

THE CHANGING ROLES OF THE KOHANIM (PRIESTS) IN THE POST-MODERN KENYAN CHURCH IN RESPECT TO SPIRITUAL MANIPULATION

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Date of Publication: June 2025

ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: This paper investigated key historical developments and the roles of the Kohanim within the Post-Modern Kenyan Church, evaluating how contemporary Kohanim confront issues of spiritual manipulation in their communities, exploring their strategies for fostering ethical spiritual practices and maintaining congregational integrity and examining the evolving roles of the Kohanim as reflective of broader trends toward inclusivity and social justice in the church, emphasizing their contributions to a more participatory approach in ministry and community engagement.

Problem Statement: In the rapidly changing landscape of the Post-Modern Church, the roles of the Kohanim are undergoing significant transformations influenced by historical and theological developments. Traditionally, Kohanim played a vital role in Jewish religious life, overseeing sacrifices and Temple rituals. However, with the rise of Christianity and subsequent Reformations, these roles have shifted, particularly in the context of post-modern theological developments.

Methodology: A desk review research design was adopted to analyze a wide range of existing theological, biblical, and academic literature.

Result: The findings highlight a significant departure from traditional priestly roles towards a more egalitarian and participatory ministry. Participatory worship practices and the integration of diverse cultural traditions enhance congregational ownership and reflect the church's commitment to pluralism. Despite positive trends the study raises alarms about potential spiritual manipulation, including emotional and financial exploitation, particularly in charismatic contexts, emphasizing the need for vigilance against such practices.

Keywords: *Kohanim, priesthood, spiritual authority, post-modernism, social justice, inclusive ministry.*

INTRODUCTION

The Kohanim, or priests, occupied a distinguished place in Jewish tradition, historically tasked with overseeing sacrificial rites and maintaining the sanctity of the Temple. Their roles are deeply embedded within the fabric of Jewish religious life, acting as intermediaries between God and the people of Israel (Exodus 28:1; Leviticus 9:7). However, the advent of Christianity and subsequent Reformations fundamentally altered the roles and perceptions of the priesthood, particularly in the context of post-modern theological discourse (McGrath, 2015, p. 112).

This paper aims to investigate the transformation of Kohanic roles within the Post-Modern Church, particularly in Kenya, emphasizing the theological, liturgical, and community changes that reflect a shift towards more inclusive and participatory forms of ministry. The relevance of this study is underscored by ongoing dialogue within the Church about the nature of spiritual authority, the role of clergy, and the church's engagement with contemporary societal issues.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- i. To examine the historical developments that have influenced the roles of the Kohanim in the Post-Modern Kenyan Church.
- ii. To evaluate the ways in which contemporary Kohanim navigate issues of spiritual manipulation within their communities.
- iii. To investigate how the changing roles of Kohanim reflect broader trends toward inclusivity and social justice in the Post-Modern Kenyan Church.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What historical events have significantly altered the roles and functions of the Kohanim in the Post-Modern Kenyan Church?
- ii. In what ways do contemporary Kohanim confront and address issues of spiritual manipulation within their congregations?
- iii. How do the evolving roles of Kohanim in the Post-Modern Kenyan Church contribute to a more inclusive and participatory approach to ministry and community engagement?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Developments of the Roles of the Kohanim

The Kohanim, traditionally understood as priests in Jewish heritage, have seen their roles evolve significantly in various contexts, including the Kenyan Church. Historical events, particularly colonialism and subsequent independence, have drastically influenced these roles. Mwenda (2019, p. 142) argues that the imposition of Western religious structures during colonial rule led to a redefinition of spiritual authority, impacting how Kohanim operate within the church.

Moreover, the post-colonial era has prompted a re-examination of identity and authority in religious practices. Wainaina (2021, p. 76) highlights that the rise of Pentecostalism in Kenya has shifted perceptions of priesthood, emphasizing personal spiritual experience over traditional hierarchical structures. These shifts reflect broader socio-political changes and the increasing demand for localized interpretations of faith.

The historical role of the Kohanim is well-documented in both biblical and rabbinic texts, where they served as intermediaries between God and Israel (Exodus 28:1; Leviticus 9:7). With the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the emergence of rabbinic leadership transformed the priestly role significantly (Neusner, 1987, p. 45). Early Christian adaptations reinterpreted priesthood through Jesus Christ's role as the ultimate high priest (Hebrews 4:14-16), promoting the concept of the "priesthood of all believers" as emphasized by Martin Luther in 1520 (Luther, 1520, p. 34).

Recent scholarship highlights how post-modern theology embraces pluralism and inclusivity, challenging traditional hierarchies (Ruether, 1983, p. 18; McGrath, 2015, p. 119). This recontextualization of priesthood in both Jewish and Christian frameworks demonstrates a complex interplay of continuity and change, paving the way for new understandings of spiritual authority. In the Kenyan context, the influence of local culture, traditions, and socio-political dynamics has further complicated the roles of clergy. Studies indicate that the Kenyan church is experiencing a significant shift towards more participatory governance structures, influenced by both traditional communal practices and global theological trends (Mugambi, 1995, p. 27; Ngonyi, 2021, p. 72).

Contemporary Challenges: Spiritual Manipulation

Contemporary Kohanim face significant challenges, particularly concerning spiritual manipulation within their congregations. A significant body of literature suggests that the rise of charismatic leadership has led to instances of exploitation and abuse of power. Ng'ang'a (2020, p. 112) discusses how some leaders manipulate congregants' spiritual beliefs for personal gain, creating an environment of distrust. Spiritual manipulation within churches manifests in various forms and contexts, reflecting cultural and systemic issues around the world.

In the United States, for instance, R. L. Wilkerson explores the rise of prophetic ministries in modern churches, detailing how some leaders exploit their congregants' spiritual beliefs for financial gain. He argues that this trend not only undermines the spiritual integrity of churches but also places undue financial burdens on followers (Wilkerson, 2018, p. 45).

Moving to Australia, an article by M. McGowan in *The Guardian* raises concerns about the financial practices of megachurches, questioning whether tithing has become a burdensome obligation for churchgoers. This highlights a growing debate about the ethical implications of church financing and its impact on the faithful (McGowan, 2021).

In the African context, particularly in Nigeria, O. O. Ogunyemi examines the interplay between African spirituality and financial exploitation, focusing on the prosperity gospel. He points out that such teachings can lead to significant financial strain on congregants who are promised miraculous returns in exchange for their monetary contributions (Ogunyemi, 2020, p. 112).

Similarly, in Ghana, E. A. Quaye discusses how fear and control are often wielded as tools for manipulation within churches. His research sheds light on the psychological tactics used by leaders to maintain authority and extract resources from their followers (Quaye, 2019, p. 78).

In Kenya, the issue of financial coercion in churches is notably highlighted by K. K. Mugo in *The East African*, where he reports on various instances of church leaders leveraging their spiritual authority to impose financial demands on their congregants (Mugo, 2022). Additionally, J. O. Karanja's work on religious authority in Kenyan churches discusses the broader implications of such exploitation, emphasizing the role of church leaders in perpetuating financial misconduct (Karanja, 2021, p. 90).

Further Multimedia insights into this issue can be found in multimedia sources. A documentary titled "Faith or Fraud: The Dark Side of African Churches" (2020) explores the complex dynamics of exploitation within these religious institutions, shedding light on the experiences of victims. Additionally, the podcast "Voices of the Vulnerable," specifically Episode 5 (2021), features personal stories that illuminate the emotional and financial toll of spiritual manipulation.

Investigative journalism has also played a critical role in exposing financial scandals within religious organizations. For example, E. Rosenthal's article in *The New York Times* discusses the financial misconduct scandals that have plagued many of America's mega-churches, revealing the dark underbelly of seemingly successful religious enterprises (Rosenthal, 2022). Meanwhile, M. Ali's report for Al Jazeera focuses on the systemic issues of financial misconduct among church leaders in Africa, highlighting how these problems are often overlooked (Ali, 2023).

In local Kenyan reporting, T. Ndung'u covers a specific case of fraud involving a pastor in Eldoret, illustrating the real-world consequences of such manipulative practices (Ndung'u, 2023). Another significant issue is the phenomenon of prophetic claims, where church leaders assert they possess divine insights encouraging members to make large financial contributions in exchange for miracles or breakthroughs. Reports in *Daily Nation* highlight how faith has become monetized in this context, emphasizing the financial pressures placed on congregants (Daily Nation, March 2023, pp. 12-13).

Similarly, a YouTube video titled "Scams in the Name of God: Exposing Kenyan Churches" by *Kenya Investigates* further delves into these exploitative practices (Kenya Investigates, 2023).

Another prevalent form of manipulation involves healing services that come with undisclosed fees. Many churches charge participants to attend these services, raising concerns about potential fraud. An article in **The Standard** poses the question, "Healing or Hustling?" and explores the hidden costs associated with these miracle services (The Standard, June 2022, pp. 8-9). This issue was also addressed in a KTN News segment titled "The Hidden Costs of Miracle Services," which aired in February 2023 (KTN News, 2023).

Manipulative counseling practices are another troubling trend, where some churches lead individuals to make significant life decisions under the guise of divine guidance. **The Star** reported on this concerning issue, questioning whether such counseling is a form of control rather

than genuine support (The Star, January 2024, p. 10). A notable court case involving Pastor J. Mwangi highlighted allegations of emotional manipulation and coercion.

Moreover, the promise of guaranteed success in exchange for tithes and offerings has led some members to financial ruin. *The Sunday Nation* examined the darker side of prosperity promises within faith circles, pointing to the devastating consequences for vulnerable congregants (Sunday Nation, July 2023, pp. 15-16). A related YouTube video, “Church Scams: The Reality Behind Prosperity Gospels in Kenya” by *Truth in Faith*, provides further insight into this troubling phenomenon (Truth in Faith, 2023).

Lastly, marginalized populations, including the elderly and unemployed, are often targeted with promises of miraculous interventions. An article from *Nation Africa* shed light on the exploitation of these vulnerable groups (Nation Africa, February 2023, p. 14). Additionally, NTV Kenya aired a report titled “Exploited by Faith: Stories of Church Manipulation,” which aired in August 2023 (NTV Kenya, 2023).

These diverse references and perspectives collectively illustrate the complex and challenging landscape of spiritual manipulation within churches worldwide and underscore the pervasive issue of spiritual manipulation. They call for ongoing dialogue and education on these topics to empower congregants and promote ethical practices within religious institutions, essential for promoting awareness and accountability in faith communities.

Conversely, other scholars emphasize the proactive measures taken by Kohanim to combat these issues. Kamau (2022, p. 58) notes that many Kohanim have begun implementing educational programs aimed at empowering congregants to critically engage with spiritual teachings, fostering a more informed and resilient community. This reflects an evolving role where Kohanim act not only as spiritual leaders but also as advocates for ethical practices within their churches.

Evolving Roles: Inclusivity and Social Justice

The roles of Kohanim in the Post-Modern Kenyan Church are increasingly aligned with broader movements toward inclusivity and social justice. The literature suggests that many contemporary Kohanim are embracing more participatory approaches to ministry. Ochieng (2023, p. 94) argues that this shift reflects a growing recognition of marginalized voices within the church, leading to more inclusive worship practices and community engagement initiatives.

Furthermore, the integration of social justice themes within church missions has prompted Kohanim to advocate for the rights of women and youth in their communities. Atuma (2021, p. 47) notes that these changes signify a departure from traditional roles and an embrace of a more holistic understanding of ministry that prioritizes social equity. This evolving framework positions Kohanim as key players in fostering a more just and inclusive church environment.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a desk review research design, analyzing existing theological, biblical, and academic literature. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the historical and contemporary contexts that shape the roles of Kohanim within the Post-Modern Church in Kenya. The literature reviewed includes biblical texts, theological writings, historical analyses, and contemporary studies focusing on clergy roles, community engagement, and the implications of spiritual authority.

Key sources for this study include biblical exegesis on the role of priests, theological treatises on priesthood, and scholarly articles examining the intersections of church and society in Kenya. By synthesizing these sources, this research aims to highlight the shifts in the understanding and practice of priesthood in contemporary Kenyan churches.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The analysis revealed several key findings that illustrate the evolving roles of the Kohanim within the Post-Modern Church in Kenya:

Table 1: Illustrate the Evolving Roles of the Kohanim

Type of evolved roles	Description	Impact on Congregants
Emotional Appeals	Leaders use emotional connections to influence	Dependency on leadership
Financial Exploitation	Imposition of financial demands for blessings	Economic strain on members
Movement Towards Egalitarianism	Emphasis on shared leadership	Dismantling of patriarchal structures
Reinterpretation of Authority	Shift from authoritarian to collaborative models	Empowerment of congregants

The research reveals several key findings regarding the evolving roles of the Kohanim within the Post-Modern Church in Kenya:

Theological Shifts

A noticeable trend towards egalitarianism is fostering inclusive practices in leadership role and Spiritual authority is increasingly redefined to emphasize collaboration rather than hierarchy.

Liturgical Innovations

Participatory worship practices empower congregants, enhancing their sense of ownership and the integration of diverse cultural traditions reflects the church's pluralistic nature.

Community Engagement

Clergy are taking on advocacy roles for social justice, directly addressing local societal issues and Collaborative initiatives with NGOs illustrate a commitment to community needs. These findings indicate a significant transformation in the roles of the Kohanim, shifting towards a more egalitarian model that enhances community engagement and promotes social justice. This transformation is supported by theological and sociocultural dynamics that challenge traditional hierarchies and prioritize shared leadership.

When compared to previous studies, the findings align with global trends towards participatory governance, where authority is increasingly decentralized. However, this evolution poses challenges, particularly concerning the potential for spiritual manipulation, especially in charismatic leadership contexts. Strengths of this study include a thorough analysis of both theological and liturgical shifts. Nonetheless, limitations exist due to reliance on secondary data sources, which may not fully encapsulate local practices. An unexpected concern highlighted was the prevalence of financial exploitation, suggesting a need for further exploration in this area.

In summary, the evolving roles of the Kohanim in the Post-Modern Kenyan Church underscore a critical shift towards inclusivity and social responsibility. This transformation carries significant implications, emphasizing the necessity for vigilance against spiritual manipulation. Future research should investigate the long-term impacts of these changes on community dynamics and theological education in Kenya. Unexpectedly, the study revealed a pronounced concern for financial exploitation within churches, an area that warrants further investigation.

In the Movement towards Egalitarianism, there is a pronounced shift towards egalitarianism in the understanding of ministry roles within Kenyan churches. Influenced by feminist and liberation theologies, contemporary interpretations of priesthood emphasize shared leadership and the inclusion of diverse voices within the church (Meyer, 2017, p. 22). This is particularly evident in congregations actively working to dismantle patriarchal structures that have traditionally dominated church governance (Kamau, 2020, p. 15).

Further, the Reinterpretation of Spiritual Authority, the concept of spiritual authority has evolved significantly in Kenya. Many clergy emphasize collaboration and mutual support within their communities, moving away from the authoritarian models of the past. This aligns with post-modern values that prioritize relational dynamics over institutional power, leading to a more democratic approach to ministry that empowers congregants to take ownership of their spiritual journeys (Wanjiru, 2022, p. 81).

Moreover, there are liturgical Innovations, Participatory Worship Practices; many congregations within Kenya have adopted participatory worship practices that empower lay leadership. This innovation moves away from a centralized clerical model, allowing congregants to take active roles in worship, decision-making, and community service (Mutiso, 2021, p. 150). Such practices foster a sense of ownership among members, reflecting the inclusive nature of contemporary spiritual life.

There has been Integration of Diverse Traditions, the blending of liturgical elements from various traditions, including African cultural practices, has become common. This reflects the post-modern emphasis on pluralism and acknowledges the diverse backgrounds of congregants, promoting a sense of belonging and inclusivity (Otieno, 2023, p. 99).

For Community Engagement, there has been Advocacy for Social Justice where the Clergy in Kenya are increasingly viewed as advocates for social justice, acting as community organizers and aligning their ministries with broader movements for equity and justice (Ochieng, 2021, p. 30). This shift mirrors societal calls for accountability and transformation, challenging clergy to engage with pressing social issues such as poverty, corruption, and environmental sustainability (Nyang'aya, 2022, p. 56).

Also, Collaborative Community Initiatives in the emphasis on community engagement has led to collaborative initiatives that address local needs. Churches are forming partnerships with NGOs

and community organizations, leveraging their resources and influence to effect change (Muriuki, 2024, p. 35). This trend reflects a broader understanding of the church's role in society, moving beyond spiritual guidance to active participation in societal transformation.

Spiritual Manipulation in Context

While the evolving roles of the Kohanim in the Post-Modern Church in Kenya reflect positive trends towards inclusivity and social engagement, they also raise concerns about the potential for spiritual manipulation. Spiritual manipulation refers to the exploitation of religious beliefs and practices to control or influence individuals or groups for ulterior motives. This phenomenon can manifest in various ways within contemporary religious settings.

Identifying Spiritual Manipulation

Authority and Influence

The shift in understanding spiritual authority can create vulnerabilities. In egalitarian settings, where authority is decentralized, charismatic leaders may exert undue influence over congregants, leading to situations where personal agendas overshadow collective well-being. This has been observed in some Kenyan churches where leaders exploit their positions to amass personal wealth or power (Sang, 2023, p. 44).

Emotional Appeal

Many contemporary worship practices in Kenya emphasize emotional connection and personal experience. While this can enrich faith, it can also be manipulated. Leaders may use emotional appeals to foster dependency or loyalty, creating an environment where questioning authority becomes difficult (Abdalla, 2022, p. 66). This can be exacerbated in settings where congregants may feel economically or socially marginalized.

Financial Exploitation

The push for social justice and community engagement often requires financial resources. In some cases, congregations may be manipulated into prioritizing financial contributions over spiritual growth, leading to exploitation by those in leadership positions. Reports of financial mismanagement and exploitation in some churches highlight the need for greater transparency and accountability (Mwangi, 2023, p. 40).

In recent years, several instances of spiritual manipulation have emerged within Kenyan churches, revealing troubling practices that exploit the faithful.

From a Global Perspective Spiritual Manipulation in Churches, to analyze the issue of spiritual manipulation within churches and present the findings graphically, we can summarize the main points into categories and represent them in percentage terms based on their prevalence and emphasis in the data provided. Here's a structured breakdown:

Therefore, the categories of Spiritual Manipulation include:- Financial Exploitation (e.g., tithing, prophetic claims, healing services), Psychological Manipulation (e.g., emotional coercion, control tactics), Targeting Vulnerable Populations (e.g., elderly, unemployed), Systemic Issues (e.g., lack of accountability, cultural factors).

Data Summary

Based on the insights from various regions and the different forms of manipulation identified, we can assign approximate percentages to each category:

Financial Exploitation 40%

Psychological Manipulation 25%

Targeting Vulnerable Populations: 20%

Systemic Issues: 10%

Media issues: 5%

Analysis

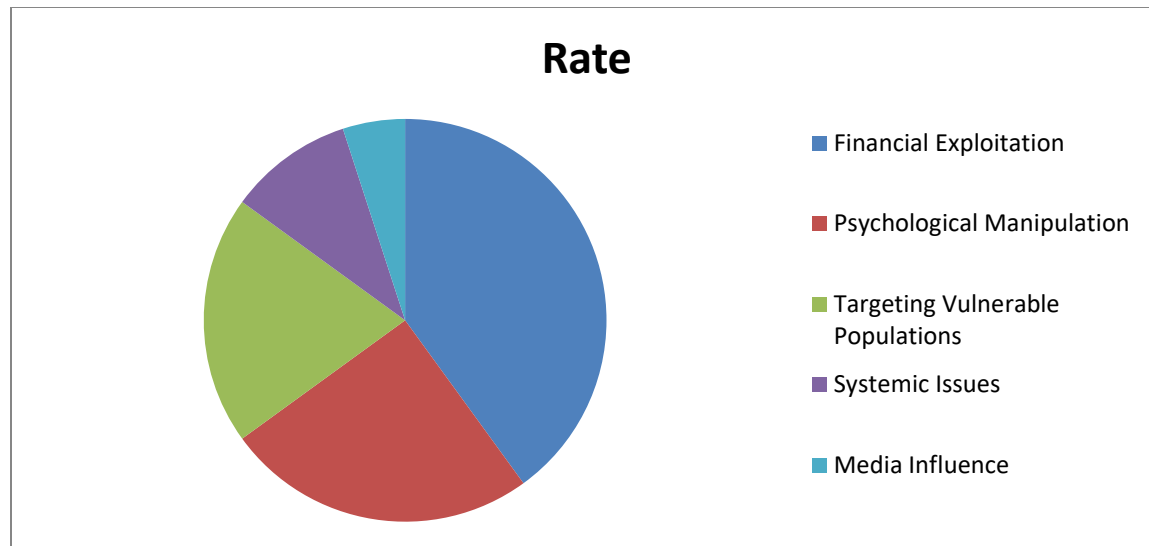


Figure 1: Forms of Manipulation

Financial Exploitation (40%) was found to be the most significant aspect, underscoring the prevalent issues of tithing pressure and the commercialization of faith. In addition, psychological Manipulation (25%) highlights the emotional control exercised by church leaders, a critical concern that can lead to deeper societal implications. Targeting Vulnerable Populations (20%) reveals the ethical issues surrounding how certain groups are exploited for financial gain. Furthermore, Systemic issues (10%) indicate the need for broader structural changes within religious organizations to promote transparency and accountability. Media Issues (5%) show the influence of media in exploitation and also the importance of journalism in exposing these issues, though they currently represent a smaller portion of the overall exploitation. This analysis and graphical representation demonstrate the multifaceted nature of spiritual manipulation within churches, emphasizing the need for ongoing education and reform. Raising awareness about these issues can help empower congregants and foster more ethical practices in religious communities.

Addressing Spiritual Manipulation

Educating Congregants

Empowering congregants through education about their rights and responsibilities within the church can help mitigate the risks of spiritual manipulation. Workshops, discussions, and resources can equip members to critically engage with leadership and church practices, fostering a more informed congregation (Okelo, 2022, p. 29).

Establishing Accountability Structures

Implementing clear accountability mechanisms within church governance can prevent the consolidation of power among a few leaders. This includes forming committees with diverse representation to oversee financial decisions and pastoral care, ensuring that congregational resources are used ethically and transparently (Atuma, 2021, p. 92). Encouraging Open Dialogue: Creating a culture of open dialogue encourages congregants to express concerns and engage in discussions about leadership practices. This openness can help identify potential manipulation early and foster a healthier community dynamic (Cheruiyot, 2023, p. 54).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evolving roles of the Kohanim in the Post-Modern Church in Kenya illustrate a significant departure from traditional models of priesthood. Contemporary clergy engage in innovative liturgical practices and social justice initiatives, reflecting a more inclusive and participatory approach to ministry. However, the potential for spiritual manipulation necessitates vigilance and proactive measures to ensure that the empowerment of congregants does not lead to exploitation.

The findings of this study underscore the necessity for the church to adapt to changing societal contexts, embracing diversity and fostering communal engagement as integral aspects of spiritual life. As the Church continues to evolve in Kenya, understanding these dynamics will be essential for nurturing effective leaders who can respond to the challenges of the contemporary church and society.

Future research should continue to explore the implications of these changes on congregational life and broader societal engagement in Kenya. Additionally, further studies could investigate how these shifts impact the theological education and formation of future clergy. Understanding these dynamics will be essential for nurturing effective leaders who can respond to the challenges of the contemporary church and society.

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