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### African Kanisa Israel Faith Healing and the Management of COVID-19 in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya

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COVID-19.

The study investigated the African Kanisa Israel faith healing and the management of COVID-19 in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya. It traced the history of A. K. Israel, assessed the concept of faith healing in A. K. Israel, and examined the role of A. K. Israel's faith healing in the management of COVID-19. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research designs and settings. This entailed purposive sampling, stratified sampling, and simple random sampling to obtain data from the African Kanisa Israel faithful with regard to the usage of faith healing in the management of COVID-19. Respondents included 1 A. K. Israel Bishop, 40 A. K. Israel faith healers, 384 A. K. Israel faith healing users, and 5 area Chiefs. The study indicated that A. K. Israel mainly preaches faith healing to address health concerns. The teachings of the A. K. Israel on faith healing are recognized by the faithful as a safety net for disease; therefore, adherence to their indigenous practices and the prophecy about COVID-19 helped a great deal in maintaining optimal health status amidst the pandemic. The study recommends revisiting the indigenous practices and taking that which is useful and blending it with science to arrive at sustainable solutions to not only coronavirus disease but also future calamities. Following this, the study advocates for measures to be put in place to enable the tapping of indigenous knowledge systems as a basis for the understanding and management of diseases hand in hand with science. That entails moving from a people's knowledgeable base to the unknown.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the world was hit by the coronavirus disease, which was one of the worst pandemics in modern times. Cucinotta & Vanelli (2020) noted that the disease had a rapid spread rate. The transmission of COVID-19 was further fuelled by the movement of people and goods globally (Carteni et al., 2020). This forced countries to restrict health measures such as a ban on social gatherings and closure of borders.

The restrictive measures also applied to Kenya. The Ministry of Health banned all social gatherings, including religious gatherings. People could no longer meet physically for worship. Religious meetings attract a lot of people and hence could be detrimental to health as contact among the masses would lead to a surge in coronavirus cases (WHO, 2020).

Religious gathering is a key feature of various religious groups (Pontzen, 2021). Christians, Muslims, and Indigenous religions all practice mass gatherings. The African Kanisa Israel is part of indigenized churches. The believers of the A. K. Israel keep regular fellowships. They gather physically for worship on Friday and Sunday, where they engage in prayers, singing, and dancing vigorously as they reach out to God to meet their needs. Sackey (2001) argues that during religious meetings, there are sermons and teachings on day-to-day life. Hence, the gatherings serve the purpose of catering to members' needs. Williams et al. (1991) corroborates this as they state that activities that are religious in nature, such as sharing sacred

texts, praying, singing, and dancing in religious meetings, promote the wellbeing of the faithful. Sacred texts offer promises of hope and help people make sense of the world around them. Therefore, religion may be used as a tool to offer an explanation for the cause of the virus and how to manage it. Additionally, it may offer a safe space for people to get relief from anxiety and hope that all will be well.

The hopelessness that resulted from COVID-19 inevitably drove the study to seek a host of remedies, solace, and hope as promised by A. K. Israel, a movement that professes African Christianity and is determined to remain an exclusive community. The African Kanisa Israel demonstrates the resoluteness and innovative originality of an African Religious movement. In the context of a congested healthcare space, where Western medicine has obliterated African cultural healing practices to substitute them with foreign ones, this indigenized movement remains stable (Magesa, 1997). The African Kanisa Israel provides a mode of healing that is relevant to its faithful and has been adapted to their indigenous situation, hence creating a community with faith healing modalities that enable them to feel psychologically and spiritually at home. The A. K. Israel has the wisdom to offer to society in its efforts to manage COVID-19 and the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 of ensuring health and wellbeing for all ages by 2030.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Allport (1963) argued that religion and science can work together, given that they both have wisdom that enhances the healing process. The author proposed that an intensive study should be conducted based on mutual cooperation and the desire to promote wellbeing. This justified the need for the study of the role of the A. K. Israel faith healing in the management of COVID-19 as a way to examine the wisdom brought in by the African Christian religion in the healing process with regard to COVID-19.

Vanderpool (1977) asserted that religion provides explanations for the existence and meaning of illness and curing. Therefore, it influences the comprehension of diseases. The author contends that a religious-philosophical framework should be adopted in the healing process. This implies that when attending to a patient, attention should not only be given to the physical state but also the spiritual state. Vanderpool notes, "The subject of 'religion and medicine' thus involves the interpenetration of traditional and modern religion and philosophy with medical concepts and practices" (p. 258). Therefore, there was a need to examine the A. K. Israel faith healing as a guide to understanding the beliefs of a COVID-19 patient during a medical exam serving a practical purpose for prescribing medicine.

Kibicho (2006) notes that the Europeans from the West came to Africa to trade, spread the gospel, and explore. Those who came as missionaries to spread Christianity taught that healing, as practiced by the Africans, was part of paganism. Therefore, the African healers or medicine men who were held in high regard were viewed as witches by the missionaries. Therefore, the condemnation of African traditional healing aimed at creating space for the adoption of Western civilization and modes of healing. This called for the need to study the African Christian view with regard to faith healing as applied by A. K. Israel in managing COVID-19, with the aim of valuing the indigenous African

approach to healing. Kibicho's work also enriched the study by pointing out the need to investigate if the traditional approaches to healing are still condemned today. Therefore, the study sought to examine the challenges of A. K. Israel's faith healing, that is, especially whether the African Kanisa Israel's faith healing is condemned or ridiculed by society today amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

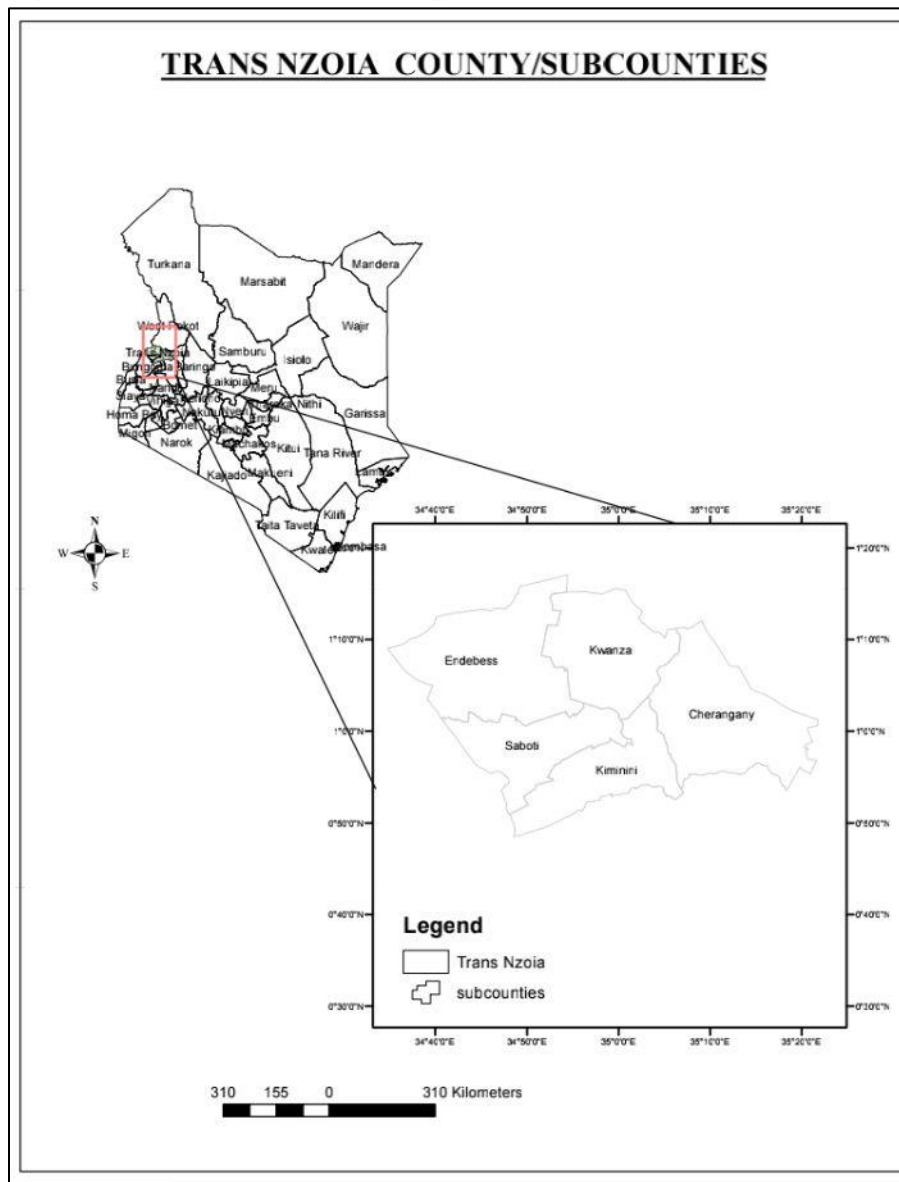
Magesa (1997) argues that African traditional healing was not valued by the European missionaries. Hence, they set up mission churches and hospitals to discourage it. The African converts did not get a substitute explanation for the causes of the sickness that was satisfactory to them in these centres. Therefore, there was the creation of a spiritual vacuum. Consequently, the missionaries termed African religious culture as primitive. However, African traditional culture is vibrant and has unique wisdom to offer to the healing process. He further notes that African cultural heritage persists and permeates African individual and social consciousness. He argues that the concepts of life shape the whole behaviour of men and women in a world of modernity and globalization. The author reiterates that even those called intellectuals at some point in their life do not hesitate to go to their traditional roots to find solutions to some problems in their lives since these traditions shape their whole life. It was therefore important for the study to examine the A. K. Israel faith healing process, practices, and religious culture. This was with the aim of determining the visibility of African culture within the A. K. Israel in terms of faith healing teachings on the management of COVID-19.

Wildman et al. (2020) argued that religious communities either inhibit or accelerate social transmission of the coronavirus disease. The researchers argued that the scientific study of religion could help tease apart reasons for religion making one kind of impact rather than another. Standard epidemiological models of viral spread do not take into account human factors such as

religious ideologies and values. The study suggested that just as health officials try to explain their recommendations, experts in the scientific study of religion need to surface religion-abetted value judgments that impact behaviours relevant to viral spread. Therefore, there was a need to study A. K. Israel as a religious community and explain whether they were causing problems or if they had adopted ways of inhibiting the spread.

## METHODOLOGY

**Figure 1: Trans Nzoia County Map**



Source: Google Maps

## Research Design

A descriptive research design was utilized to seek the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of the respondents from the A. K. Israel church concerning faith healing and the management of COVID-19.

## Study Area

The study was conducted in the A. K. Israel in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya.

### Target Population

The target population is the desired population from which the sample size is produced or the entire study area's population. According to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, the population of Trans Nzoia County was 990,341 people, which was the study's target population. The African Kanisa Israel population was 68,308 believers in 2022; it was from this population that the data for the analysis was gathered. The set of participants for

the study were faith healers or A. K. Israel spiritualists practised faith healing mostly through prayers, fasting, ointments, holy water, and medicinal herbs. The faith healing service users included A. K. Israel faithful who had used or were at the time of study using prayer, ointment, holy water, or medicinal plants as prescribed by the professed faith healers for their health and wellbeing.

### Sampling

**Table 1: Sample population and sampling techniques**

Target Population	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
Bishop	1	Purposive
A. K. Israel faith healers	40	Purposive
A. K. Israel Women (adult)	128	Simple Random
A. K. Israel Men (adult)	128	Simple Random
A. K. Israel Youth	128	Simple Random
Area Chiefs	5	Purposive
Total	384	

Source: Field Data, 2022

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents using sample size 384 by sub-county, centre, and cluster in Trans Nzoia**

Sub-county	Total number of A. K. Israel Centres	The total number of A. K. Israel Centres selected	No. of A. K. Israel women selected	No. of A. K. Israel men selected	No. of A. K. Israel youth selected	Total number of respondents
Saboti	84	12	28	28	28	84
Cherangani	70	10	25	25	25	75
Kiminini	26	6	25	25	25	75
Endebess	10	2	25	25	25	75
Kwanza	48	8	25	25	25	75

Source: Field Data, 2022

### Data Instruments

Primary data was collected using interviews, questionnaires, and observation. Secondary data was collected from the library and reliable sources on the internet using the desk study method. To collect qualitative and quantitative data, semi-structured interviews made up of open-ended questions were utilized. The interviews were instrumental in collecting data from the key informants of the A. K. Israel for a clear understanding of their teaching on faith healing and management of COVID-19.

Questionnaires that had both open-ended and close-ended questions were administered to the A. K. Israel adults and youth who chose among alternatives in some questions and also elaborated their opinion on matters to do with faith healing and the management of the coronavirus disease. With the permission of the faith healers and faith healing users in the A. K. Israel in Trans Nzoia County, the researcher made observations of how faith healing was done. This included details about the process of faith healing, the patient's behaviour as the process

occurred, and the activities conducted by the ritual leaders.

Qualitative data was analyzed thematically through the description of the findings of each objective. Quantitative data was analyzed through frequency distributions. The results were presented descriptively in consideration of the frequencies. The presentation of data also employed tables.

### Validity

To ensure validity, questionnaires and interview guide questions were formulated in line with the study objectives. They were also taken to the expert in the field of study, supervisors from the Department of Social Science Education, where necessary correction and modification of the research instruments was done to enhance validity.

### Ethical Considerations

Authorization to conduct the study was sought from the Directorate of Post Graduate Studies at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology and the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). The researcher was accountable for capturing and representing all the data objectively, bias was not embraced as findings were reported accurately, as they manifested. The respondents' consent was also sought before inclusion into the study by providing them with adequate information concerning the study, an opportunity for them to consider all options, and obtaining their voluntary agreement. Additionally, utmost confidentiality was emphasized and made aware to them.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### What is the History of the African Kanisa Israel?

The study revealed that the African Kanisa Israel was founded by Samuel Mbugua in 1959. Samuel Mbugua received a revelation to go to Kisumu from Kinungi, Naivasha, to pray. While in Nyakach, Kisumu, the founder, met a person called James

Kasibo on the way who hosted him. Kasibo was the founder of Roho Israel Church of God, a split from the African Israel Church Nineveh as a result of a vision to lead 'reform Israel'. Samuel Mbugua received "agano" from God. In this "agano", God told Samuel Mbugua to find the African Kanisa Israel. The church was called African to imply that it was originally established in Africa. Kanisa is a Swahili word meaning 'the called-out ones'. Israel has the meaning of God's plan of salvation.

Key respondents asserted that the founder was given the following instructions by God, which the A. K. Israel faithful were to follow without question:

First, the A. K. Israel members should adhere to the following 3 Pillars, which are written on every door of an A. K. Israel centre:

#### *"Kunyenyekea" (Humility)*

This pillar signifies lowliness and submissiveness for the African Kanisa Israel faithful. They are required to restrain their minds from thinking that they are great before God and accept their impoverished dependence upon God. The faithful give themselves over to God, for they cannot help themselves, neither in this life nor in pursuit of what is to come after this life. Therefore, humility serves as a pivotal movement toward the A. K. Israel members' faith because it removes the obstacle of pride that refuses to subject itself to God.

As a show of humility, the preachers, leaders, or healers are given the title '*Mtumishi wa Mungu*' or '*Mtugati*', and they are required to stay humble and accessible to all like Jesus was interacting with sinners and small children. In the midst of the A. K. Israel, an outsider cannot tell who a leader is amongst them because they come down to one level with the other faithful. They are not given a higher status because it is only Ngai who deserve honour and adoration. This is in line with Peterson and Seligman (2004), who argued that people who are humble focus on both their strengths and weaknesses. When other people make significant

contributions, they take them positively rather than view them as a threat to their ego.

Humility is the first pillar of the A. K. Israel. The study revealed that the A. K. Israel faithful are taught to react towards aggression by withdrawal. They preach a non-violent opposition to unjust practices against them. In this case, they do not see any reason to defend themselves when accused in any setting. Whenever they are attacked by other individuals, they are required to be quiet and refuse to say a word to avoid causing more trouble and also because Ngai will always fight for them.

### ***“Kutii” (Obedience)***

Obedience is an intrinsic component of social life that is based on a motive to obtain the reward of avoiding punishment. Leveillee (2011) asserted that the society at large is founded on obedience. Without obeying laws put in place and following directives instituted by authority, there would be a war of all against all. This pillar requires the African Kanisa Israel faithful to obey God’s word, which is passed to them through the leaders, without question, even when one does not understand why a directive is given. A key respondent gave the story of a prophet in (1 Kings 13:1-32). The respondent stated that the African Kanisa Israel faithful are to obey God’s word, for He punishes disobedience.

### ***“Kutubu” (Repentance)***

Repentance is a central element in the A. K. Israel. The third pillar directs the African Kanisa Israel faithful to repent of their sins and those of others so as not to suffer its consequences. The study revealed that the faithful understand repentance as not only sorrow for their sins but also turning away from them. This is in line with Demarest (1997), who argued that repentance entails a discontinuance of all evil thoughts, practices, or deeds and having a reformation of life.

Second, the A. K. Israel members depend on God’s power for healing, as revealed to the founder by the Holy Spirit. This divine command that was given to

the founder is to be accepted without question. The A. K. Israel faithful are to reject Western medicine as it may be used to eliminate them completely. Additionally, just as the Egyptian midwives were commanded to kill baby boys of the Jews, so would the A. K. Israel baby boys be killed if expectant mothers sought help from western-based hospitals (Exodus 1:15-22). Faith in the power of the Holy Spirit became the main instrument in healing the sick and solving human problems. Through prayer, the A. K. Israel calls upon the Holy Spirit to intervene and overcome all evil spirits. Therefore, through faith, the A. K. Israel faithful perceive the power of the Holy Spirit as enough to heal. That was in line with Mbiti (1969), who noted that African communities view forces of evil as being real and concrete; hence, faith takes up a concrete form to deal with misfortunes.

Third, the members should have the words A. K. Israel inscribed on their clothes and belongings. It has to be done in red colour only. This was meant to protect them from evil. The A. K. Israel maintains the tradition of having the badge just as the Israelites were instructed by God through Moses to paint their doorposts using blood, and so do the A. K. Israel for protection. In this case, a key informant noted that this is also done in their hearts. Therefore, the A. K. Israel members have the badge in their hearts and on their clothes and belongings as a way of keeping evil away and identifying as the people of God.

These findings corroborated with Kroesbergen (2019), who argued that in Africa, leadership is directly linked to the spirit world. That is the case because all the people in the leadership position are believed to have been chosen by God. African traditional leaders, including Samuel Mbugua of the A. K. Israel, were believed to be called by God and moved by revelations from the spirit world. The author also notes that religion and the spiritual world is more than a tool to mobilize people for African leaders; it is the resource for power. From an African perspective, the spirit world determined

who became a leader and inspired what the leader should do.

The findings were also in support of Kaunda (2018), which asserted that most African leaders have been hailed as 'God-ordained leaders' or 'God-sent'. Therefore, they are to be respected, and anyone respecting a leader was respecting God, who gave them positions of power.

African worldview is, by large, influenced by the spiritual realm. Even though early Europeans concluded that Africans had no religion, let alone a belief system, Mbiti (1969) argued that 'Africa is notoriously religious'. The author noted that Africans had a religion and that, for them, nothing happened by chance. He based his claim on the fact that for Africans, the spirit realm had a causal effect on everything.

### **What is the Concept of Faith Healing in general and in the African Kanisa Israel?**

The African Kanisa Israel is a spirit church. The members believe that the Holy Spirit directs them to depend on fasting, praying, using holy water, ointments, and medicinal herbs whenever they encounter diseases and sickness, and they would be healed. It emerged from the study that some members of the African Kanisa Israel movement are endowed with powers to prophesy while others are given the power to pray for others.

#### ***Faith Healing in the Africa Kanisa Israel***

Faith healing encompasses not just prayers but also the use of herbs. With regard to herbs, the marigu (banana trees) have more use than eating among the A. K. Israel faithful. The faithful believe that the tree has the ability to bring an end to sickness and pain. The A. K. Israel women use banana flowers (mukono) as lids for water containers or guards (kinya). A female elder noted that as one squeezes it to tighten it, the inner juices of the flower drip into the water. After a week when it dries up, the woman exchanges it for a new one. The banana flower has healing properties especially for women as it allows

the women to have less painful menstruation and controls menstrual flow to a mere tickle together with massage using castor oil. The banana juice also increases lactation in mothers and strengthens the uterus. This finding corroborates with Sharma et al. (2019) who argued that the banana flower or banana blossom is key in the management of anaemia. Banana flower is rich in iron and when taken by an anaemic patient stimulates the body to produce more haemoglobin. Consequently, the authors postulate that it helps relieve pain that is associated with menstruation, reduces days that a lady menstruates, relieves morning sickness among pregnant women, as it contributes to the stabilization of the woman's levels of sugar.

The following incident illustrates the use of both prayers and herbs to deal with a challenge: female members of one of the African Kanisa Israel centres escorted their fellow woman to the faith healer. The woman was unhappy in her marriage because used to be beaten by her husband every day. So, she went to the A. K. Israel healer for help, for she could not think of any other place to seek a solution to the problems in her marriage. The healer listened to her grievances, then he took a bottle, filled it with a liquid then prayed for it. Nabii Elijah then instructed her to fill her mouth with it whenever the husband started quarrelling, and spit when he was done arguing. He then asked the woman's friends to pray for her, then he concluded the prayers by also praying for her as she held on to the medicine in the bottle. When the woman went back home and her husband started quarrels, she filled her mouth with the medicine. She did so for seven days and ran out of medicine. In the seven days, she had not been beaten. She went back to the healer and told him she had not been beaten the whole week and asked for more medicine to help protect her. The healer told her the dose was only for a week, so she had to learn to keep her mouth shut just as the medicine was in her mouth to avoid problems. This is in line with Ndung'u (2009) who notes that doctors of the modern-day handle physical aspect of ailment. However, they do not provide answers on why one



was attacked and how a recurrence of the same can be prevented. They advise patients to seek their services once again if they happen to fall sick. African traditional approach to healing varies from this in the sense that a medicine man would describe to the patient why he or she fell sick and offer practical ways of evading reappearance of the sickness.

Nabii Elijah's approach to solving the woman's problems indicated that the A. K. Israel form of healing corroborates with traditional African healing. Prayer and the medicine were instrumental in driving away fights within the woman's household. This is in line with Mwaura (2002) who traditional African communities have in place tools such as herbs and prayers used to diagnose and treat illnesses. The Nabii Elijah provided a clear guideline on how to avoid fights and restore peace with her husband. The approach to healing adopted by the faith healer was holistic.

The women escorting their friend to the faith healer indicated that for the A. K. Israel, the healing process is communal. The marital problem was shared by the friends. Mbiti (1969) corroborates with this finding as he asserted that for the African people, a problem is shared in the community, one does not face it individually. Therefore, healing is sought by all, not just the infected or affected. That was evident when the women accompanied their friend to the faith healer and took part in the diagnosing of the disease and provision of remedy.

Healing process in African traditional societies is a holistic event. It touches on all aspects of life, that is: physical, social, emotional, and spiritual; and involves the larger community as it is not an individual or personal matter. Mbiti (1969) notes that the healing process in African Traditional societies is characterized by rituals which may not mean much to an observer. However, the believers held them dearly as they were psychologically vital and helped a great deal in helping the sick recover.

The quest for holistic healing preoccupies the faithful. From the foregoing account, it is evident that healing process in the A. K. Israel addresses the cause of the challenge, and solution is given hence the affected is assured of their wellbeing. This clears anxiety and fear, as explanations and solution given for the problem enhance satisfaction.

This calls for churches to adopt practical nature when addressing problems. Mwaura (2002) asserts that churches ought to deal with emotional, moral, and spiritual needs of the people.

What is the role of the African Kanisa Israel Faith Healing in the Management of COVID-19 in Trans-Nzoia County?

The study revealed that COVID-19 was prophesized 5 years before it occurred during the A. K. Israel annual meeting at the headquarters in 2014. The A. K. Israel leaders and elders noted that during an annual meeting in the movement's headquarters in Kirathe, Naivasha, Nabii Jeremiah Kariuki preached about an unknown disease that had been released by God as a result of the sin of the world. The Nabii advised the A. K. Israel members to repent, stay woke, to pray, and follow the laws of the government.

A key respondent reported the following:

*Nabii alisema ugonjwa usiojulikana utaachiliwa kwasababau ya dhambi nyingi duniani, hivyo kila mtu ajiombee, na kutii sharia. Wakati huo ukifika, tutakutana kwa kujificha na kuonana kiroho [(The prophet said that an unknown disease would be released because of the sin of the world, so everyone was advised to pray and obey the law. For when that time comes, the faithful would be forced to hide and meet in spirit)].*

During the service, Nabii Jeremiah Kariuki preached that when the disease occurs, the A. K. Israel members would have to start meeting in secret or meet spiritually. This divine advice followed from the book of Isaiah 26:20, which instructs the people of God to enter their inner chambers and hide

themselves until the wrath passes over. The study revealed that this prophecy was about the COVID-19 disease which led to the closure of the A. K. Israel centers, hence the members could not meet physically for worship rather, they met spiritually and in their respective houses where they were instructed not to visit one another. Respondents ascertained that the said disease was COVID-19 given that it required people to observe the washing of hands similar to their tradition of 'methamba', the ministry of health required people to stay at home, some had to go to quarantine, the A. K. Israel had been given instruction to stay indoors when the disease hits the world. Therefore, the words of the prophet matched the directive provided by the ministry of health. From the FGDs, it emerged that the A. K. Israel prayed for their faith to be strengthened amid the pandemic, because no one would stop the disease from coming to the world.

Durkheim (2008) asserts that the nature of religion is social, and therefore, it functions to correspond to conditions of human life. This implies that religion provides knowledge and understanding of the surrounding world which enhances coping and helps people find meaning amid calamities. Religion has been key in helping make sense of and mitigating epidemics that have hit the world.

Taylor (1957) views the existence of independent churches as a result of the spiritual life in the established churches. The author is in agreement with Welbourn (1965) who views these churches as places where Africans can feel at home spiritually.

The African Kanisa Israel have their means of addressing anti-life forces such as diseases. COVID-19 did not occur by accident, rather, it was as a result of the sin of the world. It emerged that the virus came and spread as a result of same-sex activity which is viewed as sinful, corruption, lust, and pride. This is in agreement with Ndung'u (2009) who observes that for Africans, incidences such as drought, ailments, misfortunes, and floods were not accidental, rather, forces of nature and human agents caused them. These misfortunes were

perceived to be religious in nature, therefore, the only way to deal with them was to apply a religious approach, such as seeking the services of a medicine man or a herbalist.

#### **A. K. Israel's COVID-19 Containment Measures**

Harrison et al. (2001) argues that religious beliefs and spirituality are necessary conditions for facing problem through strategies of spiritual and religious coping. In that case, religion provides a sense of meaning to life. The A. K. Israel adhere to religious beliefs which were key in the management of coronavirus disease.

The A. K. Israel's way of greeting was a measure that enhanced containment of COVID-19. The A. K. Israel have a unique way of greeting. Their religion directs that they should not shake hands or hug each other, be it between people of the same or different sex. An A. K. Israel leader noted that they wave as a form of greeting to safeguard themselves from contracting ritual uncleanness (*thahu*). The A. K. Israel believe that when one goes about shaking hands and hugging, he or she may be in contact with unclean person, and would be required to undergo purification, and offer sacrifice for the taboo to be broken. The observation of this belief was key in reducing the spread of Covid-19.

The African Kanisa Israel faithful adhere to the instruction given to them by God through their founder to have the "A. K. Israel badge" on their clothing and possessions, which is meant to protect them from evil. The badge reads "A. K. Israel" and it is knitted to their clothing using red fabric, and to their property using red or red painting for other possessions. Therefore, they believe that without holding on to the badge, they would not have survived the pandemic. Respondents compared the spread of COVID-19 to the Night of the Passover (Exodus 12) where in the tenth plague, the Israelites had smeared the blood of an animal without defect on their doorposts and remained indoors until morning; and when the angel of death saw the marks of blood on the doorposts of the Israelites, he spared

their first-born sons, but killed those of the Egyptians.

The respondents stated that they adhered to Nabii Jeremiah Kariuki prophesy about the disease and when it occurred, the A. K. Israel members started meeting spiritually. They did not have physical church meetings for worship and did not visit one another in large groups. Rather they met spiritually and in their respective houses where they were instructed not to visit one another. Meeting spiritually meant that during worship, the A. K. Israel faithful related through thoughts and their belief in Jesus Christ rather than through their bodies and physical surroundings.

The A. K. Israel, live according to the Levitical Law of Moses on cleanliness. A faith healer quoted Leviticus 10:3 where it was required that the holy sanctuary of the Tabernacle not be violated. The law on cleanliness was given to maintain the holiness of God. Inspired by this divine advice, the African Kanisa Israel faithful practice washing “*Methamba*”. This entails cleaning or washing oneself up from a journey and before entering their centers of worship. The faithful noted that it was observed to ward off evil that one many have had contacted. A faith healer noted that they were spared from contacting the disease because they frequently wash their hands, faces, and feet. This was in line with the MOH guidelines on the washing of hands to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In the past, the faithful have had to deal with the following ailments:

#### ***Mu`thanduku` (chicken pox)***

Muthanduku (chicken pox) was perceived as skin boils. The respondents indicated that once contacted, the disease was infectious, and often crippled or led to the death of the infected. A key respondent noted that it warranted the infected person to be secluded from the rest of the family who take turns to visit. There was no physical contact, and food was placed at the door where the

patient would serve himself or herself. This was done to evade infecting other members of the family.

The case of chickenpox amongst the faithful illuminated that among the A. K. Israel faithful, concept of separation or quarantine when an individual was infected by a contagion was practiced in the past.

#### ***Mu`thuuku`/Githuuku` (measles)***

Muthuuku` (measles) warranted strict restriction measures. Respondents cautioned that measles was infectious and would result in death of the infected. Therefore, it warranted the infected person to be isolated. Physical contact with the patient was banned as he or she was put in a separate room. During the isolation period, parents of the child refrained from sexual intimacy, to protect the child’s life.

From the past, the A. K. Israel faithful have faced challenges that warranted social distance. Given that the concept of keeping distance was instilled in their hearts and minds, the A. K. Israel faith healers built on that knowledge as a basis for managing COVID-19.

#### **A. K. Israel Medicinal Tree used in Managing COVID-19**

The A. K. Israel faith healers relied on muthiga/muthaiga tree (*Warburgia ugandensis*) for the treatment of COVID-19. The tree is evergreen and belongs to the Canellaceae family, dominant within Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The bark of muthiga tree is dry and was utilized by the faithful as a remedy for cough, fever, and general body pains.

The research participants indicated that the muthiga tree has an inner bark which is red in colour. This part of the tree has a bitter taste, and it was used to treat common cold. Consequently, the inner bark was left to dry and then pounded into powder and sniffed to clear sinuses.

Herbal healing was a key element in A. K. Israel's healing. An A. K. Israel healer, informed by the sacred text was convinced that the muthiga was the tree of life in the context of coronavirus disease. Following from this therefore, the A. K. Israel use of parts of the muthiga tree as herbs was key in managing coronavirus disease which mainly affected the respiratory system.

The study also established that A. K. Israel faithful boiled the leaves of the muthiga tree and used the decoction to steam. This move was instrumental in managing coronavirus disease because of the high temperatures in the steam. This observation showed that muthiga, an indigenous herb was beneficial in managing the disease among the African Kanisa Israel faithful.

Following from the foregoing accounts, coronavirus containment measures adopted by the A. K. Israel faithful stemmed from their indigenous knowledge. This placed the A. K. Israel community on an advantageous position which was utilized for the wellbeing of the community as it was confronted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The A. K. Israel community were not blank slates in terms of knowledge on management of COVID-19. Coronavirus disease plunged the countries into darkness, although for Africans, this darkness was not new (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). The author noted that the challenge required a global problem, however, there was need to look for solutions specific to each country as they all had wisdom to offer. He reiterated that the global COVID-19 challenge also required an African solution.

The study puts forth that health experts should consider indigenous people's knowledge systems when addressing challenges. As the study indicated, the A. K. Israel faithful practice physical distance and observe hygiene measures. Therefore, the government should factor into not only science but also people's indigenous knowledge as building blocks in promoting health and wellbeing amid not

only the coronavirus disease context but also future calamities.

## CONCLUSION

The use of A. K. Israel's lens in management of COVID-19 shows the need for the reclamation of indigenous societies' knowledge systems in terms of health to address contemporary challenges. The A. K. Israel retraced their footsteps into the past to manage COVID-19. The study clearly underscores the importance of the practice of faith healing among the A. K. Israel faithful in the management of COVID-19. It is in the view of this conclusion that the paper recommends revisiting the indigenous societies, borrowing relevant knowledge working together with science for effective management of pandemics. Following from this therefore, the study recommends further study on platforms necessary to promote culturally responsive contexts in the management of crisis.

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