

Effects of Religious Dissociation on Evangelization and Discipleship of Women in Woman-Woman Marriage among the Nandi people of Kenya

*Lagat Daniel K.
Moi University*

Abstract

The Great Commission to make all nations as the Disciples of Christ is still alive today as it was when made by Jesus 2000 years ago. The challenge to performing this duty is however, hindered by denominational policies and theologies established by missionaries, who sometimes had little understanding of the Kenyan varied cultures, and which have been continually implemented by the Kenyan leaders without critique, for they were assumed to be the only way scripture ought to be interpreted. Barrenness is one of the issues that have concerned the Nandi people since time immemorial. To take control over the issue where a woman become unable to get children of her own, she would be masculinised- becoming a man, and taking a wife. The new wife would bear children who belong to her female husband. While this arrangement is socially acceptable, the women and children born in this arrangement go through the prejudice of religious dissociation, because of the adultery tag attached to them. The study sought to find out how religious dissociation as practiced by selected denomination in Nandi County has affected the attitude of those women and children towards God. The method used was ethnography. Key informants were 16 women and 9 children, all selected from woman-to-woman marriage arrangements, and who were accessed using snowball technique. Additionally, 3 church leaders and one community elder were interviewed to give expert information about study. The study found that the underlying assumptions of woman-to-woman marriage were land ownership, inheritance, wealth security, preservation of family name, shelter for children born out of wedlock, and the social standing of barren women. The study also found that women and children have gone through sad experiences due to religious dissociation, for example their children were not dedicated to the Lord while young. As a result, many members in these arrangements, endure church membership, are not sure of their standing before God, and most prefer to stay out of church, rather than face the embarrassment. This paper recommends a proper African Christian Theology to help Christian denominations in Nandi address this problem in a way that will affirm a biblical position and enable women and children in the woman-woman marriage to exercise their faith God in a fulfilling way.

Keywords: *Religious Dissociation, Biblical Interpretation, Woman, Theology, African, Culture, Nandi, Christian fellowship, Barrenness.*

*Names used with asterisks are pseudo names, used for ethical reasons; to shield the interviewees.

Introduction

The challenge of evangelizing the world and making every willing soul a disciple of the Lord cannot be overemphasized. There however lies some challenges in various but specific circumstances, where Christian denominations have erected walls that bar even 'would be' disciples from entering the LORD's sheep pen. Among the Nandi people of Kenya, barren women who participate in the traditionally accepted mechanism of overcoming the ignominy associated with barrenness; end up being barricaded from accessing complete acceptance as being part of the body of Christ. Several church denominations have made policies that disadvantage them, making them to feel at home more in the cultural religious rituals, than in the body of Christ. The Biblical interpretation of the meaning of marriage is when one male husband gets united with one female wife, each leaving their parents, and they become one flesh, according to Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:22-30. This paper uses this understanding of marriage as a basis for any critique. This was an ethnographic cross-sectional study, which involved in-depth interviews with key participants accessed through snow ball method in Nandi County, Kenya. This paper looks at the Nandi understanding of the problem of barrenness, how this problem was addressed culturally, why missionary denominations barred affected parties from fellowship, and a discussion on the need to develop a relevant Christian theology to correct the problem.

Barrenness is one of the issues that have concerned the Nandi people since time immemorial. Just like in many African societies, the birth of children 'should be a woman's crowning glory' (Achebe, 1958, p. 54). The Nandi society view children as completing marriage, source of self-esteem and happiness.

As is the case also in the Old Testament thought, Nandi construction of children in marriage, is that they 'are the crowning glory of marriages' (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2007, p. 438). In a circumstance where couples fail to get children, the Nandi people do not stop, but have mechanisms to try to correct this situation. This assumption and expectation that every woman has have offspring is the motivation force behind these efforts.

In Nandi community a barren woman was traditionally allowed to get married to another woman, in order to bear children. As Oduyoye observes, the 'quest for a child of one's own,' has left some women with traumas (Oduyoye, 1999, p. 112). Nandi people have tried to control this by allowing the woman to marry younger women to fill the gaps. In this arrangement, the newly-wed bride is given a man (secretly), sought out for, and brought by her woman-husband, and gives birth to children that are only known as the children of her female husband. This was to ensure that family lineage continued, and there was someone to inherit property.

The Problem

The needs of a barren Nandi woman, in the context of Nandi worldview of wealth inheritance, have never been addressed adequately by the Church in Kenya. The Church's attitude that opposes this traditional mechanism has further aggravated the problem, making it even more difficult to convince barren women that there is a place for them in the Church. The practice is regarded as sinful by the church, because it means children will be born in an arrangement regarded as adultery. Even the children born in this arrangement are not regarded as legitimate in the church. The young married woman will not be accorded the respect of a wife, and the children do not get dedicated as infants because they are illegitimate.

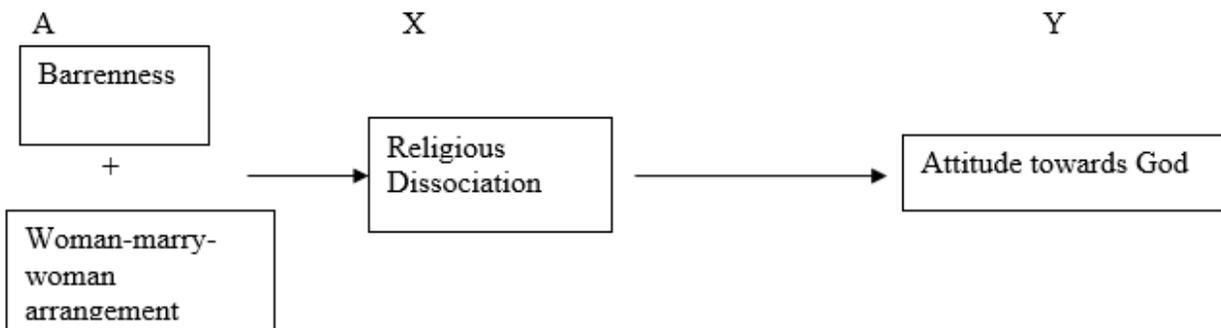
This leaves the woman and her children unsure about their future journey of faith; making it even more difficult to convince barren women that there is a place for them in the Church. Most denominations have no thought-out plan on how to address the needs of these women in relation to church rituals, and no mechanism on how to address their children born out of existing traditional mechanism. As a result, over the years, these women together with their children remain in a position of ambivalence, some opting to stay out of church, or live a life of pretence. This study investigated how the treatment of these women and their children by the selected Christian denomination affected their attitude towards God.

Method and Objectives

This was an ethnographic cross-sectional study. All the research participants were purposefully selected and were accessed using snowball technique. In total, 16 women were interviewed, and 9 children were interviewed (in-depth interview). All members participants selected were either church members or were registered church members at some point. This was to ensure that the objectives of the study were met, to find out how religious dissociation affected their attitude towards God. Three church leaders were also interviewed to get the official position of the three leading denominations: Anglican Church, Africa Inland Church and Roman Catholic. The central question of this study was to find out how religious dissociation of women and children in woman-marry-woman arrangement as practiced by selected denomination in Nandi county, has affected the attitude of those women and children towards God. Specifically, the study seeks to find:-

1. What are the underlying assumptions woman-marry-woman customs in Nandi culture?
2. In what ways have the attitudes of women and children in woman-woman marriage arrangement towards God been affected by the practice of religious dissociation?
3. How have the selected denominations constructed the religious position of women and their children in woman-marry-woman arrangement of the Nandi culture?
4. What is the applicable proper African Christian theological guidance on how Christians should treat children and women in woman-woman marriage custom?

Causal Diagram



As shown in the diagram above, barrenness together with woman-woman marriage arrangement result to religious dissociation in some denominations. Religious dissociation is a situation where a religious adherent is side-lined, relegated, or relieved of duties and roles, as a result of perception that this person is in an unacceptable religious standing or status. This person does not enjoy full rights and privileges of their denominations, and in some instances, is further not recognized as a member.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on ideas of Judith Butler (2004) who perceives the phenomenon of gender as a social construct that is constructed through performances of roles. Butler argues that gender is manifested in how individuals style their bodies and present themselves; and also in the ways they speak and move. It also includes performance of responsibility roles, as expected by the society. Gender can be deconstructed and reconstructed to fit new contexts and circumstances, contrary to sex which is fixed. Butler's theory of performativity helps us to understand how female and male characters perform their gender through their repetitive actions and how these actions in return construct various forms of masculinity and femininity. In this article, women take male roles in Nandi, and assume masculinities, performing the roles that create and sustain perception that they are masculine.

Findings

I. Underlying assumptions of woman-marry-woman custom in Nandi culture

Woman-marry-woman relationship is done in pursuance of a range of social, economic, and political interests. Although this paper examines the Nandi case, it is interesting that the practice is also practiced by people of other ethnicities. For example, among the Kisii, woman-woman relationship was sometimes practiced, but for other reasons, as Nyanungo explains:

The Abagusii people of Western Kenya have a slightly different form of women marriage. An example of woman marriage among the Abagusii would be where a mother with only female children marries a woman for a fictitious son (Oboler, 1980). In patriarchal societies, daughters or their offspring cannot carry on the family line – that is the preserve of sons. In such a situation, a woman who has daughters only, fears risking everything due to the absence of male heirs to perpetuate the family name and inherit the family wealth.

To resolve this dilemma, a woman without sons may marry a young woman with the expectation that she will bear a son for the family. The purpose of the union is therefore to provide a male heir for the family.

The woman that gives bride-wealth takes responsibility for, and has rights over, any children born by the bride. The biological father will have no rights over the children. This kind of marriage is classified as woman marriage although it is done on behalf of a non-existent son. Single mothers in Western Kenya are said to view this as a good alternative way of obtaining economic security and social acceptance when they have children out of wedlock. (Nyanungo, 2014, p. 2)

The female husband in Nandi is far from the idea of lesbianism in the western thought. However, gender roles shift, so that the masculinised woman behaves and act as a man, taking stewardship, figurehead, decision maker and liaison leadership roles, just like any man would do as the head of a family. In fact, as Herskovits points, “[a]ll ceremonial aspects of these marriages are observed, bride wealth is paid to the girl’s father, and all rules of divorce in the society apply (Herskovits, 1937, p. 335). They are even allowed to attend male ceremonies and perform the rituals that are traditionally performed by men. The wife may have children with any man she wishes, or a man chosen by the female husband, but the legal and social ‘father’ of the children will be the female husband. The giving and receiving of bride-wealth accords the female husband the same rights over the children as any other husband. According to Joseph Arap Korir* (interview):

The masculinised woman would be allowed to attend male initiation ceremonies, and talk with men, who would even be naked. Traditionally she would be perceived as another man, and not man in his right senses would ever think of having sexual intercourse with her. She would even use male statement such as “ooh” while addressing other men.

The study of various cultures and cultural practices reveal how different people act, and how they respond to certain problems. According to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), “Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual material, intellectual and emotional features of society, or of a social group and that it encompasses in addition to art and literature lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.” In the case of Nandi culture, marriage of one woman to another is acceptable in certain circumstances, as will be discussed. This marriage falls outside Kenyan constitution assumption and stipulation of what a marriage should be. Section 3(1) of the Marriage Act No.4 [2014] defines marriage as “the voluntary union of a man and a woman whether in a monogamous or polygamous union and registered in accordance with this act.” The following are the findings of the underlying assumptions in Nandi culture, of what and why women sometimes marry women.

Gender and Land Ownership

In Nandi thought, a land could only be in the hands of a man, who would hand over to sons. According to Joseph arap Korir, a well informed and respected elder, women could not be owners of land. Until as late as about two decades ago, the society did not conceive of the possibility of women owning land. He affirms:

I led three societies when we came together to buy land from the White Settlers. It is only men that would meet. We would bring our money together and once they were enough, we would go to Uasin Gishu, check the lands that were available, and take the money to town to pay, depositing the list of our names in the hands of the lawyer or the DC. In all the lists, there was not a single name of a woman. Even in extreme conditions when it was necessary for a woman to buy land, a ‘reputable’ woman would register this land in the name of her husband, father or brother. When a woman had become a man, when she had been allowed to get married, she would be socially accepted to own land. (Interview with Joseph arap Korir)*

This position by Arap Korir* was confirmed by several other people interviewed. It means therefore that the change of condition from woman to female husband also included the change of gender roles. From that time, this woman could be perceived as a man, in relation to land ownership. This position has been reported also by another scholar, Oboler (1980). She reports that Nandi female husbands are considered culturally men, and given masculine roles, traditionally given to men. She would therefore not be expected to fetch water, cut grass, milk the cows, or cook. Instead, she will be sitting outside with male guests, and the wife will serve them food, and collect utensils (p. 77). She affirms

[A] female husband is socially considered to assume the conceptual male role upon marriage to her wife. This is done in order to avoid the confusing situation which would arise in a patrilineal and patrilocal system whereby women have no right to land or inherited property. By conceptualizing the female husband as a man, the community recognizes that she possesses what are traditionally considered to be male rights, particularly in situations where property and inheritance are involved (Oboler, 1980 in (Cadigan, 1998, p. 2)

This thus confirms the place of land in the practice of masculinisation of women. A woman, who had been accepted as a man, would receive new gender roles.

Inheritance of property

Property inheritance stands as the biggest motivation for woman-woman marriage among the Nandi. All the women interviewed indicated in one way or another that they entered into this cultural arrangement because they wanted someone to take over ownership and management of property, and to preserve the homestead in the same or better way even after their death.

Tapshargaa* indicated:

I opted to take this woman as my wife, when Mzee (her former husband) died. I told myself [sic], “why do not I make my home warm?” “Who will take care of this whole land, when I go?” I figured out that the sons of my co-wife were looking jealously at my farm, and I am sure, they were plotting to take over if I were to die. I resolved that I needed my own children to take over my own land. I married.

In this case, sons were greatly desired, since they would be the ones to remain at home, as girls would move away to other homesteads if they got married. An ordinary Nandi man would always subdivide his land equally among his wives, irrespective of them having children. The one who was not able to get any child would then begin thinking of how to bequeath that property.

Security of wealth

According to Bot-Agui*, women who do not get children among the Nandi, and who normally would have wealth, get worried when they approach old age, of who would take care of the wealth. Any homestead was expected to have men being around. A childless woman would always be alone in her homestead, and nobody would be there to watch the cows at night and provide general security against the threat of rustles and other enemies. In that case, the lonely woman would opt for marriage, in order to have sons born into her family. Sharing her experience, Bot Agui* reported:

My husband had given me land in Kapkangani. In that place cattle rustling was a menace. Lemek¹ would come at night and steal my cattle. I became an easy target, for their spies must have told them that there was nobody in my house; just me, a woman. I decided that things would not continue like that. I asked my brother, who was at Kaptebee to find for me a wife. He brought this woman from there, and we got married in the traditional way. We now have four adult sons. I left three in that land in Kapkangani, and now I am living with this wife and our last-born son here. I bought this land about 10 years ago.

¹ Either Luhyas or Luos. The Kalenjin use of the term Lemek includes wither or both ethnicities.

As it can be gathered from this quote, security of cattle, and security of land in old age is assured the birth of sons. Bot-Agui* in this story certainly settled down in her mind once sons were born. She is even peaceful to leave her land under the possession of three of her sons, and she moves on to buy another land where she lived together with his wife and their last-born son. It can be gathered also that a masculinised woman got right to buy land at will.

Family Name Preservation

Preservation of family name was highly prized. Among the Nandi people, a name was inherited and preserved by sons. In the case where only girls were born, one would be asked to remain at home and have children. She would be free to marry one man and live together in the home of the lady. In some special circumstances, like in the case of Bilora*, she was asked to remain behind, for she had been born alone. She tried to have children of her own, for a long time but in vain. Her parents were getting old, and desperate. They had land and animals. They did not have children and were considered the neediest family of their time. Some relatives had donated sons, to take care of cows, but would recall them frequently for certain reasons. They were not reliable. She decided (with the help of her old father) to marry a young mother, who had a son already, but who was not married. They performed the normal engagement talk and dowry negotiation. She got a wife, who bore eleven children, five sons and six daughters. She was happy their family had gotten a name.

Shelter and Home for Children born out of wed lock

Milka* is a woman that entered woman–woman relationship as a wife. She already had a child born out of wed lock while she was still an unmarried girl.

Her case was somehow special, because she had been impregnated by her brother, who had slept with her forcefully without knowing. Milka* did not want to reveal her identity, when her brother found her at night in his *singiroino* (hut). Milka had come to that hut based on an arrangement she had made with her boyfriend, who was supposed to collect her from there. Unfortunately, her brother also came to that hut. He took advantage of her thinking that she was an ordinary girl occasionally brought by his friend. He expected to meet his friend, but when he entered the bed, a woman was lying there already. He quickly sprang to action, not giving Milka time to explain who she was, and what she was doing there. She conceived. As expected, she was going to be an outcast and her child would not be named. While she was still pregnant, she accepted to be circumcised, which would give her chance to win a suitor. In her heart, she was targeting a female suitor, the only who would accept an outcast like her. She got one. After the delivery of her son, he was happy for her son would be named by the female husband's family, after circumcision. He later was given the name, Arap Kogo. For Milka, this arrangement solved her problem in a way that no other arrangement would have done, during that time.

Social Standing

In another interesting scenario, as gathered from an interview talk with Mzee Joseph Korir*, whose sister became a husband of two wives, show that ordinarily, a wealthy woman would just opt to become the man, and marry a wife or wives for prestige. Apparently, the Nandi construction of gender differences, placed masculine as being superior to the feminine.

It was normal therefore for a woman to be beaten, sent home to her parents, denied rights, insulted, and forced to perform demeaning tasks. Korir further points that a man would be respected, never beaten, always right, and must be respected. A man would be free to go anywhere and during any time.

A woman needed permission to go anywhere and could not be allowed to spend the night anywhere else, unless with express permission from her husband. A wealthy woman, who would not like the normal humiliation by a male partner, would choose to become the man herself, and take a woman as a wife. According to Eskridge (1993), this form of woman marriage is known to be practiced among the Lovedu of South Africa and the Igbo of Benin and Nigeria. What is similar in these cases is that a female monarch often referred to as the Rain Queen or a wealthy woman, would take many wives as a symbol of her prosperity and social standing. It happens also among the Kamba, as Kimutu (1994) observes. He notes, “when a woman marries an *‘iveti’* [a wife], she becomes highly influential, esteemed, respected and raised above other women because she virtually assumes the status of a [male] husband.” (Kimutu, 1998).

II. Religious Dissociation and Attitudes towards God

Experiences of Religious Dissociation

This part of the study was majorly explorative. The participants interviewed in this section were selected based on their membership in a church, either presently or in the past. This was a basic criterion for determining whether they would be allowed to participate in the study. Those who said they did not go to Church were not interviewed further. Instead, the research participants only talked to them on other issues, for the purpose of getting from them assistance on whom else, was in similar arrangement, and was attending a church.

The participants who shared that they attend (or attended) churches, were also asked to name their denominations (with assurance that their names and those of their churches will not be used in any demeaning way, but just for academic purpose). To implement this promise, the following section will be presented, without specifically mentioning which denomination does what.

Participants were asked to share their lived experiences in the church, and how they felt they were being side-lined, relegated, disallowed to participate in certain rituals, disengaged from the main denominational activities, or treated in special ways, in which they felt their social esteem were injured in one way or another. From this study, the following observations were made:

a) Infants not dedicated in the Church

Some participants claimed that their denominations did not dedicate their children to the Lord, a ritual usually performed to other infants. Some of them claimed to have been told that the church requirement was for a married man and his wife to bring their children to the Lord for dedication. In the case of woman-woman arrangement, the church could not accept the female husband, as they would normally treat men. One participant, who happened to have been the wife in one woman-woman arrangement confessed:

When the secretary announced that people should bring their children for dedication to the Lord, my daughter was present. She asked me in the evening what that meant. I did not know, but I had to say something. So I told my daughter, that dedication to the Lord meant that the minister was going to pray over her, and ask God to bless her; and yes..... that her name and image will be shown in God's television in heaven. My daughter became very excited about this. She reminded me every day of the week. I wanted to pretend to be sick so that I would not go to the church. I did not know if we would be accepted, especially because Gogo here (female husband) does not go to church. I however decided to go. My daughter was well dressed, and she joined the rest of the girls that were being prepared for the ritual. They played together outside the church. I sat quietly in the pews, prayerfully, hoping that the day would end well. I was only thinking of her. Then the time came, and they read out the names in the pulpit.

The name of my daughter was missing. I think I had not even been consulted on whether I had children also. I could guess why. But I did not ask. The secretary seemed to have felt a bit embarrassed, when all the parents that were seated with me went to the stage to be prayed for, and I was left alone. He came to talk to me, but changed his mind, and called me to follow him to the office. Some elders were called to talk to me. They told me that my children could not be dedicated, because the church regulations (utaratibu) could not allow. They kept on telling me “even you know... even you know... even you know...” I felt like telling them that I do not know, but I kept mum. I still go to church, but every time they do rituals I excuse myself and stay at home with my children.

As can be seen in this encounter, women and children in woman-woman marriage go through experiences that can be termed as gruelling. They literally have to endure going to church, for within the church, they felt rejected, out of place, and unaccepted. Some people in the church could ‘try to act as good neighbours’ but as one research participant says, the church regulations are stringent and rigid.

b) Membership in Women Fellowships Disallowed

Other research participants claimed that they were not allowed to register in their denominational women fellowship programs, because they could not meet the conditions. In their denomination, the condition was being a wife of one man, having wedded in the church, and having been baptized and partaking Holy Communion. One participant said:

In my case, I could not meet the condition. Our marriage arrangement cannot pass the test... we could not do a church wedding... we could not be baptized as they thought I was living in sin.

This reveals the difficulty that even church leaders go through, especially since they understand the Nandi culture, and how such arrangement are acceptable traditionally. Implementing such a policy in the church, which is against some people in such an arrangement, must be tough.

c) Insensitive Communication

Some participants reported that sometimes they go through embarrassing moments when they go to church. This is because people generally assume that every child has a male father, and every married woman has a male husband. Other women are culturally husbands, but some pastors do not know. According to one research participant, some preachers, especially those who like asking people questions have embarrassed her. One day, she says, a pastor targeted me for questions.

It was a seminar, and he kept on asking me how I treat my husband. The whole church felt for me, but the pastor could not read the signs that he was crossing boundaries. He thought I was just an ordinary shy woman. For me that was too much, because the church knows that in my marriage I am the husband.

As can be gathered in this incident, women in the woman-woman arrangements seem not ordinarily expected to be in church, because the conversations are skewed towards the conventional marriages. According to other participants, their children also go through similar embarrassing moments in churches, when they are taught about a father being in heaven, and then asked questions to talk about their fathers on earth.

d) Exclusion

It was also gathered in this study, that members of woman-woman marriage are secluded from the rest of the laity, often done unconsciously. For the case of Mike, he felt that that even the special treatment that was well intended, ended up injuring him. He understands that people are trying to be kind, but in giving him special treatment, they were in fact affirming their view that he was different and odd. He points out:

I stopped attending any church. The last time, I attended a service... it was a Christmas celebration. In our church there were many activities, some were contests. Now in this contest, I had participated where people were expected to recite memory verses, and the best person would earn sweets. I was still in Sunday school. I did not win. Some boys and girls won presents, and then we were told to go back to our seats. One of the leaders saw me and called out aloud to the one giving people sweets. He said I should be given whatever remained... together with the carton. He said aloud, that people should understand that I am not like 'their' own children, that I needed to be taken care of, more than the rest. I was given some sweets..... there were still a lot in the carton wrapping. I took it all. The rest of the children looked at me, now with a lot of sympathy. They did not even ask me for a share. I explained this to my Gogo (Female father), and she told me never to attend that church ever again.

From this encounter, it can be said that special treatment has negative ripple effects on the people. While the treatment could be meant to communicate care or concerned attitude, it actually could lead to relegation or sidelining.

Effects of Religious Dissociation on Attitudes towards God, Evangelism and Discipleship

As discussed above, dissociation of women and children who are not in the recognized husband/wife marriage affect their attitude towards God and make evangelism on people of these arrangements to be almost impossible. Sometimes the attitude is directly towards the church, and their conduct is indirectly towards God. In other circumstances, the attitude is just on self, and the ripple effect touches on their church attendance. In all these situations, the spiritual lives of these people, and their relationship to God is affected in one way or another.

As can be interpreted from the discussion above, some people have stopped going to church, because of how they were treated by the church members. They find that staying out of church is more comfortable. The church environment is not conducive because they are constantly reminded sermons, interactions, rituals, and practices that they do not belong.

Although they never get chased away from the church, the way they are treated make them to prefer to stay away

Secondly, it can be interpreted that some of the people who have gone through religious dissociation have low self-esteem, and do not perceive themselves as being created in the image of God, just like everyone else. Based on the confessions of Milka* above, she continued going to church, even after her children were not dedicated, but developed a notion that her children would not be on the same plane as other children. This means that the treatment directed at her had affected her understanding of humanity and the position of a human being before God.

III. Religious Position of Women and their Children in Woman-Marry-Woman Arrangement

The denominations in this study were Anglican Church, Africa Inland Church, Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal Assemblies of God and Reformed Church of East Africa. These are the only denominations mentioned by the respondents as being the churches they attend. Membership was as indicated in the table below:-

Denomination	Number of Respondents
Anglican Church	9
Africa Inland Church	8
Reformed Church of East Africa	4
Seventh Day Adventist	3
Pentecostal Assemblies of God	3
No Denomination mentioned	1

From this table majority of people attend Anglican Church and Africa Inland Church. Reformed Church of East Africa and Seventh Day Adventist had 4 and 3 respondents attending, respectively. Pentecostal Assemblies of God had 2 participants attending. There was one participant who did not indicate his denomination, because he was interviewed to shed light on the Nandi culture, in relation to his sister who got married to two wives. The leadership of these denominations were interviewed to shed more light on their denominational construction of the religious position of women and children in this woman-woman marriage arrangement.

Generally, the leaders interviewed in this study pointed to the biblical direction of dealing with adultery, scriptural reference dealing with children born out of wed lock, and the desire of the church to act as a guide to the society.

Details of specific churches are not discussed here in respect to research ethics, since the people interviewed did not speak the official positions of their denominations. One example is however discussed here, because the respondent indicated that he knew the correct position and was in the right position to communicate the position of the church: Africa Inland Church.

An Africa Inland Church clergy was interviewed on the doctrines of his church in relation to children and women in woman-woman arrangement. He said that the church constitution does not discriminate against any children. The tradition of the church however dictated that only married women would join women fellowship (Ushirika wa Wake Wakristo) and only the children of married couples would be dedicated. This tradition was first practiced and instituted by a respected former leader of the church: Kimnyigei. Anywhere in among the Nandi people, any ritual is done as he (Kimnyigei) would do. The original idea behind these practices was to protect the church from infiltration of evil practice.

It is believed that Kimnyigei instituted such traditions to declare the position of the church against adultery and marriage practices that unbiblical. According to this clergy interviewed, Kimnyigei was a puritan, who made great effort to keep the church clean. The measures taken were not in any way a judgement on the fate of women and children in woman-woman arrangement.

IV. African Christian theological guidance on how Christians should treat children and women in woman-woman marriage custom

The spread of good news of our Lord Jesus Christ has always to be the priority of every church. Evangelical Christian theology in Africa can only do it with faithful adherence to accurate exegesis of scripture only. However, the application of correct interpretation will always be varied, in faithful conformity to proper hermeneutics.

Secondly, evangelization in Kenya has to put into consideration the fact that God reaches out to individual persons, in special circumstances, requiring diverse methods, but without compromising the God's inspired word (II Tim 3:16-17). The death of Jesus on the cross, which brought forgiveness of all humanity must be made meaningful to the Kenyan people.

Christianity came to Africa as a missionary religion and was packaged together with the culture of the missionaries, some which are not congruent with African culture. Professor Tite Tienou observed, "there was a conflict between Western civilization and indigenous forces, and then exposes the tradition in missionary thinking which saw a dichotomy between the "civilized" West and the rest of the world as 'primitive' and 'pagan'" (Tienou in Parratt, 1997, p. 91).

Some people in Africa, for example the Nandi people dealing with barrenness, find it difficult to abandon this cultures that they consider meaningful.

This section seeks to find out if it is possible for a modern theologian, to repackage the gospel to the Nandi mind, so that it is free from Western culture, and is acceptable to the Nandi person, without compromising the word. . As Professor Tienou argues, the focus of theology should be on the African present, and on its transformation by a full commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. There should be an appreciation of traditional thought without actually returning to the indigenous ways. According to Richard Gehman (1987), “Christ must be presented in a manner that is both true to scripture and meaningful to the people.” (p. 1)

This section is interested at finding out from scripture how the Christians should provide for Nandi barren women to continue having family continuity without compromising their faith. John Parrat (1997) thinks that it is ironical for there to be theologians in Africa, who cannot come up with African Christian theology that address African problems.

Foreign-born theologies are sometimes inapplicable to African people because they ignore aspects such as the world of the “Spirits,” aspects of commonality between Biblical Christianity and the African culture, values, liberation, women experience, Christology from the African perspective, praise names, cross atonement, salvation, initiation and community.

The growing number of African scholars should then rethink the Christian theology, with a focus of theology on the African present, and on its transformation by a full commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, not returning to the indigenous ways.

First and foremost, African theologians should be cognizant of the fact that most missionary denominations were planted with the worldview of the West. According to Parratt (1997) there are numerous instances where fundamental aspects were lost in the presentation of theology, as was presented.

The existence of mutual support between the missionaries and the colonialists portrayed an image that Christianity was a White man's religion. There were even instances whereby the missionaries tended to devalue traditional African culture and especially to dismiss traditional religion as heathen/pagan. The following are some of the aspects that could have been understood better by the African Christian, if the presentation had included the view of African thought.

Secondly, development of African Christian theology should have a place for values. The Nandi practice of woman-marry-woman arrangements were done because of certain values. Bishop T. Tshibangu observes that there are values in African culture that augur well with Christianity, and should have been developed for better adaptation to Christianity, instead of rubbing up everything African. Such values are like respect, the concept of life-force, the centrality of marriage, and solidarity of the community in the African worldview.

Tshibangu also believes that Christianity should also get involved in social and political lives of African people. In that case, understanding of Nandi woman-to-woman marriage should be done in that light, especially taking into consideration the idea of family continuity in marriage.

Thirdly, development of a theological guidance should include the aspect of liberation. As seen earlier from the interview findings, most Nandi women believe their barrenness was a punishment of some kind, and the traditionally accepted mechanism of dealing with that, was understood to solve the problem of childlessness, and to cure the family from the past curse of some kind. Children therefore brought a feeling of liberation. According to Desmond Tutu, Christian Theology in Africa should not neglect the liberation aspect as this matter significantly in restoring the spirit of worship.

When Christians therefore frame a theology to address woman-woman marriage, it should be born in mind, that unless the idea of childlessness is dealt with in some way, the barren women will still feel bound.

According to Isabel Apawo Phiri, any African Christian theology should put into consideration women experience. She says there are many aspects of women perspectives and experiences that are missing, consequently making the presentation of theology that require those perspectives and experience to be remain wanting. Proper understanding can be attained only if those theologies are revisited and reworked by African women with grounding in Theology. This is especially significant for the Nandi woman marriage as it involves women. Most of the theologians would be men, who may assume that their experience is the same as those of women.

Fifthly, the idea of Christian community should also be considered. Irene John opines that a correct Christian theology ideally should help build a community of believers.

The concept of “community” is missing in many African Christian churches of missionary origin. In the case of the Nandi woman-marry-woman experience discussed earlier, many women and children in this arrangement thought that they were being sidelined, relegated, or unwanted in the church. A proper Christian theology should put this into strict consideration, for the will of God is for all Christians to feel included.

Lastly, there is need for incarnation approach to doing theology among the Nandi. The idea of incarnation follows the example Jesus that Jesus set to take the form of a human, aptly presented by Paul in Philippians 2:5-11 and John 1:14. Even Paul in his ministry revealed his strategy: to become everything possible in order to win converts (I Corinthians 9:22b).

We must employ the use of all resources, for example languages, skills, positions, cultures, to “become everything to the Nandi, in order to win even some to faith. However, this should not be done at the expense of faithful exegesis of scripture and proper contextualization. Care should be exercised to avoid syncretism. In the instances where there will be deficiencies in linguistic categories and cultural background, they must be completed by the biblical truth.

All the above should be done in methods that glorify God and are hermeneutically correct. Scriptures chosen for reference should be inductively studied and not diluted. The message, in the process of contextual communication, never must be diluted in its content. The faithfulness to the Scriptures must be our priority like Paul who spoke of the resurrection of Christ at the Areopagus, although knowing that it would be a controversial theme for the philosophical belief. Furthermore, there is need to use Nandi symbols. The use of symbolic cultural terms that explain the biblical truths may be employed if they present clearly the relevance of the Gospel.

Paul made use of the ‘unknown god’ starting from this socio-cultural element to explain, with clarity, the truth of the Gospel. In other times he did it starting from creation, or from the contrast between God and the gods worshipped, and from the human tension between life and death. The priority should be given to scripture. The Gospel must be explained starting from itself and not from the culture. The content of the Gospel is not negotiable.

When Paul speaks to the Jews about the Messiah and presents Jesus to them, He is there on a secure track of contextualized communication. However, his desire to create a favorable atmosphere for communication does not make him minimize the more confronting truths, that would lead him to be expelled, ignored and questioned later one. Finally the aim should be conversion of the people in this customary arrangement.

The expected result of the contextualized presentation of the Gospel is the repentance of sins and a sincere conversion. Any presentation of the Gospel that leads a person to feel comfortable in their sinful state is certainly inconclusive and partial. Paul leaves this very clear when he explains to them a transforming and liberating Gospel.

Conclusion

This paper has addressed the issue of barrenness that led to woman masculinisation among the Nandi people of Kenya. The study has shown that there are underlying assumptions such as gender conception of land ownership, property inheritance, wealth security, preservation of family name, shelter for children born out of wedlock, and the social standing of barren women. These factors have led and motivated barren women to seek solution to their childlessness by marrying younger women to help them get children of their own.

The study also demonstrated that many women and children go through gruelling experiences in their churches, because there is no proper theology that has been done to make them acceptable.

As it is, they are treated either too cautiously, or in demeaning ways, which make them either endure their church membership or leave church completely. For example, some women claimed that due to religious dissociation, their children were not dedicated to the Lord when they were young, but instead set aside with no clear explanation.

These actions left made them look odd ones out. This paper recommended a proper African Christian Theology to help Christian denominations in Nandi address this problem in a way that will affirm a biblical position and enable women and children in the woman-woman marriage to exercise their faith God appropriately. For example, proper exegesis should be done, in light of Nandi values of community and continuity.

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