

Missionary Interactions with Cultural Issues on Marriage among the Nandi of Kenya

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Abstract

The missionary interactions with the Nandi people is an encounter of distinct, distant and powerfully dynamic cultural issues. These dynamics play out amid concerns of biases, conflicts, and concessions in marital rites and practices among Nandi Christians from the inception of Christianity in the missionary era, to modern Nandi Christianity today. In a descriptive and comparative survey, marriage dynamics among Nandi Christians from the colonial /missionary era to the present day are explored through a qualitative study of both primary and secondary data, which reveal that Christian missionary approaches and strategies conflicted with the dominant traditional Nandi marital, cultural values which the Nandi Christians continue to uphold. The observation is that the future of Nandi Christian marriage lies in a combined approach to Nandi practices and Christian practices on marriage, by blending and accommodating the positive relevant Nandi pro-family communal values and Christian practices that can be expressed within Nandi Christian marriage without sliding into syncretism.

Keywords: Nandi, Culture, Marriage, Polygamy, Missionaries, Christian

Introduction

The Nandi peoples are one of the many ethnic groups, that are historically and currently, struggling to reconcile Christianity with their cultural traditions. This paper will examine the history of these struggles among the Nandi people group by focusing on the question of marriage.

The over 120 years of Christianity experienced among the Nandi present a history characterized by responsive drama. The drama includes the missionaries' reaction to the Nandi culture as they saw it and the Nandi's response to the missionary approaches in evangelism and attitude towards the Nandi culture in general. The missionary interactions with Nandi customary marriage have not been without concerns of practices and rites. A significant feature of the Nandi marriage process is that it is held over prolonged lengths of time with protracted traditional religious practices, most of which were found not to agree with the Christian practices as taught by the early missionaries. It is important to note here that Nandi marriage practices and rituals are not necessarily similar to practices among other African peoples. There may be differences in the order and importance accorded to some of the processes of preparation for marriage. For example, while among the Igbo of West Africa there was/is a basic need for preliminary divination by which the young man who seeks a wife was/is enabled to find out from what clan or lineage his Chi (Guardian Spirit) permits him to take a wife of fortune from (Okeke & Ibenwa, 2017, p.29). Among the Nandi, it was the initiation rites at puberty that stood out as key and elaborate in the bid to prepare the young men and girls for their roles in marriage. Mostly the missionaries observed from a distance the extensive Nandi marital cultural practices and reacted with dislike and reproof.

Hence the missionaries presented Christianity as a religion opposed to the varied aspects of traditional Nandi marriage and attempted to transform the culture by teaching and implementing their Western Christian ideologies onto Nandi subjects (Comaroff, 1991).

To further explore these Nandi Christian marriage concerns, this paper takes a mixed approach design; based on a qualitative survey by way of interviews with Nandi informants and data from some Church teachings as primary sources, while pieces of literature about Nandi traditional marriage as well as Christian marriage supply secondary data. In the interest of brevity, the Roman Catholic Church was purposely picked to explore some of these Nandi Christian marriage concerns, since the Roman Catholic Church is one of the first mainstream denominations to start missionary work in 1932 (Baur & Burgman, 1990, p.132) and establish a center among the Nandi around 1934 (Oboler, 1985, p.52) in the Central Rift region of Kenya.

The Missionaries' Interaction with Nandi Marriage Customs

When AIM and the Roman Catholic missionary groups, came to evangelize the Nandi from the early 1914s and 1930s, they found a people who had their own culture which included religious beliefs that were the people's way of life and value systems that required certain rites of passage. These practices and rites were held dear to the Nandi until the arrival of the colonial masters and missionaries that saw a new wave of restrictions and obligations. The missionaries had arrived in cohorts bearing varied labels but reading and speaking from the same script. From the onset, the missionaries had come to the Nandi land with a prejudiced mindset that saw the Nandi as belonging to a dark continent which was therefore backward and evil (Macheso, 2017, pp. 45-51), such that when missionaries tried to bring the Nandi into the Christian Church, they urged the Nandi to give up Nandi customs which the missionaries considered to be evil ways.

This missionary attitude permeated the state of affairs in the Church from the pre-colonial early missionary era, through the colonial era into the post-colonial era. In the years of independence and renaissance, there has been found a need to reevaluate the missionary stand on the Nandi cultural practices that were regarded as evil, including marital practices and related rites of passage.

Marriage among the Nandi of Kenya was an important rite of passage, which served to mark that a young man /woman who through circumcision/FGM had already moved from the youth to the adult age group, was now acquiring a special status in society that of being a husband or a wife (Kattau et al, 2009, p.141). Mbiti (1990, p.124) observed that the Nandi people have the most sophisticated and detailed initiation rite, that is a preparation process for adulthood and housewifery without which no woman can get married. There was a special preparation where as part of the preparation for initiation, the girls had to sleep with selected boys in a place called *Sikiroino* to test the girl's ability to resist sex (Simuli, 2017, p.9). The *Tumdo nele* (initiation into new-age) for girls from age 9 -16 was the FGM (female genital mutilation). It was at the time of FGM that the virginity of the young girls was determined. Virginity was highly valued, those who were found to have lost their virginity brought shame to their parents, and in some cases, such girls were speared to death. After the FGM, the girls had a coming out ceremony *Tumdo nele* (new age), which symbolized that the girls were now eligible for marriage and their parents were ready to receive suitors (Langley, 1979, p.46-47).

The Nandi regarded FGM as a rite of growth and shift from childhood to adulthood in which the sex organ which is regarded as a symbol of life was cut, as a way of unlocking of life issues.

It was done in seclusion as a symbol of death, and the coming out of seclusion was like resurrection to a new responsible life (Wangila, 2015).

The missionaries saw FGM as a superstitious and barbaric Nandi custom that should be eradicated immediately, this perspective, therefore, undermined the would-be marriage process of the Nandi Christians who choose to avoid FGM. On the other hand, the young men had also undergone circumcision that initiated them as young warriors ready for marriage. Although the missionaries did not have issues with the male circumcision among the Nandi at that, the main challenge with the male circumcision was the practices associated with the ceremony like consumption of traditional liquor and the intercrural sexual intercourse that the young men were treated to (Langley, 1979, p.46).

Marriage was a big step of achievement for the bride or bridegroom and their families too in the community. For the Bride and bridegroom, marriage marked an elevation to economic actualization since “marriage was the point in which a man and woman could own a cultivated field” (Tanui, 2015, p.219). Marriage automatically changed the status of the family that married off their son or daughter as well as the clans where they belonged. They were no longer to be strangers or mere neighbors but were by the marriage acquiring new titles as in-laws. In marriage the two families and clans acquired new titles; consequently, these titles shaped their interactions in the public arena including the marketplace and other ceremonial occasions such as deaths and funerals (Langley, 1979, p.48-49).

The Nandi marriage progressed in three stages: identification/courting, engagement and marriage marked by two major ceremonies of engagement and marriage. The first stage of identifying the bride and courting was a family affair and not a public issue; since there was room for different suitors to look around for the bride.

Most of the time it was the parents who initiated such friendships by arranging for visits, however, the young men also made their choices from the dances they had with the girls who were of age during the circumcision homecoming celebrations. Some of the friendships aborted; when the men young women were unfit due to unfaithfulness or when other suitors showed up with more promising qualities. The common trend was that most of them matured into actual marriages especially those where the friendship was initiated by the parents who had also been long term family friends or even business partners. The friendships which succeeded; then went into the second step which was marked with celebrations and customary practices, namely the engagement and marriage ceremony (Kemboi, 2013).

The Nandi Engagement Ceremony

Chang'ach (2012, p.4) details the engagement ceremony as a special phase /ceremony that was and continues to be organized by the parents of the bride to be together with other elders of the family. Three traditional shelters (tents) are made ready the eve of the material day; the first shelter was for the soon to be bride's parents and relatives, the second shelter for the groom to be and his friends and other guests, then the third special shelter was one made for the bride to be and her maidens. The bride to be and her mother wore special traditional clothes and decorations made of hides and beads to clearly distinguish them from the other female attendees at the ceremony.

Before the visitors arrive, the man and his relatives approach the homestead. The lady is hidden in a room. On arrival, the man must convince the sister (the younger one) on the door to let her come out. He may also be forced to give out some money and presents for her to be let out.

The bride to be; was covered together with two other ladies so that the man can identify his own chosen one.

A special oil (made from the cream of cow milk) was smeared on the face of the lady and she was adorned with special beads for decoration. Traditional alcohol was sprinkled on both the man and the woman as a sign of blessing. Dowry was discussed before the meals were taken by both the communities of the man and the woman. Traditional songs were sung to praise the couple and dances were also performed. The celebration was a feast where traditional liquor/alcohol was prepared for the festival. They ate meat and drank milk and bear. The man's relatives were to carry with them things like honey, bananas, and blankets for the bride's family. This engagement ceremony meant that the bride to be was now officially a wife to that man and in many instances, she would go with the groom to his home and stay there awaiting the marriage ceremony. In some cases, the bride remained in her home and was to be picked later for the final marriage ceremony at the groom's home. This engagement ceremony is still valued among the Nandi, and in cases where the bride to be and the groom are in distant lands (overseas) the engagement ceremony is done in their absence.

Marriage Ceremony

The ceremony was well organized, alcohol prepared, a cow was slaughtered for meat and other foods such as bananas prepared. The couples were made to take oaths as a binding marriage factor, and they were blessed by anointing oil on their foreheads and sprinkling alcohol on them. Dances were organized and songs sang as people danced.

The couples were given presents like animals: goat or cow. The bride was given a cupboard full of gourds to keep milk (sour milk). After the ceremony people were left to eat and drink alcohol and dance as much as they wanted. There were dances for the maidens and groom's friends and relatives which could even extend overnight. The groom and the bride were given a place to sleep which was organized by the aunties.

The arrangements were to determine whether the bride had qualified to be given more presents and the dowry to be added especially to the mother. If the bride was found to be a virgin the next day, other special gifts were given to her and her mother but if she was not a virgin, it was an embarrassment to the family (Kemboi, 2013).

Among the Nandi of Kenya marriage was both monogamous and polygamous. Both were regarded as customary and right, however, the polygamy was a privilege that gave the man status as it added to his children and showed that he was wealthy enough to afford the second, third or fourth wife. The process 2nd and subsequent wives in a polygamous marriage was the same as that of the marriage of a first wife, only that in this case the first was expected to go along with the negotiation and preparations to receive her co-wife.

Missionary Reactions to Nandi Marriage Practices and its Effects

Regarding the Nandi culture, many studies of Nandi customs were undertaken by the missionaries, with the conviction that the Nandi culture had to give way to European Christian civilization (Baur, 2009). Most of the missionaries spoke against everything Nandi while others saw the need to accommodate some practices by accepting into the Church membership the Nandi who still performed these customs, while a few missionaries acknowledged the fact that Nandi marriage was a communal affair and they realized that it was a process of stages that stretched over a period of time and not just a day's affair.

When the missionaries discussed the Nandi cultural practices with their congregants, it was a kind of graded ethical absolutism where the Nandi marital practices were either acceptable or not acceptable for Christians depending on the magnitude of the evil in the practice. Some practices were regarded as more evil than others, so that the engagement ceremony was accepted as part of the marriage customs but with some modification.

The missionaries taught the Nandi that they did not need to use traditional liquor to bless the couple or invoke the ancestors, but that they were to use the “Holy Water” for blessing the couple while saying grace and having mass. Instead of the ancestral blessings, they were to seek blessings through the saints such as Mary, the mother of Jesus. This also applied to the marriage ceremony. The Nandi were required by the missionaries to give up on some of the customs like the brewing of traditional liquor and the overnight dances (Kemboi, 2013). These ceremonial practices and the bride price were considered not so necessary and could be avoided if need be, though not completely stopped or rejected by the Church. However, the marriage ceremony for the Christian couple was to be performed in Church and officiated by the priest or pastor, not the clan elders. With time the Nandi Christians replaced the traditional marriage garments made of hides and beads with the Whiteman’s white wedding gown for the bride and the wedding ring in place of the Nandi ornamental beads won by the bride from the point of marriage. There is one marriage custom which was not accepted by the missionaries; and still is an issue among the Nandi Christians, this is the practice of polygamy. Yet even those customary practices which were accommodated for the Christian converts were still considered uncivilized and evil.

The missionaries argued that the Nandi had no civilization, and most of the Nandi did not take some of these missionary allegations lightly. For example, Senghor recorded that he was grateful for the provocative statement that “led him to search for the hidden values in African culture,” (Kemboi, 2013). However, not all the Nandi took the line of Senghor. Some of the Nandi shunned Christianity and moved further away from the white man and his/her religion. They opted to maintain their way of life away from foreign civilization. For example, among the Nandi a small section of the Nandi the *Ajek* people moved further into the forest areas and still inhabit those areas to date.

They continue with all the Nandi cultural practices including the dressing in hides (Bitok, 2013). At the same time, some among Nandi people who embraced the European civilization and desired to be white Christians except for their colour gave up everything Nandi including their names, taking up the European names (Taiwo, 2010, p.109). Many of the Nandi people may have played double standards, like the Mani Kongo who accepted Christianity for the benefits it accorded his people, such as education, but continued to maintain the practice of marrying many wives (Hilton, 1983:200).

The Nandi of Kenya believed strongly in polygamy; since having many wives meant having many children quickly, and many homesteads that were built for the different wives in form of a circumference which then ensured the security for the larger family. During the colonial era; these people saw some mischief in the missionaries advocating against polygamy, as plotting to breakdown the Nandi defense system to enable easy conquest by the colonial masters. Such people did not take Christianity but remained traditional; only later did some of the children get to take it up during their schooling in the mission schools, (Kemboi, 2013).

Down the years after independence with widespread Christian missions and many years into modernity, the Nandi still value polygamy. This is because the Nandi still regard children as a blessing so that even the unmarried women will have to ensure that they get children to avoid the curse of being childless. This trend of getting children even without marriage eventually leads to polygamy when the fathers of these children consider bringing their “bastard” children home, they consequently build homes for the mothers of their children and end up solemnizing their relationship through customary engagement, so that the single women end up in polygamous marriages. For such women, the mission Churches took some action which carries on to date.

The lady who was married as a second wife was sanctioned by being dis-fellowshipped and was not allowed to partake of communion or hold any position of leadership in the Church though she continued to attend Church.

Some Christian denominations would dedicate the child (equivalent to baptism) just like any other child, (Adventists-Secretariat, 2010, p.50). But in the Roman Catholic Church apart from the sanctions on the dis-fellowshipped the member, she was /is not allowed to hold leadership positions in the Church or have communion. At the same time the sanction was/is passed on to her children; in that baptism for the baby was/is only allowed for the first two after which the other children were not baptized. These children could/can only be baptized when they grow up and choose to join classes and be prepared for baptism (Kemboi, 2013). The sanctions in the Roman Catholic Church followed/follow the woman to her death in that when she died; the Church did not/ does not allow her coffin in the Church, nor is there full mass offered for her burial where communion is received. Instead, only half mass is given, that is mass without communion. These sanctions in the Roman Catholic Church also applied/ apply to the man who though a baptized Church member has taken to polygamy (Kemboi, 2013).

It was reported at the 1980 Roman Bishops Synod that:

marriage is the most difficult issue affecting most personally, especially the lives of the majority of the people of God in Africa...nothing has resisted Christianization than marriage. Traditional marriage is a communal event deeply involving two clans, and it is performed in stages, thus permitting cohabitation before final ratification. Christian marriage is a contract between a man and a woman and with a fixed starting point (Baur, 2009, p.395). When the 1967 AMECEA Bishops researched on this question it confirmed that in only a few places do the believers marry in Church. Only in a few places do more than half of the Anglicans or Catholics marry in Church, and a third of these marriages are likely to fall back to polygamy. Quoting the statement of the Pope in the 1980 Roman Bishops Synod “the local Churches must be allowed to find solutions on the pastoral level to the problems arising from Christianity... This means that some of the Church legislation on marriage may have to be drastically revised and reduced to essential laws applicable to the universal Church. More particular legislation must be left to the local Churches themselves,” (Baur, 2009, p.385).

While the aforementioned experiences were about 40 years ago, the Catholic Church among the Nandi still maintains stringent measures on the members found in polygamy, for example, the cases of half mass at death, and no baptism for the third child and those that after. Arguably the effect of the missionary interaction with the Nandi culture is not any better now than it was then. For the missionaries, Nandi marriage customs such as the polygamous marriage was the greatest of obstacles in the way of realizing Nandi ambitions. In a report of the mission field in 1910:

“Our correspondents in Africa view with unanimous intolerance conditions of life...not only unchristian but are at variance with the instinctive feelings of natural morality. With them, there can be no “question” of polygamy. It is simply one of the gross evils of heathen society, which like murder or slavery, must at all costs be ended.... In Africa polygamy is more common than in other countries...the Christian law upon this subject may be said to be the greatest obstacle to the acceptance of our faith,” (Conference, 1910, p.4).

One will acknowledge that in Nandi cultural heritage, marriage was one of the most important marks of social adulthood. One would not be socially recognized as a grown-up person without being married.

An adult had to marry whether as a second wife or not. Also, because procreation was an important Nandi concept of marriage, a childless marriage was problematic hence, polygamy was potentially allowed by custom. The problem was that Christianity came with a new understanding of marriage. The Christian wedding was introduced as a new experience in Nandi cultural and religious life. The wedding was performed in church, following a liturgy that was new to the Nandi religious practice. In the Catholic Church matrimony was /is understood as one of the seven sacraments (Dacanáy, 2000, p.3).

Polygamy was more problematic due to the value it held for the Nandi people - It gave prestige to the chiefs, solved the problem of barrenness, and provided help for the older wife, widows got the opportunity to get married to their in-laws. By the 1970s, “approximately all the churches have long banned polygamy and at least male polygamists from communion and membership” (Jones, 2011, p.401).

Time and again in the 1970s African theologians and some missionaries too had argued for a major change in church practice. The imposition of monogamy was essentially an instance of western cultural imperialism condemning the marriage practice of Nandi in favour of those traditions in Europe “without any Biblical warrant and indeed in contradiction to much of old testament witness” (Hastings, 1976, p.215). This means that many people use situations of polygamy in the Bible to justify polygamy. Hence the Old Testament is found to be the obstacle in the way of the Christian Church’s full handling of the question of polygamy because the Old Testament is seen as a loophole in the struggle against polygamy in Christian circles.

As much as marriage is a highly religious ceremony /act, ironically so, Nandi traditional religion as a way of life considered polygamy part of its religious life in as much as it met the needs in society. In this regard, other scholars like Bediako argued that “Christianization of the African past provided cultural continuity which helps in clarifying ethnic identities (Bediako, 1992:427-428). On the same breath what is needed now is the localization of Nandi’s Christian present. It has been observed that second marriage in certain circumstances with the consent of the first wife should be tolerated even though polygamy cannot be permitted as a standard of the rule (Dacanáy, 2000). Polygamy continued to be a thorny issue in the missionary interaction with the Nandi since the missionaries regarded the practice of marrying more than one wife as unlawful for Christians and incompatible to Christianity.

Thus, any polygamist desiring to be baptized was enjoined to put away all his wives except the first one. The AIC missionaries encouraged divorce for new converts who desired Christian partners (Langley, 1979, p.14). The missionary position found favour with the colonial government that enacted the 1904 Native Christian marriage act that applied to the Nandi community but only to the marriage of Nandi Christians.

An even more forceful law came in 1931, i.e. the Nandi Christian Marriage and Divorce Act that applied to Nandi when either or both partners professed Christianity, hence the missionary opposition of the Nandi marital customs was in line with general mission policy at that time (Langley, 1979, pp.15, 100). The laws enacted by the government allowed only monogamous marriage and by effect aimed at eliminating polygamy. While the missionaries acknowledged the Divorce act it came as a slap on the Nandi marital life practices. Since the Nandi held that marriage is formally irrevocable, but permanent separations did and do occur, they do not technically negate marriage.

The Position of the Roman Catholic Church on Polygamy

The Roman Catholic Church is one of the mainstream churches that has had a clear and firm stand on the question of polygamy. On discussing the stand of the Roman Catholic Church on polygamy we will look at some of the documents of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Position of the Pontiffs

Pope Pius XI in the “Encyclical Letter *Casti Connubii* of December 31, 1930, on Christian Marriage the pontiff gave this message:

“The Christian marriage according to the Catholic Church is divided by God and its nature is to be understood according to those divine precepts set out in the Law of God. Among the pillars of the Christian Marriage are childbirth, conjugal faith, and marriage as a sacrament. On the second pillar, it is asserted that there should be no carnal intercourse outside the marriage bond with another man or woman. It is rightly contemplated as demanding that the union of marriage be between one man and one woman. This was the law at creation and although subsequently relaxed by the same creator, it was later to be restored to its true state by the teachings of Christ.” And, “with reason, therefore, does the Council of Trent solemnly declare: “Christ Our Lord very clearly taught that in this bond two persons only are united and joined together when he said: “therefore they are no longer two, but one flesh.” (Torre, 1930).

The Church asserts that polygamy is against conjugal love. Conjugal love which is a right appertaining to both parties to the marriage partnership requires “indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving.” Since conjugal love is undivided and reserved exclusively only to the partners to a marriage pact, then an arrangement that seeks to divide this love among different individuals is contrary to the holy matrimony.”

In an official letter on the position of the Roman Catholic Church on polygamy, Pope John Paul II states that:

The union between man and woman is likened to the church being united to the body of Christ. Christ makes the ultimate sacrifice, and in love gives himself as the savior of the race of mankind. This selfless giving demonstrated by Christ defines the essence of marriage as God intended at creation. This eternal covenant is thus exemplified in the marriage of man and woman. As such conjugal love is intended in the ultimate to mirror that same love that Christ shows for the church (Paul, 1981).

God in his being is characterized by the love he embodies. He is the essence of love. He created humans out of love, through love and having created called them to love. In that way, God created man in his own image, which is love.

He wrote upon man's substance, his temporal and incarnate form, the capacity and duty to love and commune. It follows that above all else man's true calling is to love.

Since man is both body and spirit, it follows that the totality of his composition should resonate with his true vocation. That is love; to be truly expressed should be embodied both through spiritual action and bodily action. In the forms in which this love is realized which inter alia include marriage, it is imperative that the truth of love should combine both the temporal dimension and the physical dimension. If love in either dimension is withheld or is purported to be given in exclusion of the other, then it wouldn't be the evidence or result of total personal self-giving. This bond of love is the true expression of the communion between God and people. Faithfulness to each other in the marriage covenant is an imperative and the Pontiff John Paul II compares the sin that destroys the marriage covenant to that of idolatry and disobedience to the law. He says "...idolatry is prostitution, infidelity is adultery, and disobedience to the law is an abandonment of the spousal love of the Lord..." One observes that the Roman Catholic Church is right in giving the explanation of the love for one man being for one woman as Christ has one love that is the Christian Church, which is true for monogamy as the ideal marriage as taught in the Bible.

Polygamy as Covered in the Roman Catholic Church Catechism

The most obvious area of conflict between Christianity and Nandi customary marriage is on the question of polygamy. The traditionalists believe that the number of wives a man has shows his affluence. The number of wives consequently often determine the number of children, who consequently ensured that there was ready and enough labour for different social economic activities (Ojua et al, 2014).

But the practice of polygamy appeared contrary to the Christian doctrine of monogamy where one man is expected to remain married to one wife. Although Christians may seem to have things working well, Christians are found in a dilemma when they have problems such as childlessness or problem of gender mix in the children (Okeke & Ibenwa, 2017, p.31). The catechism first begins with an examination of the marriage institution under the Old Testament. It presents the argument that an emphasis on the indissoluble love that characterized the marriage institution first emerged under the old law. This point isn't blind to the fact that the patriarchs and kings practiced polygamy. However, the fact that this practice was permitted to them is due to man's hardness of heart rather than a rejection of the 'moral conscience concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage (Pope John Paul, 2003). The Catechism asserts the unity and indissolubility of spousal love. Arguing that spousal love is a day-to-day commitment to mutual self-giving that embraces an entire life. Where the unity clarified by the equal personal dignity which must be accorded to man and wife in mutual and unreserved affection. It follows that "any practice that is contrary to conjugal love (which is undivided and exclusive), and for our purposes, polygamy is to be deplored" (Pope Paul VI, 1965).

In one of the documents reporting Roman Catholicism about the Nandi, the clerics report that the Nandi love of community fellowship, life and the reality of sin constitutes positive values of their culture. However, marriage and family life are mentioned as a challenge to the Catholic Church in Nandi, which is yet unclear how it would be addressed. This situation leaves the Church in an awkward position in that it cannot handle the challenge of life for the Nandi people. (Pope John Paul, 2003).

Although the Roman Catholic Church was not clear on how it was going to handle the apparent marriage challenges. It did clearly state its stands on the position that, polygamy is not allowed for the believer. If one gets into polygamy he or she is sanctioned in life and in death, and it affects the Children as well. For those who have lived in polygamy before they come to Christ, the women have to live a separate life from the husband just as neighbors and no more conjugal relations. The man will have to choose one of the women to whom he will be officially wedded in Church and denounce the others. He would, however, be required to provide for the economic needs of the wife and children (Kemboi, 2013, p.3).

The Roman Catholic Church affirms the holy family is the model upon which every family must be built. In step with the dignity with which man and woman are created, the Church deplored any Nandi customs that derogate from that dignity. The truth about marriage is revealed in and through the union of Christ and the Church. The love which Christ exemplifies assumes a human nature through the gift of marriage. It is a symbol of that 'new and eternal covenant sanctioned in the Blood of Christ. It is asserted that marriage, therefore, requires an indissoluble love (Trujillo & Hellín, 2000, p.40). It is emphasized that the mission of evangelism can only start from the domestic church which is the family.

Evangelism among the Nandi is therefore dependent on Nandi families that embrace the ‘noble values’ of the Nandi family which curiously excludes polygamy. However, the predicament of the man desiring to convert to Christianity and who is at the same time obliged to repudiate one or more of his wives with whom he has shared one or more years of conjugal love is understandable. Even though, on the one hand, polygamy is contrary to the moral law, the Christian who has previously lived in polygamy has a grave duty in justice to honour the obligations contracted regarding his former wives and his children (Pope John Paul, 2003).

It is commendable that such a statement can be brought out from the very organization that bitterly condemned polygamy as a grave evil equal to habitual murder or slavery. Apparently, the Church does not much speak the voice of the true Nandi woman who lives with the experience of polygamy, but she speaks from the point of view of the clergy who have no stake in marriage by virtue of their celibate life. It is not so much the voice of a people experiencing evil, nor are the victims running away from it, rather the envy of those that lead a life of discipline.

Other than the question of polygamy, the missionaries took issue with the Nandi practice of woman to woman marriage. This is the institution in which an elderly woman who is advanced in age has no male child. She took the role of a female husband by paying bride wealth and marrying another woman but does not have sexual intercourse with her. The purpose of this marriage was to raise a male heir for the female husband. The other type of marriage among the Nandi is the *tunisiet ab got*, *Kitunis toloita* “marrying the house” institution. Here the aged sonless woman retains her youngest daughter at home.

The daughter would then have children by self-selected sexual partners, then the sons born to this daughter would inherit the property of her mother's house. The missionaries were opposed to both *tunisiet ab got*, *Kitunis toloita* "marrying of the house" and the female husband marriages (Oboler, 1980, p.86-87).

With the above-mentioned situations, the Nandi Christians were in a tight place requiring them to choose either to belong to the traditional Nandi community fully by continuing in their traditional practices or to join in the new requirements expected by the missionaries.

There were, therefore, few Christian marriages by the early 1970s: By 1969, the AIC Christian marriages were at 3.0% while the Roman Catholic rate was 4.4 %, only to drop down to AIC 1.9% and Catholic 3.7% in 1970. That means that less than 50% at times even less than 25% of Nandi Christians married in their Churches. Customary law marriage continued to carry the day in the face of missionary objections (Langley, 1979, p.86).

The Rationale for a Middle Way towards a Nandi Christian Marriage Ceremony

Looking back over the years one can say that Christianity among the Nandi has gradually grown despite the Christian Marriage challenges herein mentioned, which may be common among other African communities. Christianity is one of the few institutions that has remained intact over time (King, 1999, p.606). The mainstream Christian denominations have somehow survived the contrary tides. It is based on this survival that approaches directed towards a Nandi Christian Marriage is proposed.

Although African ideologists fear that values such as those of the Nandi are threatened and may succumb to modern materialism, individualism, and hedonism under the guise of Christianity, it should be noted that the Nandi possess powerful natural defenses in their traditional grasp of pro-life and pro-family values. However, these values may not survive today, on their own. In more of a lament to the weakened standards, Chang'ach observes that:

Traditional religious ceremonies and ethical values which were the basis for the maintenance of tribal honor and stability are disappearing. Personal moral responsibility focuses attention upon an individual and undermines his sense of corporate security in the tribe. Hence, too, Christian marriage has become a matter of choice and of a contract between persons rather than between their clans. Such marriages will tend to bring the traditional notions and law into collision with their Western counterparts when they break down and when one party abrogates the marriage unilaterally and then has recourse to the customary rite (Chang'ach, 2012, p.5).

There is a need for a new force to mediate the Nandi Christian marriages in the context of unyielding cultural practices and passionate Christian convictions. The existing tension is not healthy for mutual coexistence. Chang'ach (2012, p.5) says, the impact of Christianity and western education upon the Nandi attitude to life and ethnic systems has of necessity been disruptive and has sharply divided the community into two, i.e. the "modern" and the "old." There is a need for a change in attitude and approach to the apparently two different ways of life. Unlike the colonial encounter with ATR, which was characterized by hostility and the condemnation of Nandi marital practices, the postcolonial encounter should be characterized by mutual respect, understanding, tolerance, and some level of freedom, liberation, and genuineness (Adamo, 2011, p.1).

Regarding the approaches to a Nandi Christian Marriage, some facts need to be considered. Foremost is the fact that the Nandi worldview is different from that of the western world. Which means that Western missionary Christianity and the Nandi Christian way of life must be expressed from a Nandi worldview (Oladipo, 2016).

This worldview is informed by the Nandi core value of interdependence and the value systems which undergird the peaceful, meaningful harmonious relationships free from undue conflicts (Ikenye, 2011, pp.79-80). Because of the foregoing, any approach towards a Nandi Christian marriage will require an integrative approach, in which scripture is to inform the purpose and pattern, within the dynamics of Nandi cultural and ethnic identities (Ikenye, 2013). This will have to consider the fact of changing contexts of modernity and postmodernity, in which Christian lifestyle also varies from context to context. Depending on the contexts, therefore, certain practices will be common for example, the fact of the matrimonial liturgy/mass/service. Shifting ideologies within a colonized society would enable cultural transformations.

In the recent past, there was a collective approach by stakeholders who seek alternatives to FGM. “Seventy-nine teenage girls in Nandi County have graduated from an alternative rite of passage that has replaced the outlawed FGM. The girls aged between 8-16 years graduated after a two-week camp that culminated in the colourful coming out ceremony dubbed “*Tumdo Nelet*” (Jelimo, 2014).

True Christianity can and should be able to meet different people and make a meaningful difference in their lives. This meaningful difference should be centered on Christ (the Gospel and its power of salvation.) This means that the Nandi Christian mindset would acknowledge the inherent limitations in our culture in terms of salvation. And having accepted Christ and the salvation found in him to take note of Paul’s pastoral counsel, “All things are lawful to me, but not all things are profitable, all things are lawful but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Cor. 6:12). The Nandi Christian should consider if there be any profit whatsoever from any form of practice they are to engage in as part of the marriage ceremony.

If there be any marriage rites, are they beneficial for us today? Henry (2013, p.73) argues that the Christian should not put himself/ herself under the power of any such ceremonial practices or rites to give such rites power to doom or bless. Since as believers we know that these have no power in them except if we give them power over us. We have no right to do even that which is innocent if it disadvantages our highest interests or that of others.

Since the Nandi traditional marriage is a communal event deeply involving two clans, and it progresses in stages that could provide a fertile ground for cohabitation before final ratification. The Nandi Christian marriage Bride and Groom should guard their boundaries because the Christian marriage is a contract between a man and a woman, yet it has a fixed starting point (Henry, 2013, pp.73-74).

The Nandi Christian marriage should accommodate the communal events while guarding against any semblance of cohabitation before the final ratification at the wedding ceremony.

Suggested Approaches to Nandi Marital Ceremony

1. That the Nandi people's acknowledgment of the marriage and pledge to support the couple by accepting the invitations to participate in the wedding ceremony officiated by clergy within the Church premises should be encouraged.
2. Use of traditional attire such as in the case of the Maasai *shuka* (*wrap over scarfs*) and beads for the wedding ceremony should be a matter of personal choice and preference rather than the ecclesiastical principle.
3. The parents of the bride and groom or their representative's presentation of the Bride and the groom to the priest or pastor in the presence of the Church gathering at the wedding ceremony should be encouraged, as a sign of communal and ecclesiastical acknowledgment of the marriage.

4. The practice of vow-making in public following the minister's message to the bride and groom at the wedding ceremony should be encouraged.
5. Nandi cultural symbols like rings and bangle given to the bride to wear as a sign of a lasting and binding marriage should be based on the couple's choice and preference.
6. The Nandi varied traditional food items presented at the wedding reception should not require the performance of libation rituals for appeasing the ancestors. While the couple and guests could share in the traditional main meal either *matoke*, *ugali* or *mokimo* just as (alongside) the cake, intoxicating beverages or liquor should be discouraged.
7. Blessings pronounced on the new couple by the parents and words of advice and counsel by clan leaders and the religious leaders as part of the wedding ceremony reception should be encouraged. Where prayers are offered for the water given to the couple or anointing by oil is done as a sign of blessing where applicable.
8. Musical items which do not contradict Christian morals presented by different age groups, such as the age group (young adults) whom the newlyweds are leaving behind singing out farewell remarks. As the receiving young parents' age group/women's guild and the men's band sing out welcoming remarks to the new couple should be encouraged.
9. Presentation of gifts signifying status can be part of the reception, for example, a Milk guard given to the bride as a symbol of the wife's ability to feed the clan from the guard of milk need not be discouraged.
10. Parental send-offs that give the bride away to her groom in Church and at the reception with traditional artifacts and gifts, for example, the gift of a cow to the bride, at the reception party of the Church wedding ceremony should be acknowledged as much as possible.
11. The wedding ceremony celebrations' continuation at the bride and at groom's home, where the parental blessings are spoken as the new wife is received in her new home should be encouraged as they mark a closure to singlehood and a beginning of extended marital relationships of acquiring mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law.

Conclusion

Conclusions on the "Missionaries' interactions with Nandi cultural marital practices" based on a historical survey of ecclesiastical preferences practiced Christian Church Missionary groups, suggest that the issues of concern in the Nandi marriage did not necessarily stem from Scriptural interpretation but were mainly ecclesiastical, of personal choice and preference, and as such needed to be appraised on individual merits based on principle.

The conflicts observed seem to have stemmed out of the missionaries' negative preconceived notions about the Nandi people and Africa as a whole. I have argued that if efforts were made to try and understand the Nandi marital practices then this history and experience would be told differently.

One can see that Western Christian missionaries' impact on Nandi marital cultural practices has been limited by the vitality of traditional Nandi culture. So that Komo's (2005, pp.13-14) statement that, "the missionaries and Churches' insistence on monogamy in the middle years was an unreasonable obstacle to evangelism," is true of the Nandi situation. The Western Christian missionaries' position on Nandi marital practices did not root out the Nandi marital cultural practices but encouraged the Nandi to stay away from and even reject Christian ways of life. The Nandi cultural practices and ways of life have been and still are a challenge to the traditional Western Christian idea of marriage, to the extent that there were and there still is an on-going dualism in the Nandi Christian's religious beliefs.

This is not just a Nandi Christians' problem, rather it is an African Christianity situation, in general, which may be regarded as an amalgamation of Christianity and African Traditional Religion where the Nandi Christianity draws from both the Western Christian faith and Nandi Traditional Religion for some ethico-spiritual principles. This is based on the fact that Western Christianity has about twenty centuries of sustained presence among the Nandi and qualifies to be in the criterion of indigenous or traditional Nandi religion (Mokhoathi, 2017, p.4). However, many people are caught in between tradition and Western Christianity, and Christianity proper. Where Nandi Christians live with one leg in the Nandi way of life and another foot in Christianity.

Time has come for the Church in Nandi to realize that the Church needs the Nandi community of Kenya with the Nandi religious riches (Heally & Sybertz, 1996, p.65). There can be no doubt that by and large Christian missionaries among the Nandi in the 19th and 20th century took very hard lines against polygamy.

It should be noted that the dilemma of the Church on the issues of cultural marriage begs for empathy and understanding from the Western Christian Church and the Nandi culture as well, calling for mutual respect, understanding, tolerance, and some level of freedom, liberation, and genuineness (Adamo, 2011, p.1).

The proposed approaches towards a Nandi Christian marriage will need the support of the Church and the Nandi community opinion leaders to enable blending in of the positive and relevant pro-family Nandi values that can be expressed within Christian marriage to accommodate communal practices without sliding into syncretism.

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