



# Women of Fire and Spirit: History, Faith, and Gender in Roho Religion in Western Kenya

*Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton*

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The African Christian Roho religion, or Holy Spirit movement, is a charismatic and prophetic movement that arose in the Luo region of western Kenya. This movement has fascinated students of history and religion for more than sixty years, but surprisingly has not been extensively studied. This book fills that lacuna.

In *Women of Fire and Spirit*, Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton uses the extensive oral histories and life narratives of active participants in the faith, giving them full voice in constructing the history of their Church. In doing so, she counter-balances the existing historical literature, which draws heavily on colonial records. Hoehler-Fatton's sources call into question the paradigm of "schism" that has dominated the discussion of African independent Christianity. Faith, rather than schism or politics, emerges here as the hallmark of Roho religion.

Hoehler-Fatton's book is doubly unusual in foregrounding the role of women in the evolution and expansion of their Church. She traces the gradual transformation of women's involvement from the early years when--drawing on indigenous models of female spirit possession--women acted as soldiers, headed congregations, and served as pastors, to the present condition of Western-style institutionalization and exclusion for women. Despite this marginalization, women members continue to be inspired by the defiance of past heroines.

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