

ARTICLE

Global Anglican Discourse and Women's Ordination in Kenya: The Controversy in Kirinyaga, 1979–1992, and its Legacy

Stephen Asol Kapinde and Eleanor Tiplady Higgs¹

Email: eleanor.higgs@uni-bayreuth.de

(Received 22 January 2020; revised 25 September 2020; accepted 27 September 2020; first published online 08 January 2021)

Abstract

In the 1980s, the question of women's ordination in the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) caused a controversy in Kirinyaga diocese, in which Archbishop David Gitari (1937–2013) played a critical role as an advocate for women. This controversy is just one example of how African Christian women have faced multiple material and theological obstacles to ordination, both in the Anglican Church and in other churches. Through an analysis of institutional texts we show how the issue of women's ordination has been addressed in formal Anglican decision-making processes. We also outline the patriarchal attitudes that characterized the wider discourse of women's ordination in Kenya and in the Anglican Communion, and discuss how this discourse informed Gitari's intervention. Opposition to women's ordination is only one facet of sexism in the ACK, as was implicitly recognized by Gitari in his wider project of 'holistic development'.

Keywords: African feminist theology, Anglican Church of Kenya, David Gitari, ordination of women

Introduction

The patriarchal attitudes of male clergy in the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) delayed for a decade the ordination of women in Kirinyaga, a diocese about 100 km north-east of Nairobi. We analyse the debate and ensuing controversy about women's ordination within the ACK, including the contributions made by the late Archbishop David Mukuva Gitari (1937–2013). Gitari was a prominent Anglican cleric with a record of political activism, who advocated for the partnership of men and women in ministry. He began his career as a priest in 1972 and served only three years before his enthronement on 20 July 1975, as the first Bishop of Mount Kenya East diocese, which in 1990 was divided into the dioceses of Kirinyaga and Embu. Gitari eventually became the Archbishop of ACK on 12 January 1997, acting as a reformer and emphasizing the institution's responsibility for political critique. Gitari acted on this

¹Stephen Asol Kapinde has a PhD in Theology from the University of Basel, Switzerland. Eleanor Tiplady Higgs is fellow of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence, University of Bayreuth, Germany.

responsibility by consistently and publicly opposing government corruption, at some personal risk.² His support for women's ordination was part of his 'holistic development' approach to ministry, and a significant departure from the widespread complacency across Anglican dioceses and in particular among clergy. In this article, we identify how the wider context of Anglican theological arguments and global Christian discourse on women's ordination influenced Gitari and the local situation in Kirinyaga diocese during the controversy and thereafter.

Global Anglican discourse is represented in the 'official' documents, decisions and statements of the ACK and the Lambeth Conferences of 1978, 1988 and 1998. Anglicanism and global Anglican discourse are not defined by or confined to these institutional texts, but they are pertinent to our analysis because they are the arena in which the issue of women's ordination has formally been addressed or avoided, supported or opposed, in the process of institutional decision-making. Discourse is the operation of power in language, and so we approach the global Anglican discourse on women's ordination as inclusive not only of these texts but Gitari's intervention, the work of African women theologians and everyday Kenyan Anglican engagement with the topic.

While paying attention to Gitari's contribution in the debate over women's ordination, we acknowledge the risk of centring a male cleric's voice and agency at the expense of women whose voices are already marginalized in this discourse. Gitari's influence reflects his position of authority as well as the fact that, in the ACK as is the case elsewhere in the Anglican Church, the debate about ordaining women has never been simply men versus women. Reminding ourselves of this fact has allowed us to focus on the ways discourses and narratives distribute power and grant authority to the one who speaks them. Seeing the Kirinyaga controversy in this light explains the absence of many ordained women's voices from the historical record and many women's acquiescence to their own exclusion from ecclesiastical positions, including the recurring debate over women's election as bishops in African Anglicanism.

The work of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter, 'the Circle') provides the methodological and theoretical lens we use to discuss efforts to include and exclude women in the ACK, and to trace narratives and counter-narratives about women's ordination in global Anglican discourse. The Circle, founded in 1989 by Ghanaian theologian Mercy Oduyoye, has become a major platform from which African women speak and write about sexism in response to the androcentric tendencies of African theologies, African Traditional Religions (ATR) and the discipline of religious studies.³ The Circle has equally challenged the exclusion of African women from academic theology and the practices that confine women to the pew as men occupy the pulpit.⁴ Following the Circle's lead, we agree that African inculturation

²Gitari's legacy is considered at length in Ben Knighton (ed.), *Religion and Politics in Kenya: Essays in Honour of a Meddlesome Priest* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See also Stephen A. Kapinde, 'Prophetic Church Leadership in Kenya's Democratic Processes between 1986 and 2010: A Case Study of the Most Rev. David Gitari', MA thesis, Pwani University, 2016.

³Esther Mombo, 'Doing Theology from the Perspective of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 1.1 (2003), pp. 91-103; Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press); Isabel A. Phiri, 'Major Challenges for African Women Theologians in Theological Education (1989-2008)', *International Review of Mission* 98.1 (2009), pp. 105-19.

⁴Hazel Ayanga, 'Voice of the Voiceless: The Legacy of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37.2 (2016), a1580 (4).

and liberation theologies alone are not 'enough to confront and dismantle' the sexism African Christian women experience.⁵

Circle theologians have paid close attention to the material and wider socio-cultural constraints on women's leadership and ordination as well as the theological reasoning deployed to justify this form of discrimination against them in Africa. Their materialist analyses draw attention to structural exclusions, the political economies in which churches operate, and the legacies of Western imperialism and the colonization of Africa.⁶ The Circle has also critiqued arguments against women's ordination and reframed them to deny that the 'present state of man/woman relationships' is 'decreed by God' and thus beyond debate.⁷ These two broad approaches, the material and the theological, are both necessary for analysing the significance of arguments raised against women's ordination in Kirinyaga Diocese.

We acknowledge that much of the work we cite from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians postdates the controversy in Kirinyaga diocese. However, we insist on framing the controversy using their analyses for two related reasons. First, we understand that African women have been, and continue to be, problematically spoken *of*, spoken *for* and spoken *over* to the degree that they are presumed to be included 'as women' in the scholarship and advocacy of white women, and 'as African' in the scholarship and advocacy of African men. In fact, the interaction of these concessions has resulted in the double exclusion of African women from theological, ecclesial, and academic spaces and conversations. So, we begin from the knowledge that African Christian women theologize and advocate for themselves, and the Circle's output is highly relevant in this regard.

Second, the Circle was founded towards the end of the period under analysis here. The intervention of the Circle was precisely to respond to and correct the marginalization of African women's voices and experiences in theology, so their apparent absence from Anglican debates in Kenya in the 1970s and 1980s informs our analysis. What was said and what was not said, and by whom, is of critical importance. Thus, the absence of Kenyan Anglican women from the discourse is part of the discourse.

Using data gathered through our in-depth interviews with ten eye-witnesses to the events in Kirinyaga in the 1980s and early 1990s, we piece together a history of the women's ordination controversy and observe that the ACK has largely failed to challenge patriarchal cultures, values and practices and as a result has perpetuated sexism from its pulpits. Gitari began to challenge this discrimination in the late 1970s and continued promoting gender inequality as part of his 'holistic development' mission in the following decades. Viewing the controversy in the context of global Anglican discourses of gender equality and women's ordination allows us to identify the circulation and expression of power in the words of male clergy who opposed women's ordination in Kirinyaga. Some of these protagonists were senior ACK members, while others were part of the synod or Diocesan Church Council (DCC). Data from these

⁵Nyambura Njoroge, *Kiama Kia Ngo: An African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation* (Accra: Legon Theological Studies, 2000), p. 124.

⁶Teresia Hinga, 'African Feminist Theologies, the Global Village, and the Imperative of Solidarity across Borders: The Case of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 18.1 (2002), pp. 79-86 (85-86).

⁷Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton, 2000), p. 129.

interviews are supplemented by our analysis of archival sources including Church minutes and newspaper reports concerning women's ordination and women's leadership.

Christianity and Gender Norms in Kenya

The widespread myth in Christian circles that the church brought liberation to African women is contested by leading Circle theologians.⁸ Notwithstanding the earlier existence of African Christianities and the work of African missionaries, Africans often experienced Christian mission as a tool of colonization.⁹ The gender politics imposed by missionaries to colonized eastern Africa were preserved well into the twentieth century.¹⁰ Many Protestant interventions in education were framed by the assumption that girls should be prepared for marriage by teaching them 'domestic' skills.¹¹ While there were certainly patriarchal social tendencies in pre-colonial African cultures, these were changed and institutionalized by the imposition of colonial social structures. These changes were highly complex and not uniform across the country. Christian misogyny interacted with a range of other social phenomena, including economic and cultural institutions, processes of colonization and local power struggles.¹² In the case of Kirinyaga, the mixture of missionary Christianities with local Gikuyu culture resulted in conflicts over genital cutting practices, polygynous marriage, dowry payments and formal education.¹³ These were clashes over the appropriate understanding and performance of womanhood, and the influence Christian institutions sought to have in this. Similarly, diverse processes of 'inculturation' led to a range of distinctive local interpretations and modes of Christianity, including styles of leadership.

Congruent with the churches' promotion of domesticity, churchwomen have typically been tasked with making tea, minding children, cleaning, teaching Sunday school and fundraising. These roles are in fact essential to churches, as they organize and pay for their activities and maintain community relationships.¹⁴

⁸Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), pp. 90-91.

⁹David Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 447-68; Isabel Phiri, 'African Women's Theologies in the New Millennium', *Agenda* 61 (2004), pp. 16-24 (16).

¹⁰Tabitha Kanogo, *African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya 1900-50* (London: James Currey, 2005); Wilhemina Oduol and Wanjiku M. Kabira, 'The Mother of Warriors and her Daughters: The Women's Movement in Kenya', in Amrita Basu (ed.), *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 187-208 (201).

¹¹This is evident in the work of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Mothers' Union (MU). See, for example, Lydia M. Mwaniki, 'The Impact of the Church on the Development of the Identity of an African Christian Woman: A Case Study of the Anglican Church of Kenya, Diocese of Kirinyaga 1910-1999', MA thesis, University of Pietermaritzburg, 2000, p. 54.

¹²Esther Mombo and Helen Joziassse, 'Jesus, A Man Above All Other Men: Kenyan Women Questioning Traditional Masculinities' in R.S. Wafula, Esther Mombo and Joseph Wandera (eds.), *The Postcolonial Church: Bible, Theology and Mission* (Alameda, CA: Borderless Press, 2016), pp. 159-72 (162).

¹³Kanogo, *African Womanhood*.

¹⁴Ruth M. James, 'The Church in Africa and Violence against Women', in Grace Wamue and Mary Getui (eds.), *Violence against Women: Reflections by Kenyan Women Theologians* (Nairobi: Acton, 1996), p. 69. See also Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, p. 124.

However, 'women's work' is positioned as secondary to the 'real' church work of administering the sacraments and leading the congregation.¹⁵ Although women have long exercised religious authority in eastern Africa, women's access to formal roles in Christian churches has often been predicated on their husbands' status.¹⁶ Within the ACK, women were partially incorporated in Church leadership through the Mother's Union (MU).¹⁷ The MU, established in England in 1876, was brought to Kenya in 1918 and sought to support Anglican women in their family lives.¹⁸ The MU has offered women opportunities to organize themselves separately from men, but it also subsidized the ACK's activities with unpaid maternal/material work, while not agitating in favour of women's ordination during the controversy we discuss in this paper.

Arguably, the MU's options for enacting institutional reforms were limited by the patriarchal culture of the ACK that penetrated from the grassroots, to clergy, to theological colleges.¹⁹ The MU's institutional framework also tended to entrench a hierarchy of gender and age, which when combined with a rigid institutional structure kept women in a marginal position in the church.²⁰ Many commentators have noted that women's church groups can be a double-edged sword when it comes to gender equality because while they provide legitimate positions for women to exercise agency and authority in Church-affiliated groups, they restrict women's influence to that sphere.²¹ This is because they promote a Christian anthropology that there are two genders which are 'separate but equal', which enables churches to justify excluding women from leadership roles based on the belief that gender roles have been determined by God.²² It is from this basis that Oduyoye is critical of the

¹⁵Esther Mombo and Helen Joziase, 'From the Pew to the Pulpit: Engendering the Pulpit Through Teaching African Women's Theologies' in H. Jurgens Hendriks, Elna Mouton, Len Hansen and Elisabet Le Roux (eds.) *Men in the Pulpit, Women in the Pew?: Addressing Gender Inequality in Africa* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press/ESFA, 2012), pp. 183-94 (183-84). See also Mary-Jane Rubenstein, 'An Anglican Crisis of Comparison: Intersections of Race, Gender, and Religious Authority, with Particular Reference to the Church of Nigeria', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72.2 (2004), pp. 341-65 (357).

¹⁶Deborah Gaitskill, 'Female Faith and the Politics of the Personal: Five Mission Encounters in Twentieth-Century South Africa', *Feminist Review* 65 (2000), pp. 68-91; Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton, *Women of Fire and Spirit: History, Faith, and Gender in Roho Religion in Western Kenya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Esther Mombo, 'The Revival Testimony of Second Wives', in Kevin Ward and Emma Wild-Wood (eds.), *The East African Revival: History and Legacies* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 153-62 (161); Derek Peterson, 'Casting Characters: Autobiography and Political Imagination in Central Kenya', *Research in African Literatures* 37.3 (2012), pp. 176-92 (183-85).

¹⁷Galia Sabar, *Church, State and Society in Kenya: From Mediation to Opposition 1963-1993* (New York: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 56.

¹⁸Esther Mombo, 'Resisting Vumilia Theology: The Church and Violence against Women in Kenya', in Andrew Wingate, Kevin Ward, Carrie Pemberton, and Wilson Sitshebo (eds.), *Anglicanism: A Global Communion* (New York: Church Publishing, 1998), pp. 219-24; Galia Sabar-Friedman, 'The Power of the Familiar: Everyday Practices in the Anglican Church of Kenya (CPK)', *Journal of Church and State* 32.2 (1996), pp. 377-95.

¹⁹Mombo, 'Resisting Vumilia Theology', pp. 221-23.

²⁰Eleanor Tiplady Higgs, 'From "Imperial Maternalism" to "Matricentrism": Mothering Ethics in Christian Women's Voluntarism in Kenya', *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 25.1 (2019), pp. 20-44.

²¹James, 'The Church in Africa', pp. 68-77.

²²Erica Appelros, 'Gender within Christian Fundamentalism: A Philosophical Analysis of Conceptual Oppression', *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 75.5 (2014), pp. 460-73 (465-66).

concept of gender ‘complementarity’, arguing that it allows ‘the man to choose what he wants to be and to do’, leaving women with the leftovers.²³ Furthermore, the existence of women’s church organizations allows the interpretation that women are already included in the church; suggesting that parity with men in ordination and election into the episcopate might not be necessary. Members of the Circle’s Kenyan Chapter have been at the forefront of challenging these wider tendencies in the Kenyan academy and churches, before and since the controversy in Kirinyaga.²⁴

Obstacles to Ordination

The situation in which Anglican women found themselves in Kirinyaga in the 1980s was characterized by limited roles within the church and a lack of access to theological education. This pattern can be seen throughout the Anglican Communion as women’s support of the church is taken for granted, and women’s historical and continuing exclusion from theological education compounds the situation. Circle theologians have consistently drawn attention to the issue of African women’s lack of access to theological training on an equal footing with men. So, while Kenyan women have sought ordained ministry, their access to ordination and to formal church leadership roles has been consistently constrained by six obstacles. We outline the following obstacles: (i) the unwillingness of their families to allow them to pursue theological training; (ii) formal barriers to their admission to theological education; (iii) informal barriers in admissions processes; (iv) patriarchal biases in the curriculum; (v) the limited range of roles available to them upon graduation; and (vi) the intransigence of the House of Bishops (provincial synod) and diocesan synods in permitting women’s ordination. These obstacles are evident in the Kenyan context before the period under discussion here, and many survive despite the progress that has been made in Kenya and elsewhere.

In some instances women managed to enrol in theological training, but upon graduation the ACK only permitted them to serve as lay readers or ‘deaconesses’.²⁵ Meanwhile, men who had gone through three years of theological training (or less) would be ordained as deacons, and a year later they were elevated into priesthood, serving as heads of parishes.²⁶ Although women were posted alongside men in these parishes, their role was limited to that of supportive ‘pastoral assistant’, with duties including preparing tea and lunch during council meetings and teaching catechism in Sunday school.²⁷

In 1976, Bishop Henry Okullu (Diocese of Maseno South) prompted the provincial synod of the ACK to discuss the ordination of women. This led to the agreement that,

²³Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p. 94.

²⁴Esther Mombo and Nyambura Njoroge have made significant contributions in this regard. See Faith W. Ngunjiri, *Women’s Spiritual Leadership in Africa: Tempered Radicals and Critical Servant Leaders* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), pp. 108–11; ‘Swiss Reformed Church backs pro-women Kenyan theologians’, <http://ekklesia.co.uk/node/8913> (accessed 17 September 2019); Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler, *A History of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (1989–2017)* (Luwingu, Malawi: Mzuni Books, 2017), pp. 58–64.

²⁵J.S. Mathenge, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 29 January 2015.

²⁶Mwaniki, ‘The Impact of the Church’, pp. 62–63.

²⁷Julius M. Gathogo, *Mutira Mission: An African Church Comes of Age in Kirinyaga, Kenya (1912–2012)* (Limuru: Zapf Chancery, 2011), p. 134; James, ‘The Church in Africa’, p. 72.

in principle, women could pursue theological studies; but the ACK continued to deliberate on the issue of ordination.²⁸ In 1978, Bishop Okullu sent Lucia Auma Okuthe for theological training at St Philip's Maseno at a time when the province was yet to conclude on the matter.²⁹ Despite these marginal changes within the ACK, women's access to theological education was not guaranteed, as many men did not want to let their wives become priests. Even for those women whose families supported their decision to pursue theological studies, the criteria for admission discriminated against female applicants, who faced many hurdles during the admissions process.³⁰ Interviewers interpreted women's interest in ministry through gender norms that foregrounded their marital status and the cultural demands and expectations of Kenyan society.³¹ Marriage, continuing the family's lineage, and deference to male authority are central to Kenyan constructions of 'respectable femininity', notwithstanding the differences between cultural and ethnic groups.³² Married female candidates were therefore expected to demonstrate how they would balance family life and marriage during their studies, while single women, divorced or separated women, and widows were often considered unsuitable for theological training.³³

The provincial synod was the site of deliberate efforts to delay progress towards women's ordination. In October 1980, the Provincial Standing Committee of the synod recommended that all Diocesan Church Councils (DCCs) debate a motion for women's ordination and communicate the outcome to the then-Archbishop Manases Kuria (1980–1994).³⁴ Subsequently, and for purposes of uniformity, the Provincial Board of Theological Education (PBTE) drafted a motion for consideration by all the synods, as follows:

That this committee/council/synod resolves that women who are called to the sacred ministry and are carefully examined by their respective church committees, Parish councils, Diocesan selection committees and PBTE and are found to have a genuine calling and necessary qualities and who successfully complete their training for the ordained ministry may be ordained to the Diaconate and to the priesthood.³⁵

While the PBTE explicitly recommended that women could be ordained, we argue that the wording of this motion allowed for discrimination against women ordinands to continue through the informal policing of candidates. While this kind of vetting was equivalent to that directed at male ordinands, the chain of

²⁸Esther Mombo, 'The Ordination of Women in Africa: A Historical Perspective', in Ian Jones, Kirsty Thorpe, and Janet Wootton (eds.), *Women and Ordination in the Christian Churches: International Perspectives* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), pp. 123–43.

²⁹Mombo, 'The Ordination of Women in Africa', pp. 129–30.

³⁰Mombo, 'The Ordination of Women in Africa', pp. 134–35.

³¹Esther Mombo and Joseph Galgalo, 'Theological Education in Africa in the Post-1998 Lambeth Conference', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 6.1 (2008), pp. 31–40 (39).

³²Awino Okech, *Widow Inheritance and Contested Citizenship in Kenya* (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 53–55.

³³Mombo and Galgalo, 'Theological Education', p. 40.

³⁴Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, p. 124.

³⁵CPK Diocese of Mount Kenya East, Fifth ordinary session of the synod (Kenya, 1983).

scrutiny was placed in the hands of all-male committees, from congregational level where women faced church elders, to Parish Councils, to the DCCs and provincial synod. Even when a female candidate managed to progress through the initial stages, her fate would rest with the Bishop Examining Chaplain composed of senior male clergy. This board determined those qualified for theological training for ordained ministry, those to be ordained and clerics who should pursue further studies after ordination.³⁶ So, although the PBTE's recommendation may have been issued in good faith, it implicitly complicated women's path by preserving the power and form of patriarchal hierarchies over all aspects of their journey towards ordination.

The sixth provincial synod of 1982 unanimously postponed a debate on the ordination of women, instead urging dioceses to reflect on the matter and report to the forthcoming synod. Minutes from the meeting show that Gitari's conclusion at that time was that 'there shall be no women ordination' until the Standing Committee made a final decision.³⁷ This was reflected also in the DCC minutes as follows:

This synod notes that the provincial synod has not as yet approved the Ordination of women because most of the Dioceses has [*sic*] not debated the issue in their respective synods. This synod urges the provincial synod to allow Dioceses which have approved women ordination to go ahead and ordain suitably qualified women.³⁸

Regardless of such observation, the provincial Standing Committee's decision was not forthcoming because many synod members felt that the ordination of women was not a priority. Rather than accept the retrogressive ecclesial cultures, bureaucracy and paternalistic attitudes of the male clerics from other dioceses, in 1981 Bishop Okullu decided to act. He ordained Lucia Okuthe and later Emily Onyango as the first cohort of women in the diaconate. Okullu based his actions on resolutions of the Lambeth Conference (1968) and the Anglican Consultative Council (1971/1973), which did away with a separate order of 'deaconess'.³⁹ Therefore, he considered the ongoing admission of women as deaconess in the 1970s and 1980s illegal. Okullu had acted before the province had received resolutions from the dioceses, so his actions were viewed by many as disrespectful to Archbishop Kuria.⁴⁰ However, according to Mombo, complaints about Okullu were not based purely on his ordination of women, but reflected inter-ethnic tensions and a fear of having a critical and controversial bishop in the Church.⁴¹ By acting alone, Okullu went against the code of practice of the

³⁶Mwaniki, 'The Impact of the Church', p. 70.

³⁷CPK Diocese of Mount Kenya East, Fifth ordinary session of the synod (Kenya, 1983).

³⁸CPK Diocese of Mount Kenya East, DCC, Minute 23/1988. See also *Fifteen Great Years 1975–1990, the End of the Beginning: Preparatory Documents for the Eighth and Last Ordinary Session of the Synod of the Combined Diocese* (Embu: Diocese of Mount Kenya East, 1990), p. 24.

³⁹Mombo, 'The Ordination of Women in Africa', p. 131.

⁴⁰Richard Odeng, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 22 June 2017 and 8 January 2019.

⁴¹Okullu was a Luo, the fourth largest ethnic group in Kenya, and in the 1970s 'tribalism' or inter-ethnic tensions resulted in discrimination within the ACK. Mombo, 'The Ordination of Women in Africa', p. 131.

House of Bishops, but nobody in his diocese objected to the ordination of women.⁴²

Okullu's willingness to act on women's ordination set a precedent that others, like Gitari, could follow. The ordination of Okuthe and Onyango would serve as a paradigm shift in the Kenyan Anglican gender debate and shaped the discourse on women's ordination throughout the 1980s. Some dioceses, like Mount Kenya South, decisively ruled out women's ordination on the pretence that it was not a priority, but elsewhere women's ordination legislation was successful owing to Okullu's influence.⁴³ Five out of twelve ACK dioceses enacted women's ordination during the following decade, including Maseno South (1980), Maseno North (1984), Maseno West (1985), Mount Kenya East (1986) and Nambale (1989).⁴⁴ Despite these positive changes, the provincial synod also dragged its feet on the matter and failed to pass any resolution on women's ordination until June 1990.

Women's Ordination as Part of 'Holistic Development'

Transformative Anglican clerics like Gitari saw themselves as fighting at the forefront for the liberation and reconstruction of society, not just the church.⁴⁵ Gitari's 'holistic development' mission comprised mental, physical, spiritual and social interventions alongside his attempts at institutional change. A key plank in this mission was the establishment of St Andrew's College of Theology and Development in Kabare, and Gitari played a key role in shaping its ethos, as reflected in putting theology alongside 'development'. Besides theological interventions at St Andrew's, including his contribution to the well-known Kenyan communion, Gitari initiated several local development projects addressing agriculture, health and education.⁴⁶ His mission included addressing women's rights within the church and the transformation of gender relations in Kenya. In his quest for these reforms, Gitari indicted male clerics for excluding women from social development by refusing to support their requests for ordination.⁴⁷ This was reflected in his synodical deliberations both at the diocesan and provincial level.

Gitari raised the issue of women's ordination in four consecutive Diocesan Synods in 1979, 1981, 1983 and 1986. Minutes of the DCC meetings reveal the voting pattern and resolutions (Table 1).

⁴²This is the general assembly of all Anglican Bishops within a province; the House of Clergy refers to ordained priests within a diocese.

⁴³Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, p. 125.

⁴⁴The other seven dioceses were Eldoret, Machakos, Mombasa, Mount Kenya Central, Mount Kenya South, Nakuru and Nairobi. These dioceses declined to debate women's ordination.

⁴⁵Galia Sabar-Friedman, "Politics" and "Power" in the Kenyan Public Discourse and Recent Events: The Church of the Province of Kenya (CPK), *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 29.3 (1995), pp. 429-53 (434-40).

⁴⁶Gitari contributed to writing *A Kenyan Service of Holy Communion*. David Gitari, 'The Anglican Church of Kenya', in Colin Buchanan (ed.) *Anglican Eucharistic Liturgies: 1985-2010* (London: Canterbury Press, 2011), pp. 145-52.

⁴⁷Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, pp. 125-26.

Table 1. Voting pattern on women's ordination by delegates from both Houses 1979–1986⁴⁸

Synod	1979		1981		1983		1986	
	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
House of Clergy	27	9	46	13	59	13	32	29
House of Laity	23	34	49	33	51	66	12	146
Total votes	50	43	95	46	110	79	44	175

As detailed above, the first three times Gitari raised this motion it was defeated.⁴⁹ The minutes of the 1983 synod resolution capture the clergy's opinion on the issue; the motion was lost by 110 votes to 79. This loss surprised Gitari, who thought that Okullu's intervention would have persuaded the delegates to support women's ordination in his own diocese as well.⁵⁰ Gitari thought the motion was defeated because the synod was composed of male clerics who predominantly held patriarchal attitudes.⁵¹ ACK discourse on women's ordination reflected the legacy of institutional sexism and patriarchal theology, which maintained a strictly gendered hierarchy within which women's social roles were minimized. As we discuss in further detail below, when the motion passed in 1986 it was with the overwhelming support of the House of Laity.⁵²

Explicating this further, J.S. Mathenge (a prominent lay member of the ACK and a confidant of Gitari) argues that clergy opposition to the ordination of women was informed by a judgement about how to use limited resources. Clergy viewed theological education as an investment in the future of the church and competition was stiff for the few available positions across the diocese, so a preference for men could be justified by this pragmatic argument.⁵³ Combined with the notion that women should be ordained into diaconate only after serving for a decade, women's ordination was perceived as a barrier to efficiently staffing a growing organization.⁵⁴ We have not been able to confirm the significance of this theory, but the Reformed Churches of East Africa (RCEA) is said to have invested in male clergy at the expense of women, for this very reason.⁵⁵ This suggests that the ACK's institutional sexism was not only justified through culture and theology, but given economic justification as well.

Clergy made explicit reference to 'cultural' reasons not to ordain women. One observer of the controversy, Canon John Mararo (who served as a member of Kirinyaga Diocesan synod), remembers that a common narrative was that it was un-African to ordain women.⁵⁶ The 'un-African' argument refers in sweeping terms

⁴⁸Data collated from Diocesan Synod resolutions 1979–1986. See also Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, pp. 125–26.

⁴⁹DCC Resolution 1983: 51/83.

⁵⁰DCC Resolution 1983: 51/83.

⁵¹Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, p. 125.

⁵²Unfortunately, we have not been able to confirm the gender composition of the House of Laity. However, the data in Table 1 suggests that throughout the 1980s, lay men were in general more supportive of women's ordination than were male clergy.

⁵³J.S. Mathenge, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 29 January 2015.

⁵⁴DCC 1983: 38/83.

⁵⁵Mombo and Joziase, 'Jesus, A Man Above All Other Men', p. 162.

⁵⁶John Mararo, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 30 January and 14 April 2015.

to 'African' cultural and moral norms that often are asserted in postcolonial resistance to perceived imposition of Western gender and sexual norms. To justify their views, many male clerics – including a senior cleric and chair of the Bishop Examining Chaplaincy, Titus Ngotho Njuno – employed negative stereotypes about educated women and single women, and appealed to the exclusivity of women's roles as wives and mothers. This appeal was not a simple reflection of 'African' realities, but one of the key sites where Christian African womanhood was constructed. Yet while the significance of marriage was generally accepted, it generated opposite conclusions. Some clerics suggested that only married women could be considered for ordination, while others recommended that only single women would be suitable.⁵⁷ Such contradictions circulated throughout the global Anglican Communion, finding expression at Lambeth conferences and usually diffusing into the provinces and dioceses. Related to the question of marriage was motherhood and the possibility of a pregnant or lactating priest officiating mass.⁵⁸

Motherhood and Ordination

Motherhood has emerged as a primary focus of arguments for women's ordination in Kenya and beyond. Reading the minutes of the fifth Ordinary DCC Synod of 1983 reveals that those present were divided on the issue of ordaining mothers, whether single or married. Circle theologians have analysed motherhood both as an embodied experience and as a position of social recognition and responsibility.⁵⁹ This has largely been a response to the widespread attitude among many Christians – men and women – that the material realities of menstruation, pregnancy and motherhood disqualify women from ordination.⁶⁰ Faith Ngunjiri describes the situation church women find themselves in as a 'double-bind' where 'childlessness discrimination' overlaps with the attitude that women's actual or potential motherhood makes them unsuitable for ordination.⁶¹ While motherliness and assertiveness are both held up as essential qualities in women leaders, they are constructed as mutually exclusive.⁶² This 'double-bind' means that neither women who are mothers, nor childless women, are regarded as suitable candidates for church leadership.

By contrast, Sarojini Nadar and Eliza Getman draw on their personal experiences of motherhood and mothering as theological resources for women's ministry. Getman describes a contradiction in her position as an Anglican priest due to the overall symbolism of priesthood playing with feminine and maternal imagery while re-inscribing male leadership as the norm.⁶³ Specifically, women are at different times in their reproductive lives 'bleeding' and 'feeding', or menstruating and breast-feeding their infants, distinctly maternal activities that are contrasted to the disembodied Eucharistic wine and bread.⁶⁴

⁵⁷DCC 1983: 38/83; George Paddy Benson (GPB) personal communication to S. Kapinde, 29 July 2018.

⁵⁸Magdalene, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 8 April 2018.

⁵⁹Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p. 57.

⁶⁰Magdalene, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 8 April 2018.

⁶¹Ngunjiri, *Women's Spiritual Leadership*, pp. 115, 206–208.

⁶²Ngunjiri, *Women's Spiritual Leadership*, p. 112.

⁶³Eliza Getman and Sarojini Nadar, 'Nativity and Motherism: Embodiment within Praxis of Spiritual Leadership', *Journal for the Study of Religion* 26.2 (2013), pp. 59–73 (64–65).

⁶⁴Getman and Nadar, 'Nativity and Motherism', pp. 59–60.

Yet to bleed and to give nourishment are both Christ-like activities, and so Getman and Nadar point out that women are already responsible for life-giving and nurturing activities which could furnish powerful theological symbols.⁶⁵

Like other Circle members, Nyambura Njoroge laments the structural marginalization of women in the church, in her case the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA).⁶⁶ Njoroge describes how, through the PCEA Women's Guild (WG), Presbyterian women in Kenya reclaimed motherhood as a site from which to rally for women's ordination. The PCEA's male-dominated decision-making bodies had long objected to women's ordination with reference to the apparent bodily and emotional 'obstacles' of motherhood.⁶⁷ This rhetoric is seen in different Christian denominations that refuse to ordain women. In this case, WG members responded to the church's deprecation of motherhood by defending it as a source of valuable insights, and asserting a complementarity between men's and women's roles. Njoroge assesses the WG's response in terms of moral agency, claiming that taking the initiative to act on the ethical-social issue of women's ordination is a means of resisting the sexism of the PCEA. Of course, given the status of mothers and mothering in Kenyan cultures and across the world, such an interpretation is contentious.

Theological concerns are not only of theoretical interest in the controversy. Ephantus Muriuki, an Anglican cleric and a member of the House of Laity, observes that Gitari clashed with synod members who objected to women's ordination based on motherhood and menstruation.⁶⁸ Many of his opponents cited the absence of women among Jesus' disciples to strengthen their case against women's ordination. Although he did not take the more radical approach of Nadar, Getman and Oduoye, Gitari did argue that women should not be discriminated against because of their physiology, stating that there is 'neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3.28).⁶⁹

Institutional Change

By the early 1980s, Okullu's ordination of Okuthe and Onyango had laid the groundwork for institutional change towards ordaining women in the ACK. Some thought that those clergy who were in favour of women's ordination had been influenced by Western feminist ideologies. In fact, Gitari and Okullu were acting in advance of the Church of England, which did not ordain women until 1994. Although the Church of England was by no means leading these reforms in global Anglicanism, comparing its record on women's ordination to that of the ACK belies assumptions of Western feminist progress, and narratives of Western progress and African backwardness such as were deployed by the British to justify colonization. Gitari built on the local legacies of Okullu, Okuthe and Onyango at the Diocesan Synod held in December 1983, at St Mark's College, Kigari. Gitari took up the task of debating women's ordination, which

⁶⁵Getman and Nadar, 'Nativity and Motherism', pp. 62-63.

⁶⁶Njoroge, *Kiama Kia Ngo*, pp. 61-66. Significantly, Nyambura Njoroge was the first Presbyterian woman to be ordained in Kenya.

⁶⁷Njoroge, *Kiama Kia Ngo*, pp. 66-68.

⁶⁸Ephantus Muriuki, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 30 January 2015.

⁶⁹Magdalene, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 8 April 2018.

had been entrusted to the dioceses in the provincial synod the year before. He argued in favour, claiming that women had equal rights to participate in the integral mission of the Church:

We have sometimes doubted the ability of women to serve the church. I hope this synod will this time support the motion on ordination of women. The failure of one or two (women) must not be used as a ground for objection for men are not exempted from failure either. . . I appeal to you as socially developing people of God to allow women to become full participants in the ministry of the church.⁷⁰

Gitari articulated his opposition to the widespread double standard that makes each woman representative of all women, amplifying the significance of her shortcomings, while allowing men to be fallible. Changing tack, Gitari employed pulpit advocacy to effect change and began to use his sermons to conscientize his congregation about women's exclusion from ministry, as well as his usual themes of corruption, governance and politics.⁷¹ In calling the church to account for this discrimination, he thus took a vocal public stand against institutional sexism, as reflected in his sermon to an MU rally on 10 November 1985. Gitari used this sermon to urge women to participate in decision-making processes, suggesting that by capitalizing on their numerical strength as the majority of church attendees, women could out-vote men.⁷²

This comment turned out to be prophetic, as the motion permitting women's ordination was passed in 1986.⁷³ In our retrospective analysis of the vote, the composition of the synod that enacted women's ordination is of great significance to understanding the turn of events. The 1983 voting indicates that 59 clerics voted against the motion compared to 13. However, on this occasion the majority of the laity were in favour of women's ordination by 66 to 51 (Table 1). It was the votes of the mixed-gender House of Laity that tipped the balance against the male clerics, who had consistently opposed women's ordination. The opponents of women's ordination claimed that Gitari had 'bulldozed' the voting process to settle the matter.⁷⁴ Whether Gitari somehow choreographed a swing of the votes in favour of women is hard to establish. Nevertheless, the rapid growth of the diocese and increases in parishes and congregations improved the number of the laity in the synod and the numerical strength of the laity secured the decision in favour of women's ordination.

This was just the beginning of another controversy that would emerge upon the subdivision in 1990. As the Bishop of Kirinyaga, Gitari continued with his holistic development agenda, believing that the approach to reform that had worked before should be implemented again.⁷⁵ However, the creation of new dioceses included the establishment of new synods. For purposes of continuity, Gitari implored members of the Kirinyaga synod to respect the resolutions of the former DCC, including the 1986 decision in

⁷⁰Mwaniki, 'The Impact of the Church', p. 62, citing CPK Diocese of Mount Kenya East, Ordinary Session of Diocesan Synod 1983, p. 17, CPK Diocese of Mount Kenya East Newsletter 1985.

⁷¹George Paddy Benson (GPB) personal communication to S. Kapinde, 29 July 2018.

⁷²Mwaniki, 'The Impact of the Church', pp. 61-62. See also CPK Diocese of Mount Kenya East Newsletter 1985, p. 12.

⁷³DCC Resolution 1986: 56 /86.

⁷⁴John Mararo, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 30 January and 14 April 2015.

⁷⁵Mararo, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 14 April 2015.

favour of women's ordination. Unfortunately, the dissenting male clerics and laity claimed that those resolutions were redundant and not binding in the new dioceses.⁷⁶

These dissenters called a press conference and vilified Gitari, accusing him of authoritarianism and threatening court action if he proceeded with the ordination of women.⁷⁷ This controversy was stoked by Titus Ngotho Njuno by then a provost of St Thomas Cathedral, Kerugoya, and Ephantus Muriuki, one of the council members. The two fashioned themselves as opponents of women's ordination in the diocese.⁷⁸ While Gitari remained steadfast and put forward the names of those women to be interviewed for ordination, Ngotho, the chairperson of the Bishop's examining chaplaincy, declined to process their names for ordination. He maintained that previous resolutions were not binding, and the matter should be debated again. In an effort to settle the debate in a transparent and accountable manner, Gitari called for a synod meeting on 6 June 1992, where all previous resolutions were endorsed as binding for the (new) diocese.⁷⁹ Muriuki now feels that his opposition to Gitari over women's ordination was the lowest moment of his pastoral career. He considers that he failed to appreciate and share the spirit of siblinghood and love of Christ with women in the diocese – above all, failing to nurture the spirit of unity in diversity he associated with Anglicanism.⁸⁰

Not all opponents of women's ordination in the ACK were men; many women also reinforced the ACK's patriarchal practices, structures and interpretations. Arguing from the idea of gender complementarity, some female lay readers argued that women should complement men in their capacity as leaders, rather than challenging their authority. Some women agreed with this view on the basis that it was against biblical teachings, and others cited their Gikuyu culture to justify the preservation of male-exclusive realms.⁸¹ On the other hand, history has not recorded the voices of those women who sought ordination, giving the impression that they did not campaign for their inclusion or challenge sexist theologies. Perhaps their voices were simply not recorded, or they may have sought to protect their existing positions by keeping quiet.

Ironically, some women clergy seem to have relied upon the stereotypes that had been cited by those opposed to women's ordination as the foundation of their church ministry. Gitari himself is said to have advised female ordinands to utilize the 'qualities of a Gikuyu woman' or 'feminine contributions' in their work.⁸² His pragmatic approach to church ministry and efforts to include everyone in his episcopate led to the growth of the diocese until 1990, when it was restructured as Embu and Kirinyaga. By this time there were 93 parishes, up from 19 at its inception, and the number of congregations had increased from 150 to 420.⁸³ In addition, about 150,000 Christians had been baptized and 90,000 confirmed in various parishes, the majority being women and children.⁸⁴

⁷⁶Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, p. 126.

⁷⁷Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, pp. 126-27.

⁷⁸Mararo, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 30 January and 14 April 2015. Gitari considered Ngotho's claims to be bordering on insubordination and replaced him with Moses Njoroge as the Provost of St Thomas. Muriuki was also suspended, although later both were readmitted into the House of Clergy.

⁷⁹Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, p. 127.

⁸⁰Ephantus Muriuki, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 30 January 2015.

⁸¹Magdalene, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 8 April 2018.

⁸²Mwaniki, 'The Impact of the Church', p. 71; citing an interview with Pamela Wilding.

⁸³Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, p. 40.

⁸⁴Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, p. 40.

Women's Ordination in Global and Kenyan Anglican Discourse

It is key to historicize the Kenyan controversy over the ordination of women by looking to socio-cultural and theological discourses in comparable global, regional and local Christian contexts. The period under discussion, 1979–1992, sits at the overlap between two significant decades; the UN Decade for Women, which opened with a conference in Nairobi in 1975, and the World Council of Churches' (WCC) 'Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women', which opened in 1988. During this period, gender equality was gaining ground as a global debate which involved Kenyan churches and state apparatus in projects of 'women in development' and gender mainstreaming. Attention to gender and the experiences of women grew in regional Christian institutions and the ecumenical movement, in such bodies as the MU, the World YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All African Conference of Churches (AACC). Pressure from these bodies, and the support they offered individual women, paved the way for a theological challenge to institutional barriers to women's ordination.

The controversy and subsequent ordination of women in the ACK were precipitated by developments in the wider Anglican Communion. The question of women's ordination, along with the issue of how, and to what degree, the Church should include LGBTQ+ persons, has often been identified as a key site for the Anglican Communion to negotiate 'unity, difference, and the boundaries of orthodoxy'.⁸⁵ As such, conflicts over the place of women and sexual minorities in the Anglican Communion are more complex than the difference between 'liberal' and 'conservative' gender politics and theological anthropologies. Rather, they are issues through which wider projects of identity construction are pursued – namely, those of postcolonial Africanness and of 'Anglican Orthodoxy', within which African Anglicanism has played a significant role.⁸⁶ This discourse coalesced at the 1978 Lambeth Conference, which accepted the ordination of women as priests, but equally accepted the legitimacy of those who opposed the ordination of women and urged each side of the debate to 'respect the convictions' of the other.⁸⁷ Held at the University of Kent and chaired by then-Archbishop of Canterbury Donald Coggan (1974–1980), the 1978 Lambeth Conference was attended by a Kenyan delegation led by Archbishop Festo Olang.⁸⁸ While, as we have seen, the ACK did not ordain women until 1990, in North America 11 women (later known as the Philadelphia 11) were controversially ordained

⁸⁵Joanna Sadgrove, Robert M. Vanderbeck, Kevin Ward, Gill Valentine, and Johan Andersson, 'Constructing the Boundaries of Anglican Orthodoxy: An Analysis of the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON)', *Religion* 40 (2010), pp. 193–206 (194). See also Christopher C. Brittain and Andrew McKinnon, 'Homosexuality and the Construction of "Anglican Orthodoxy": The Symbolic Politics of the Anglican Communion', *Sociology of Religion* 72.3 (2011), pp. 351–73; Miranda K. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and their African Allies Are Reshaping Anglicanism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Rubenstein, 'An Anglican Crisis of Comparison'.

⁸⁶Brittain and McKinnon, 'Homosexuality and the Construction of "Anglican Orthodoxy"', pp. 370–71.

⁸⁷Anglican Consultative Council, 'Resolution 21: Women in the Priesthood', *The Lambeth Conference: Resolutions Archive from 1978* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2005), pp. 13–14, www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127746/1978.pdf (accessed 6 June 2020).

⁸⁸The delegation included David Gitari, Henry Okullu, Peter Mwangombe (Mombasa); Sospeter Mangua (Mount Kenya South); James Mundia (Maseno North); and Manases Kuria (Mount Kenya Central).

as priests in the Episcopal Church in 1974.⁸⁹ This seemed to deepen the divide between more 'progressive' and more 'conservative' segments of the Anglican Communion.⁹⁰

The recommendations of the 1978 Lambeth Conference were not binding and similarly the House of Bishops of the ACK did not enforce women's ordination. Ahead of Lambeth in 1976, it had issued a statement that women could be ordained, but that each diocese would be allowed to follow its own route towards this goal.⁹¹ This decision was made on the basis that dioceses within the ACK were semi-autonomous and each fell under the authority of its Diocesan Church Council (DCC), with the Bishop as its chairperson. The Bishops' statement was issued at a time when a minority of provinces in the Anglican Communion had ordained women, while the majority continued to debate the issue. The House of Bishops' statement allowed for different dioceses within each province to ordain women at different times, so there was no uniformity across the ACK. Some provinces even set a moratorium on the topic.⁹²

In the resolutions passed at Lambeth in 1988 and 1998, the polarization of the Anglican Communion on the question of ordaining women received more attention than the claims of women and sexual minorities to equal opportunity in the church. The Anglican Communion understood the debate as a threat to its 'unity', with the resolutions that passed reiterating the importance of maintaining unity, or being in communion, in spite of fundamental disagreements.⁹³ This approach has subsequently been applied to the issue of widespread homophobia within global Anglicanism and the related opposition of many Anglicans to the ordination of LGBTQ+ people. As pointed out by many observers, the position of women and the position of LGBTQ+ people in Anglicanism are connected at the roots.⁹⁴ The failure of the Anglican Communion to come to a consensus paved the way to the establishment of GAFCON in 2008, but even GAFCON denies that its existence undermines the unity of Anglicanism.⁹⁵

Conclusion: A Case of Partial Reform

Gender inequality was institutionalized and endemic in the ACK in the 1970s and 1980s. The ACK reflected and perpetuated sexist trends in Kenya, and during this period it was very difficult for women to take up senior positions in the public and private sectors. Across Africa, the activities of the Circle supported women in theological education, creating some space for marginalized voices in church and society. In the midst of ecclesial silence, the Circle's work also strengthened the case for the ordination of women by challenging dominant paradigms in African theology. They

⁸⁹Sylvia Sweeney, 'The Feminization of the Episcopal Priesthood: Changing Models of Church Leadership', *Anglican and Episcopal History* 83.2 (2014), pp. 126-45.

⁹⁰Rubenstein, 'An Anglican Crisis of Comparison', pp. 344-46.

⁹¹Canon John Mararo, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 30 January and 14 April 2015.

⁹²Mombo, 'The Ordination of Women in Africa'.

⁹³Anglican Consultative Council, 'Resolution 1: The Ordination or Consecration of Women to the Episcopate', *The Lambeth Conference: Resolutions Archive from 1988* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2005), p. 4, www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127749/1988.pdf (accessed 30 June 2020).

⁹⁴Rubenstein, 'An Anglican Crisis of Comparison', p. 344.

⁹⁵Charles Raven, 'Unity in the Anglican Church' (GAFCON, 2020), www.gafcon.org/news/unity-in-the-anglican-church (accessed 1 July 2020).

pointed out male theologians' preoccupation with decolonization and enculturation to the exclusion of critiquing cultural norms that justified women's marginalization and men's exclusive claim to leadership.

In this article, we have argued that the exclusion of women from ordination in the ACK was influenced by global Anglican discourses. The challenge posed to the church by Gitari, Okullu and others sparked a controversy in Kenya by challenging the sexism into which Anglican men and women had been socialized. However, the ordination of women is not only a point of theological disagreement and an expression of sexism. As mentioned above, it also became an opportunity for the 'unity' of the Anglican Communion to be emphasized and negotiated. Gitari's and Okullu's support for women's ordination thereby also influenced global Anglican discourse, including by helping to bring about a state of *disunity*.

Women's ability to match or exceed men's achievements at theological college challenged the justifications for denying women ordination.⁹⁶ St Andrew's served as the springboard for women's ordination and has produced more women ministers than any other provincial theological college in Kenya to date.⁹⁷ Following the 1992 diocesan synod in Kirinyaga, three women were ordained into the diaconate including Pamela Wilding, Edith Njiri and Joyce Karuri.⁹⁸ Women ordinands tripled from 15 in 1996 to 45 in 2010, and by 2017, there were 54 women out of 213 clergy in Kirinyaga, serving 102 parishes and 221 congregations under the stewardship of Bishop Joseph Kibucwa.⁹⁹

Since 1992, women have continued to be ordained at lower rates than men. Some of the ACK's leading women clergy have taken up global leadership positions in the ecumenical movement – such as Lydia Mwaniki, who took up the role of Director of Theology, Family Life and Gender Justice at the AACC in 2015, while Rosemary Mbogo served as the chairperson of National Council of Churches of Kenya (2012–2018). While this seems to reflect a growing acceptance of women in leadership, it is notable that both ordained and lay women appear to find positions in ecumenical bodies with greater ease than in churches. This is further reflected in the unanimous election of Anglican lay theologian, Agnes Abuom, during the 10th Assembly of the WCC as the moderator of the Central Committee.¹⁰⁰

Evidently, substantial gains have been made towards involvement of women in decision-making in the ACK through ordination and other appointments, but there are still institutional constraints that work against them. As Anglican cleric Dickson Kagema points out, in the early twenty-first century no Provincial Bible College had a gender studies or women's theology course as part of its curriculum.¹⁰¹ In 2007, a general survey of enrolment in Anglican provincial theological colleges in Kenya found far fewer women than men: there were only 77 women out of 457 trainees.¹⁰² Out of the 77 women training for ordained ministry, 28 (36%) were from St Andrew's College.¹⁰³

⁹⁶Mwaniki, 'The Impact of the Church', pp. 61–63; Mombo, 'The Ordination of Women in Africa', pp. 135–36.

⁹⁷Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, p. 126.

⁹⁸Pamela Wilding, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 2018.

⁹⁹Magdalene, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 8 April 2018.

¹⁰⁰Agnes Abuom, personal communication to S. Kapinde, 17 January 2019.

¹⁰¹Dickson K. Nkonge, 'Leadership Training for Mission in the Anglican Church of Kenya', PhD dissertation, University of South Africa, 2008, pp. 133–35.

¹⁰²Nkonge, 'Leadership Training', p. 196.

¹⁰³Nkonge, 'Leadership Training', p. 196.

While there is some growth in women's ministry, the strength of Christian women's organizations like the MU and YWCA are still constrained by social, cultural and political barriers to gender equality that are predominant in Kenya.

The wider economic and political context of Kenya has changed vastly since the 1990s. The enactment of the 2010 Constitution mandated a quota system that has facilitated women's access to leadership positions in the public sphere. As we write, there are two women governors and substantial members of parliament and county assemblies. Within the Anglican Communion, the election of Libby Lane as first female Bishop of the Church of England and Kay Goldsworthy as Archbishop of Perth in Australia has reignited the debate over women's consecration as bishops in Kenya. While the ordination of women has been largely accepted throughout the Anglican Communion, electing a woman bishop or archbishop, in most cases, remains highly controversial. The leading Kenyan advocates of female bishops include the aforementioned Lydia Mwaniki and Rosemary Mbogo, both Circle members who have formerly contested bishopric elections in Kirinyaga and Embu respectively. The courage of these women in contesting positions in the male-dominated House of Bishops is a 'sign of hope' of ecclesiastical reconciliation – suggesting that the ACK can be reformed by women and men towards gender equality.