maxwell, 2006), and Nigeria (Marshall, 2009), the RHM suggests that the conversion of doctrine into embodied, surveilled, and gendered community is not a peculiarity of one Kenyan movement but a recurring strategy through which African Pentecostal and holiness movements construct moral certainty amid rapid social change. What distinguishes the RHM within this wider pattern is the degree to which a single figure's prophetic discernment, rather than congregational consensus or denominational doctrine, anchors the entire embodied system; this suggests that theories of embodied piety and communal surveillance may need to be further specified according to where doctrinal and disciplinary authority is located, whether in a charismatic individual, a clerical hierarchy, or a diffuse congregational culture. Future comparative work across these cases could test whether movements anchored in individual prophetic authority generate more totalizing forms of embodiment and a correspondingly higher cost of exit than those anchored in more distributed forms of religious authority.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, fieldwork was conducted entirely in Siaya County; the RHM has spread nationally and internationally, and comparative research would reveal how the movement adapts to different cultural environments. Second, the article focuses primarily on the perspectives of current members; the voices of former members are largely absent and would provide crucial insight into the movement's disciplinary practices and the costs of departure. Third, the gender dynamics of the movement deserve deeper investigation; a sustained gendered analysis of power, authority, and resistance within the RHM remains to be written. Fourth, the relationship between the RHM's apocalyptic framing of Kenyan society and its political engagement deserves further attention.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This article has traced how the Repentance and Holiness Movement translates theological conviction into embodied practice across five interconnected dimensions: historical and cultural roots that give its theology local intelligibility; a prophetic call that constitutes the movement's founding narrative and ongoing authority; healing testimonies that provide empirical validation of its claims; dress and behavioral codes that inscribe holiness visibly on bodies and social life; and sacramental practices through which its eschatological imagination is enacted and rehearsed.

The RHM cannot be understood simply as sociological deviance, political manipulation, or cultural pathology. It must be engaged as a serious theological project whose practices embody a comprehensive account of what it means to live faithfully before God in contemporary Kenya. For its members, repentance is not a one-time decision but a daily discipline. Holiness is not an abstract ideal but a visible, embodied reality. And community is not a voluntary association but a total social fact: a new kinship order that claims the member's entire life. The movement's power lies precisely in the comprehensiveness of this claim: it offers not a partial adjustment to existing social arrangements but a complete alternative social world, inscribed on bodies and enacted in community.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered:
Future research should adopt a comparative regional design to examine how the RHM adapts its embodied practices across different cultural environments within Kenya and in diaspora contexts in the United States and Europe.

Gender-focused research should be prioritised to produce a sustained analysis of the asymmetric distribution of religious costs within the movement, particularly with regard to women's spiritual authority and institutional exclusion.
Scholars of religion, public health, and social policy should attend to the therapeutic and social-protective functions of RHM membership, particularly for women who have experienced domestic violence, reproductive crisis, or social marginalisation, as these dimensions have implications for community wellbeing programs in western Kenya.

The relationship between the RHM's apocalyptic worldview and political consciousness warrants dedicated investigation, as implicit political critique embedded in eschatological frameworks may have significant implications for civic engagement and democratic participation in the region.

6.0 REFERENCES

1. Ammerman, N. T. (2007). *Everyday religion: Observing modern religious lives*. Oxford University Press.
2. Anderson, A. (2001). *African reformation: African initiated Christianity in the 20th century*. Africa World Press.
3. Anderson, A. (2004). *An introduction to Pentecostalism: Global charismatic Christianity*. Cambridge University Press.
4. Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. (2005). *African charismatics: Current developments within independent indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. Brill.
5. Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. (2013). *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African context*. Regnum Books.

6. Cox, H. (1996). *Fire from heaven: The rise of Pentecostal spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the twenty-first century*. Addison-Wesley.
7. Daneel, M. L. (1987). *Quest for belonging: Introduction to a study of African independent churches*. Mambo Press.
8. Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Pantheon Books.
9. Geertz, C. (1966). Religion as a cultural system. In M. Banton (Ed.), *Anthropological approaches to the study of religion* (pp. 1–46). Tavistock.
10. Gifford, P. (2009). *Christianity, politics and public life in Kenya*. Hurst.
11. Iannaccone, L. R. (1994). Why strict churches are strong. *American Journal of Sociology, 99*(5), 1180–1211. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2781147
12. Iannaccone, L. R. (1998). Introduction to the economics of religion. *Journal of Economic Literature, 36*(3), 1465–1495. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2564806
13. Kalu, O. (2008). *African Pentecostalism: An introduction*. Oxford University Press.
14. Lindhardt, M. (2011). *Practicing the faith: The ritual life of Pentecostal-charismatic Christians*. Berghahn Books.
15. Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press.
16. Marshall, R. (2009). *Political spiritualities: The Pentecostal revolution in Nigeria*. University of Chicago Press.
17. Mate, R. (2002). Wombs as God's laboratories: Pentecostal discourses of femininity in Zimbabwe. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, 72*(4), 549–568. https://doi.org/10.2307/3556701
18. Matisi, H. (2014). *Prophetic authority and congregational life in Kenya: A study of the Repentance and Holiness Movement* (Master's thesis, University of Nairobi).
19. Mauss, M. (1990). *The gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* (W. D. Halls, Trans.). W. W. Norton. (Original work published 1925)
20. Maxwell, D. (2006). *African gifts of the spirit: Pentecostalism and the rise of a Zimbabwean transnational religious movement*. James Currey.
21. McGuire, M. B. (2008). *Lived religion: Faith and practice in everyday life*. Oxford University Press.
22. Meyer, B. (1998). "Make a complete break with the past." Memory and post-colonial modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist discourse. *Journal of Religion in Africa, 28*(3), 316–349. https://doi.org/10.2307/1581573
23. Meyer, B. (2004). Christianity in Africa: From African independent to Pentecostal-charismatic churches. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 33*, 447–474. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25064861
24. Nandi, J., Omenyo, C. N., & Wango, G. (2015). *Pentecostalism and morality in Kenya*. Nairobi University Press.
25. Ocholla-Ayayo, A. B. C. (1976). *Traditional ideology and ethics among the Southern Luo*. Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.
26. Ogot, B. A. (1967). *History of the Southern Luo*. East African Publishing House.
27. Parsitau, D. S. (2018). *'Arise, oh ye daughters of faith': Women, Pentecostalism and the negotiation of patriarchy in Kenya*. CODESRIA.
28. Soothill, J. E. (2007). *Gender, social change and spiritual power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana*. Brill.
29. Sundkler, B. (1961). *Bantu prophets in South Africa*. Oxford University Press.
30. Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Aldine.

31. Turner, V. (1979). *Process, performance and pilgrimage: A study in comparative symbology*. Concept Publishing.
32. Ward, K. (1999). Tukutendereza Yesu: The Balokole revival in Uganda. In *From mission to church: A handbook of Christianity in East Africa*. Uzima Press.
33. Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. Free Press.