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Constructing the Meaning of Childlessness within the Luo Community of Western Kenya

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the issue of childlessness among the Luo people of western Kenya through the prism of the Church and indigenous culture. Generally, the knowledge people have of certain things is always as a result of what the society attributes to the phenomena in question. The society gives names and meaning to various things. Sometimes the meaning of a particular phenomenon varies from one community to another. There are certain things that one can only understand the meaning if the person belongs or perceives the meaning within the context of that particular society. Childlessness is one terminology that may seem quite obvious to many people, however, according to the Luo community, this term goes deeper than just having no child. The findings are part of a larger study that was done in Western Kenya, through a cross-sectional field research. The study targeted Catholic childless couples, Priests, Catechists and Small Christian Community (SCC) leaders. Samples for the study were drawn from these target groups using snowball sampling for childless couples, purposive sampling for priests and catechists, and, systematic sampling for SCC leaders. Primary data was collected through in-depth oral interviews and Focus Group Discussions. The secondary data was obtained from the published articles, textbooks, Church records, diocesan archives, pastoral letters and papal encyclicals. The data was coded and analyzed thematically and presented in a descriptive form using narratives. The findings of this study were that, childlessness has a deeper meaning than having no offspring. The study recommends that when approaching issues of childlessness among the Luo people, it is important to consider their worldview to avoid misunderstanding.

Keywords: Kenya, Childlessness, Luo Community, Western Kenya, Construction, Church

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Background

Childlessness is the state of being without an offspring. It results from infertility/impotence of either of the couples. It is the expectation of every couple to reproduce. When they do so it becomes a sign of fecundity. Freedman (1968, p.371) defines fecundity as: “*the capacity for reproduction while fertility as the actual reproduction*”. Fecundity is actualized in giving birth. According to Banzikiza (1985), fecundity is broader in meaning than fertility, but in most cases the two may be used synonymously. Morell (1994) like many authors similarly understands childlessness as having no offspring. She therefore talks of voluntary or intentional childlessness, where couples choose not to have children. However, this could be due to some socio-economic factors as some people perceive children as burdensome and too expensive to take care of. Some look at children as a disturbance to their marriage and peace.

Chamie and Mirkin (2012) equally consider childlessness as a lack of a child. They argue that voluntary childlessness is where couples opt to delay childbirth or may decide not to have children due to economic reasons, high unemployment rates, education and career ambition. According to Steinhauer (2013), in Switzerland, to be childless means not having a child. There are cases where couples choose to be without children. Even in such circumstances such couples are still said to be childless. Mariette (2012) corroborates that Canadians equally view childlessness as having no offspring. She says that the 2011 census showed that, 44.5% of Canadians are not having children. This is mainly voluntary which is due to the current trend, economic and social reasons. Morell (1994) points out that in western countries involuntary childlessness is common. Yang and Rosenblatt (2008) in their study among the childless couples of Korea, view childlessness to be a situation where there is no child.

Inhorn (2007) in his study among the Muslims found that childlessness is equally viewed as having no offspring. Given that the Muslims are pronatalists, they highly value children and parenthood is desired and culturally mandatory. Thus infertility is an issue that is looked at with a lot of concern and among Muslims. Rabia (2013) corroborates this view and argues that the childless couple prays to Allah to give them children and also can seek traditional medicine.

Among the traditional African communities, marriage was cemented by the birth of a child. According to Kimani (2001) in some African communities, marriage was nullified under two conditions, when either the woman failed to conceive or she was not a virgin. The African communities had a lot of value for children. Mbiti (1969) argues that for an African to die without getting married and without children is to be completely cut off from the human society, to become disconnected, to become an outcast and to lose all links with humankind. Marriage and sex were held sacred because the future of the community depended on them.

Kimani (2001) argues that sexual activity in the African communities was restricted within marriage because it was the only way of perpetuating the community. He observes that to African people, sex was more than sexual intercourse. Apart from procreation, it was also the means of sustaining, maintaining and extending the clan and the society. In many African communities, sexual activity was not geared for pleasure but was done because of the desire

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to have children. Kenyatta (1970) emphasizes that for the Kikuyu of Kenya, the desire to have children is deeply rooted in the hearts of men and women so that on entering marital union, they regard the procreation of children as their first and most sacred duty.

Among the Luo of Kenya, marriage and begetting of children is equally important. Everyone is expected to marry and those who are not married are despised and ridiculed. Mboya (2001) explains that a virgin who died would be buried outside their homestead; and before the burial after the grave had been dug, an old woman came to break the hymen. Then the wedding songs were sung as if she was still alive and was getting married. This was to avert the possibility of her spirit coming to disturb those still alive. In the same vein, Mboya (2001) argues that every young man or woman growing would be looking forward to the day he/she would be married. The father would even urge his son who had attained the age of marriage to look for a wife. He would advise the son on which family to marry from. An unmarried man would be despised and referred to as *misumba* which literally translates to a servant or slave, meaning that one who did not marry had no status within the familial or societal matrix and would only be compared to an outsider-a servant.

The importance the Luo attached to children made barrenness to be considered an evil. Childlessness affected the very existence of the community since it was perceived as interfering with the normal flow of life (extinguishing the fire of life). The whole community was disturbed when a couple did not have children. In traditional Luo community the couple would be helped through a diviner. In most cases, polygamy would be recommended. Nwoye (2007) supports this argument that, polygamy was connected with barrenness of the first wife or with her one-dimensional reproduction of only female children in marriage. The above literature indicates that the meaning of childlessness among the Luo and even other African communities is more than just lack of an offspring.

This study was specific to the Luo community because, preliminary findings discovered that the Catholic Church's perception of childlessness do not accommodate the Luo worldview. This results to agony and dilemma to the childless couples who adhere to the Catholic faith.

The Meaning and Causes of Childlessness among the Luo

Theoretical Perspective

Bram (1985) did her study on couples who were voluntarily childless and those who delayed to be parents. She studied their attitude toward children and parenthood, self-image, marriage, lifestyle and goals. According to her, childlessness means those who have remained without children. She discovered that those who delayed to have children ended up having children. She further says that there are divergences in the development of attitudes among the childless men and women in regard to the meaning of childlessness and the value of work. This study is relevant because it gives the meaning of childlessness but this meaning is inadequate according to the Luo understanding.

Kawango (1995) in her study of health problems of mothers and children, their causes and management, found that one of the problems the Luo women faced was infertility. She describes infertility as the inability of women to conceive and bear children. This infertility she says has several causes such as: sorcerers who either tied the womb of a woman or bewitching (*ndagla/nawi*). The other cause was the spirits of the dead who would also refuse to open the womb of the woman if they are offended by the woman or one of the couple, thus making the couple childless. If the parents of one of the couple were witches, then the spirits of the people that they killed turn to their children and thus cause the misfortune. Breaking of

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taboos also caused infertility for example when one married a blood relative then they would not be able to bear children.

Kawango (1995) also observed that sub-fertility would also occur if the wife had a child out of marriage and the tradition of *kalo nyathi*, (where the parents of the child place the child between them on their bed sometime after the delivery). If the baby was conceived on another bed or is of another man, either the child would die from *chira* or the mother would stop having more children. This was to check on unfaithful women. The last cause of infertility was genetic or hereditary. Couples who were having a childless member in their family also turned out to be affected by the same.

Kawango (1995) further admits that a childless woman has an exasperating struggle since she is rendered dead because she has no offspring. She outlines the taboos a woman should observe during pregnancy like avoiding sexual intercourse especially outside marriage since it leads to miscarriage. They also need to wear protective charms. She observed that the expectant women consulted the Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA) especially in cases when they have abdominal problems. The study is from the perspective of health. She studied childlessness from the perspective of infertility and as one of the health problems facing the Luo women. Her understanding of childlessness is the absence of a child or children. However this definition is limited according to the Luo understanding.

Reed (2008) in his study was interested on how voluntary childless men define and construct the meaning of family life, how they make the decision to remain childless, the reaction they receive to this decision and the impact of their childless status to their identities. Most of his respondents had positive experiences with children and enjoyed children. When these respondents were asked the meaning of family, they thought of their parents and siblings. Most of his respondents defined family basing themselves on intimacy and they included other kin members. However, some of the respondents gave the definitions that fit the modern constructions of family that do not require a child. This work presents childlessness as the absence of children whether voluntary or involuntary.

Forsythe (2009) in her study on the social stigma and the medicalization of infertility was interested in examining the history of infertility and the changes that have happened over the years. She wanted to see if the situation of women's control and care of their health and bodies has improved, stayed the same or worsened. She observes that the concept of infertility has changed over centuries from being known as barrenness to being known as infertility, which is a medical term. She defines infertility as a situation when a woman cannot conceive after a year of trying without contraception or cannot carry a child to term. Forsythe (2009) further distinguishes infertility into two, which are, primary and secondary. Where primary infertility is when a couple cannot have a baby after a year of regular sexual relations without contraception and have not conceived before. While secondary infertility is where a couple has failed to conceive after bearing at least one child or has failed to carry a baby to term. This study indicates that people can construct the meaning of childlessness.

Ayayo (1976) in his work describes the social, economic, political and religious life of the Luo community. He shows the cultural norms concerning the traditional Luo marriages and the processes involved. He also describes the reasons that may make divorce permissible in the Luo community. He brings up issues such as impotence and infertility as reasons that may cause marriage to be dissolved and points out how the couples involved would be helped so as to save the marriage. He outlines the rights and obligations of a barren woman and shows that even though childlessness was not appreciated in the traditional Luo community, the barren woman still had rights and obligations. He does not explore much on childlessness but he gives the picture of the traditional Luo practices. Though Ayayo (1976) does not

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explore on the meaning of childlessness among the Luo, his definition of the term is that, it as a situation of lack of children.

The above literature gives a picture of both voluntary and involuntary childlessness. Voluntary childlessness is purely a matter of choice. While involuntary childlessness is caused by infertility. However, the context within which the Luo understand and define childlessness, and the causes attached to it is what the study intended to expose.

Methodology

The findings for this article are part of a cross-sectional study conducted from October 2011 to February 2015 among the Luo Catholic childless couples in Kisumu diocese, Kenya. The target population was Catholic childless couples, as well as Priests, Catechists and Small Christian Community (SCC) leaders. Samples were drawn from these target groups using snowball for childless couples, purposive for priests and catechists, and, systematic sampling for SCC leaders. Data was collected through in-depth oral interviews and Focus Group Discussions. This generated qualitative data that was transcribed, coded, analyzed thematically and presented in descriptive form and verbatim narratives.

Ethical Considerations in the Study

The consent of the respondents was sought before being interviewed and they signed a consent form. The information given by the respondents was emotive and confidential; therefore it has been handled discreetly without breaching confidentiality. In this regard, the real names of those interviewed are not used. The names of the childless couples used here are pseudo names for the sake of anonymity. This is aimed at concealing their true identity to avoid any embarrassment that may be caused by the information they have given.

Background Information of the Luo People

The Historical Origin of the Luo

The Luo are an ethnic group in western Kenya, eastern Uganda, Sudan and northern Tanzania. They are part of a larger group of ethno linguistically related Luo peoples who inhabit an area ranging from Southern Sudan (South Sudan), South-Western Ethiopia, Northern and Eastern Uganda, South-Western Kenya and North-Eastern Tanzania (Ochieng' 1974; Ogot 2009). William Ochieng' (1974) gives the origin of the Luo to have been around Wau at the junction of Rivers Meridi and Sue. Due to various factors such as wars, diseases, population pressure and others, the Luo migrated. Today the Luo are found in Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania and Western part of Kenya. This historical background is attested to by Ayot (1987) who confirms that the cradle land of the Luo is Sudan. They migrated due to various reasons and then found their way to Nyanza. The Kenyan Luo tribe is a subgroup of the larger Luo community that spans across Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, Congo and even Ethiopia (Ochieng' 1974; Ogot 2009).

B. A. Ogot (2009) affirms that the Jii-speaking peoples (Western Nilotes) originally were situated in the Upper Nile basin, from where they migrated due to internal conflicts, human population, ecological changes and other external factors. Gideon Were and Wilson Derek (1986) describe how the Luo infiltration into the Lake Victoria region began in 1490 and 1600. The Luo constitute the largest group of the Nilotic group in Kenya. They are called Nilotes because they were close to river Nile.

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Ojore (1995) describes the etymology of the name Luo. This is from the word *luwo* literally meaning 'to follow' and *lupo* meaning to 'fish' *Jo Luwo* would therefore mean 'those fond of following' and *Jo lupo* would mean 'those fond of fishing.' Therefore, these were people who were fond of following river courses for fishing and watering their animals. The Luo in Kenya are sometimes referred to as the Southern Luo. Ochieng' (1974), Ayot (1987) and Ogot (2009), record how the Luo settled in their current places after their migrations. The Luo currently are ranked position four in Kenya with a population of 4,044,440 (*The Kenya Bureau of Statistics census, 2009*).

The Religion of the Luo

The Luo are deeply religious people. This is evident in their meticulous rites of passages which they observe with rituals and feasting. These started from birth to death. To cite a few examples; People are discouraged from noting when a woman is pregnant for fear that problems might result from jealous ancestors or neighbors. Older women and midwives assist the woman throughout her pregnancy and in childbirth. The birth of twins, is believed to be the result of evil spirits, it is treated with special attention and require taboos (prohibitions) on the part of the parents. Mboya (2001) elaborates on the many rituals that are linked to pregnancy and childbirth.

Adolescence is a time of preparation for marriage and family life. Traditionally, girls obtained tattoos on their backs and had their ears pierced. Girls spent time in peer groups where conversation centered on boys and their personal attributes. Sex education was in the hands of older women who gave advice in a communal sleeping hut used by teenage girls (also termed as *siwindhe*). Lovers sometimes made secret arrangements to meet near these huts, although premarital sex and pregnancy was strictly forbidden (Ayayo, 1975). Luo initiation rite involved the removal of the six teeth from the lower jaw which they called *nak*. The Luo, however, did not adopt circumcision for men, as practiced in some neighbouring Bantu groups (Ayayo, 1976).

Death is characterized by many rituals and taboos. Mboya (2001) gives the various ceremonies that would be carried out in cases of death depending on the age, gender, status, place and the type of death. The Luo mourning ceremony, *tero buru*, is still practiced in some places. This is a unique, elaborate and dramatic ceremony that symbolizes the departure of a loved one. Since there are no initiation ceremonies in earlier stages of the life cycle, the funeral serves as the most important symbol for family and community identity. Burials must take place in Luoland, regardless of where a person may have lived during his or her adult years.

Another unique Luo custom is wife guardianship whereby, if a man dies, one of his brothers or close relatives "inherits" his widow and must meet all of her marital requirements. Funerals last for four days for a male and three days for a female. After the burial and expression of grief through speeches and viewing of the body, there is a period of feasting and celebration. After the funeral of a man, a rooster (which symbolizes masculinity to the Luo) is taken from his house and eaten by his relatives. This signifies the end of his homestead. When a new homestead is founded, a man is given a rooster from his father's home (Mboya, 2001).

The Luo believe that the ancestors reside in the sky or underground, from where they may be reincarnated in human or animal form. Ceremonies are sometimes performed when naming a baby to determine if a particular spirit had been reincarnated. The spirits of ancestors are believed to communicate with the living in their dreams. In the Luo religion, troublesome spirits could cause misfortunes if they are not remembered or respected (Ayayo, 1976). The Luo refer to spirits by the term *juok*, or "shadow." Ogot (2009) confirms that these

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spirits are not worshipped but they communicate with the living members of the society. He says that they are invisible though they see and hear everything that the living do and say (Ogot, 2009).

The Luo refer to God by many names that indicate his power. For example, *Were* which means "one certain to grant requests"; *Nyasaye*, "he who is begged"; *Ruoth*, "the king"; *Jachwech*, "the molder"; *Wuon koth*, "the rain-giver"; and *Nyakalaga*, "the one who flows everywhere." Prayers and requests are addressed to God by those in need of his assistance (Ayayo, 1975). Ogot (2009) also submits that the Luo believe in God who created the earth. He gives the other names of God used by the Luo like *Were Hagawa* or *Were Dibo* which are manifestations of *Were Nyakalaga* the only true God. This means that the Luo have only one God but these are different ways in which they understand God as expressed to them. The Luo practice various ceremonies and prayers to God for various reasons like peace, good health, and fertility among others. Ogot (2009) supports this argument and confirms that they had prayer meetings called *Lamo Mar Piyo Mach Manyien* (Prayer for lighting the New Fire), sacrifices for cultivation, peace prayers and thanksgiving at harvest time (Ogot, 2009).

The Social Life of the Luo

The Luo society is a patrilineal community, meaning that succession in the family is exclusively through males. Descent is patrilineal (traced through the male line) to determine kinship. They are exogamous, thus marrying outside one's clan and this enables them expand their relationship through affinity. They also have strong kinship and communal ties (Ayayo, 1976). Social relations among the Luo are governed by rules of kinship, gender, and age. Kin align themselves for purposes of exchange of goods, marriage, and political alliance.

The Marriage Customs among the Luo

Historically, couples were introduced to each other by a go-between commonly known as *jagam* in dholuo (Ayayo, 1976 and Mboya, 2001). The traditional marriage ceremony took place in two parts, both involving the payment of bride wealth by the groom. The first ceremony, the *ayie*, involved a payment of a token to the mother of the bride; the second stage involved giving cattle to her father. If the husband died during the marriage, his brother replaced him and continued with the marriage arrangements. Traditionally, marriage was considered to be the most significant event in the lives of both men and women. It was thought inappropriate for anyone to remain unmarried. Large families ensured adequate numbers of workers. The system of polygyny (multiple wives) guaranteed that all people married.

According to Ayot (1987) the Luo society puts a lot of emphasis on exogamy in marriage. The elders educate the young people the importance of the custom which forbids a man to marry within his own clan or among his relatives. Therefore, when a man is of age to marry, he would look for a young woman out of the clan. Once this was done, and a woman is identified then the marriage negotiations would start. In the traditional society, girls were taught on how to relate with men. Ominde (1977) says that pre-marital pregnancies were very rare in the past. This is because sexual relationships before marriage were prohibited. He says that virginity was highly valued during marriage and it was a source of personal pride and honour. This he says would motivate a young woman and the female relatives to work together through a rigorous sex education to safeguard the virginity of the woman. This is because the honour and pride was not for the woman herself but for the whole family that their daughter had integrity and was a woman of worth.

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The bride wealth was quite significant among the Luo. Members of the groom's family initiated a process of negotiation with the bride's family that may have unfolded over many years. Negotiations could be intense, and for this reason a "go-between", who is neutral to the interests of each family, was used. The Luo believed that divorce could not occur after the bride wealth had been exchanged and children are born. Even if separation happened, the couple could still ideally be considered to be married. Ayayo (1976) notes that if a woman wants a valid divorce, her father must return the bride wealth in a ceremony called *wero* (Ayayo, 1976).

Names are received through the male line, and after marriage women reside in the homesteads of their husbands. A married woman builds up alliances for her husband's family by maintaining strong relationships with her brothers and sisters who live at her birthplace or elsewhere. It is expected that after marriage a woman will bear children for her husband's lineage. Bride wealth, given by her husband and his family, contributes to the woman's ability to maintain ties with her own family throughout her life. By having children, a woman greatly enhances her power and influence within the lineage of her husband. As the children grow, they take special care of her interests. This contributes to solidarity between a mother and her children, and between children born of the same mother (Herbich, 2002, Ojore, 1995, Ominde, 1987). Sons build their *simba* (small huts) adjacent to the main gate of the compound in the order of their birth (Mboya, 2001, Ayayo, 1976). The husband builds his *duol* (hut for discussing issues) near the center of the compound.

Marriage among the Luo was essentially for procreation. Ayayo (1976) observes that impotence and infertility could lead to the dissolution of marriage but measures could be taken to save the marriage. In the study of Kawango (1995) that had been earlier reviewed, she noted how the Luo struggled with issues of infertility and the various ways in which they tried to remedy it such as consulting diviners.

The Study Findings

The Meaning of Childlessness among the Luo of Western Kenya

Childlessness is a phenomenon that confronts the Luo community with challenges akin to many other African communities. The couples interviewed in this study had been married from between 6 to 47 years. Their experience and challenges were quite varied depending on how long they had lived together as a couple. All the Focus Group Discussions of the Small Christian Community leaders affirmed that childlessness exists and there are terms used to refer to it such as *migumba* or *lur* which are derogatory. These terminologies refer to a tree or an animal that cannot bear fruit or an offspring.

The above is corroborated by Bennette (1972) who observed that in Africa, child bearing is necessary for a woman's mental health since a childless woman is looked at with pity as a tree without fruits. Dyer (2007, p.73) also explains that among the Chadians, there is a proverb which says: "*A woman without children is like a tree without leaves*". Nwagwu (2008) too confirms that childlessness is a reality which is challenging in many marriages. She says that in Africa, childlessness is considered an evil because the fertility of both male and female is seen as a blessing.

SCC leaders from Nyabondo Parish observed that childlessness among the Luo is not only in the fact that the couple have no children, but the birth of only girl children is still considered as childless (FGD conducted on 11/4/2012). A catechist of Ojolla Parish submitted the following on the birth of female children:

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It is not just being childless that the Luo community does not like. Some do not appreciate female children. This happened to me since I had only girls. My family pressurized me to have another wife (oral interview on 27/3/2012 at Ojolla Church).

Field data indicated that some of the couples who had only female children resorted to polygamous marriages so that they could get sons. The case of Peter Okello and Martina Auma who had only one daughter is an example that suffices to describe this option. Peter sadly said that:

God blessed us with a baby girl and that was all. This caused the two of us a lot of worries in the house. Living without children is not a good life. This issue troubled us until we sat down and we agreed that I marry another woman (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor).

Research findings established that having only one male child could warrant a couple to be considered childless. This was the case of Japheth Owino (oral interview on 22/2/2012) at Ojolla Karateng'). He said that having only one child is like having one eye, and that, according to the Luo, one eye is considered dangerous. One is expected to have many children such that even if a misfortune strikes, one may still remain with some children.

Among the Luo and in most African communities, female children are not considered to be equal to male children. When one gave birth to male children then there was certain pride and contentment. Nwoye (2007) in his study discovered that African people would not be satisfied with a sonless marriage. He says that this would be a condition for interventive polygamy. This corroborates the sentiments of Martina Auma:

Among the Luo, a baby girl is like having no child. People want that you give birth to male children. They say *wuoy siro* (which literally translates as a boy is a pillar). If you have not given birth to a boy or boys, then it is like you have not given birth at all (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor).

Peter Okello the husband of Martina added that:

People believe that when you give birth to a girl, it is not enough. She will leave you when she gets married and you remain the two of you. This is why they call girls *ogwang'* (which means mongoose). You will need a son who will take over the home from you. He will protect your assets or to inherit your property. The son will perpetuate the home and your name (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor).

The priest of Aluor Parish in his pastoral ministry observed that the Luo people are not contented with the female children and they will do all that it takes to get male children. He reiterated that those who have female children are viewed as childless. He said this:

It is really hard not having a child and many people would find it quite challenging. You leave alone even the case of being childless, even the fact that they do not have a son. So if you don't have a child and majorly you do not have a son then this is against the custom. I have seen some women who

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are thrown out because of not having that ability to bear a son. And I have heard a situation where a man comes with another woman, sleeps with her in the sitting room and the wife is sleeping in the bedroom. This is because the wife has only given birth to girls. Thus not giving birth to a son is like having no children (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

Despite the fact that the traditional Luo community does not consider female children equal to the male ones, it should be known that female children are not less humans than their male counterparts. History has proved that female children are equally important and they play a big role in their families. There are great women in history who have done great things. In the Luo community we have Hon. Grace Ogot former Member of Parliament for Gem Constituency, the late Dr. Margret Ogolla a medical doctor and a great author, Lady Justice Effie Owuor among others. These and many other women have proved that the female gender should not be despised since they have great potentialities and are not “useless” as the traditional Luo community would depict. Despite the fact that there are such role models among the Luo women, this has not changed the perception of some of the Luo people on female gender. This is why some Luo parents may prefer to educate a male child at the expense of the female one.

The Importance of Children in the Luo Community

The Luo biases against female children prompted the study to dig deep into this reality and the study found out that a male child was considered important since out of them the clan would get warriors who would defend the clan and the family. Mboya (2001) supports this when he says that when a village went for *tero buru* (a pre-burial ceremony) in the enemy’s land, all the boys joined in with all the paraphernalia associated with the ceremony. These included shield and even spears. Japheth Owino (from Ojolla, Karateng’) had the following to say on the function of male children:

When there are male children in a homestead, no one would come to joke in your home or even start a quarrel with you since one would see that you have some sort of security. But if you do not have children or even if you have female children, someone can just come since they will not fear anything because the female ones may not fight back yet male ones would easily defend you (oral interview on 22/2/2012 at Ojolla, Karateng’).

Apart from being able to defend their parents, male children are also considered important because they remain in the homestead to take care of it when the parents grow old or pass on. While the female ones are married off to become part of another clan. The priest of Ojolla Parish confirmed this when he said that:

The male children are considered more important since they will take care of their parents when they are old. They also take care of the home when the parents are no longer there. If there is no one to take care of the home then that homestead would remain *gunda* (abandoned home) (oral interview on 10/1/2012 at Ojolla Church).

This was supported by another priest who pointed out that the Luo fear that their homestead should remain *gunda*. This is because the dead who are buried in the homestead would feel

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abandoned too. He says that this is the more reason for the Luo wanting male children since they would always be there in the homestead to keep it warm. The priest observed that:

The Luo have the concept of *kudho mach* (lighting fire) which is to be done by the living towards the dead. Once there are people living in the home they will be lighting fire as they cook or at the den of livestock or where they are seated in the *duol/abila* (a small hut in a homestead where the elders deliberated on issues). During these times even the dead will be feeling the warmth (oral interview on 12/12/2012 at St. Mary's Yala).

When the homestead is not abandoned then the graves of those who have passed on would be tended which is also an important aspect of the Luo culture which shows respect to the dead. This is viewed by Mbiti (1969) as the cult of the living dead. He points out that most African communities would take care of the places where their dead are buried. In some cases when they move to live in another area, they ceremoniously remove the remains from the graves to where they are going to live. Nwoye (2006) confirms that children are important for various reasons, for prestige, they help in the work for the family, they help their parents in old age and give their parents decent burials, they cement marriage since without them the marriage may be dissolved, they also protect and inherit the family property.

The SCC leaders from Ojolla Parish observed that children were important when they said that children protect the family by giving security, they give assurance to the family of life after death and finally some inherit the property of the dead relatives. The male children are also important among the Luo since they help in expanding the clan by bringing new members through marriage. When they marry women from various places, they expand the kinship ties. These women in turn give birth to children who would be playing in the home. As children play in the home, they give it warmth and the home becomes alive. Japheth Owino supported the above argument when he observed that:

When you have children, they play in the home and they give the homestead warmth of its own kind that may not be there where there are no children. Homes without children are cold and no child would come but if you have children, they will attract other children who would come to play with them and thus the home becomes lively and warm (oral interview on 22/2/2012 at Ojolla, Karateng').

The above reasons therefore made the Luo people have preference for male children over female children. This has affected the Luo worldview to date. A couple that bears female children only consider themselves childless. There are people who would still have a big problem when they have only female children because of the above issues. The perception of the society and their own future fears would not make them feel insecure.

Apart from the importance of male children which makes them be considered over their female counterparts, generally children are very important in Africa and specifically among the Luo. Children among Africans and specifically among the Luo are very important for several reasons. The catechist of Ojolla confirmed that: "*Children are so important to a family, they help the parents in old age, they inherit their property and they make the family tree be perpetuated*" (oral interview on 27/3/2012 at Ojolla Church).

The catechist of Nyabondo also observed that children assist their parents especially in old age or during illness or when one is infirmed. This is the worry of majority of couples

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when they do not have children. When they do not have children they know quite well that they must rely on their own even when they grow old. This causes them great anxiety. The value of children among Africans is explored by Osaso (2006) who in her study cites how the importance of children in the Bukusu community made it difficult for the late Maurice Michael Cardinal Otunga to choose priestly celibate life. Given that the Cardinal was the son of a paramount chief, he was expected to start his own family to perpetuate the family of Sudi the great chief. The late Cardinal narrated how it took him quite some time to disclose his desire of being a Catholic priest to his father. Even after disclosing to the family, his decision was met with a lot of resistance.

In another FGD in Ojolla, they discussed that children are important and they are a source of joy to a family. The catechist of Rang'ala commented on the importance of children saying:

Among the Luo, the reason for marrying and being married is to have children. Children are the joy of the family. Without children, a family is not happy and sadness is experienced in such homes (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

Majority of the respondents agreed that children are a great source of joy to the parents. The SCC leaders in their FGD's observed that most couples who are childless are always cruel and unhappy, they often quarrel children. Nwagwu (2008) points out that children are the welfare of the society and social security of the parents and other close relatives and that is why they are treasured. She says that: "*Children are of immense value and pride to an African family, they are the joy of parents, the glory of elders and the hope of entire community*" (p. 139). Dyer (2007) too supports the argument when he said that children give women social security, for this reason the women really value their children since without them there is no security, joy and happiness.

The priest from Yala supported this argument by saying that:

There was a man who was living with his grandchildren. He kept on complaining that the grandchildren were troublesome and spoiling his property. He called the parents of the grandchildren to come and pick them and they ended up remaining the two of them, him and the wife. After a couple of days, he started complaining that the home is dull and quiet. He ended up recalling the grandchildren. When the man was asked why he needed the grandchildren back, then he said that he has come to realize that the noise that the children make is the joy of the home (oral interview on 12/12/2012 at St. Mary's School Yala).

The priest argued that children are important since they are the joy of the family. He observes that children give happiness to the parents and most couples without children are always sad. Ogola (1994, p.100) argues the importance of children when she presents Nyabera having a great dilemma between adopting the new religion by accepting baptism and levirate union which would enable her to get children that she needed so much. She says that: "*children were a consolation, laughter and security, children were everything*". Blankson (1999) supports this argument saying that in Ghana, children are referred to as the cloth of the body, without which one is naked.

The above observation is supported by Dyer (2007, p. 75) who argues that most of the people agree that life without children is unhappy, not worth living and unfulfilled. He says

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that: “*Homes without children are homes without pleasure and happiness*”. Umezulike and Efetie (2004) also observed the same thing among the Nigerian barren women, that they felt angry, sad and felt that infertility was life’s worst experience. Nwoye (2007) reinforces the importance of children in a marriage. He says that children become an investment for the parents since when they grow old; they have those who would take care of them. This is always the fear of childless couples. Their worry is always about the future, how they will cope with old age without anyone to assist them. This view is confirmed by Osaso (2006) who clarifies how children were the only visible way to prove that a family was having a future (immortality). She continues to argue that: “*Everyone recognized that an individual was a full person when he/she married and got children*” (Osaso 2006, p. 13). This means that children bestowed some status to their parents because without a child, one would not be considered mature.

Clementine Odhiambo commented on the importance of children saying that:

A child is very important to the Luo people this is because children bind the couple together; they are a great source of consolation. If you cannot have one, you cannot live in someone’s home. They cannot accept you easily and if you live, it is by God’s grace (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

This was supported by almost all the SCC leaders in the FGD’s. They observed that children are the source of happiness of a family; they are the future of the family such that without them one is worried about the inheritance of his/her property. They observed that children are the ones who would make a marriage to have a strong bond. Mbiti (1975) agrees that children strengthen the marriage bond. They are the glory of the marriage. Without them the marriage may break up. Susan Achieng’ had similar sentiments concerning the importance of children when she said:

It is unfortunate that I still do not have one. But I think children are a great source of fulfillment to someone. As a woman you may have problems with your husband but if you see your children you get a lot of satisfaction and a reason to continue living with your husband (oral interview on 26/4/2012 at Rang’ala, Ugunja).

Other studies that have been done among peoples of other cultures found that children are still appreciated. Even though in some cultures today some couples would choose to be childless because of their own reasons, children are still important. This is confirmed by Yang and Rosenblatt (2008) who found out that even among the Koreans children are important. They believe that even those who chose to be childless feel guilty and sorry. Those who are childless deny their parents of the joy of being grandparents.

The study therefore revealed that the children have both social and religious importance. The priest of Aluor Parish said that:

According to the traditional Luo community, children are very important because of the aspect of the immortality that they give the parents. When the parents look at their children, they see the future and this gives them hope. In their children, they see people who would take the mantle of the family after them (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

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The above argument was supported by the catechist of Rang’ala Parish who observed that children are the future of the family. Without children, a family considers itself a dying family. Thus they have a religious significance. The same is corroborated by Caroline Akinyi who said that:

In child (ren) parents see their future so if you do not have a child like me, the future is shattered and it is quite sad. If I die today that will be my end. No one will ever see me again. But those who have children even if they die, they are seen in their children (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

Milka Achieng’ (from Ojolla) had similar views when she said that: “*A child is every woman’s joy and her future; if I had one, I would be having a bright future today, but since I do not have one, I know that I have no future*” (oral interview on 11/4/2013 at Ojolla, Kapuonja). This is supported by Mbiti (1969, p.134) when he said that children ensure that there is personal immortality. He said that: “*It is in one’s family that the living dead are kept in personal memory the longest, after their physical death*”. Mbiti further says that children are important since they are the buds of the society and that when a child is born, life springs up and the community continues to thrive.

The priest of Rang’ala in support of the religious importance of children among the Luo said that:

Africans and in particular the Luo, go into marriage, to have children this is because somebody want to get people who can take after him, people who can support him. Therefore everybody who goes into marriage has that deep within him, in the mind. The Luo set up is what makes the people to see it that way; that they need continuity in the family tree (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang’ala Church).

Dyer (2007) in the same line argues that in many African communities children have a religious importance. For example, he says that mature children would inherit the ancestral land and they also give their parents highly regarded funeral when the parents pass on. Among Africans, ancestors are believed to re-incarnate in the children. This is the reason for naming the children after the dead. It is the ancestors who ensure physical and spiritual wellbeing of the family and even fertility of the couples.

Mbiti (1969) also shows the religious importance of children since they would make one to live longer even after death. He observes that in many African cultures, a son who died before marriage would be helped so that he is not cut off from the chain of life by arranging for him a marriage “in absentia” so that children are born in his name to perpetuate his lineage. This is the same idea that Runganga et.al. (2001) found out among the Gambians, that, without children one will be forgotten, and those without children are equated to the dead.

Generally, the couples who did not have children had a feeling of sadness. They were not happy with their state since they lacked an important aspect of their marriage. Even though some were able to put up with their situation, they could not be compared to the couples who had children. They shared their unfortunate story and all of them were feeling bad about their situation which majority of them concurred was beyond their reach. This is why most of them said that they can only leave their situation to God; it is God who knows why they do not have children.

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Causes of Childlessness according to the Luo community

Some of the common causes of childlessness which were cited by the FGD's were: - *Sicknesses* which may invade home, for example, *sigete* or *rariw*, which is a disease that affects the reproductive system of both men and women. That such childlessness results from a sickness that affects one's reproductive system. Childlessness could be *inherited* from the family. These SCC leaders observed that some of the childless couples had some ancestors in their lineage that had no children. They also pointed out that in the contemporary society the use of *family planning pills* may interfere with the woman's hormones which in turn affects and renders an individual infertile or sterile.

The SCC leaders established that *chira* (ritual uncleanness) could result into childlessness. This could be due to neglecting some of the taboos concerning marriage. *Chira* could also be caused if the father enters the bedroom of his married son or even if the father is involved in sexual intercourse with the daughter-in-law. Also if a son is married, and the father has two wives and he does not go to the house of his son's mother. This affects the son and the son may end up not having children with his wife. Meaning that the parents should engage in ritual sex before the son and the wife could start engaging in sexual intercourse. It was established that may be it could be from the parents who may not have married in the right way and this causes *chira*. This could be that the customs of marriage are not adhered to.

Another cause of *chira* is when a young man engages in sexual union with women who are widows or married women. Such could affect this young man when he is married. This is because there are cultural regulations on engaging in sexual intercourse with a widow, there are also specific people who are allowed to have sex with the widows. It is a taboo for a young man who has not built his own home to engage in sexual intercourse with widows and women whose husbands have constructed homes. Ayayo (1976) gives the sexual taboos among the Luo in which he says that a young man is forbidden from having sexual intercourse with a woman whose husband had just died. The SCC leaders from Rang'ala observed that such a young man would *rocho kare* (which literally means interfere with his future life). If he did, then it resulted into *chira*.

Childlessness could also be as a result of a woman being *married in a "bad home."* Bad home was explained as a situation where one of the ancestors had killed people using *nawi* (sorcery). This may affect the descendants. Other causes of childlessness were established to be due to a *problem in the reproductive system* of a man or a woman. May be because of lack of "power" in men which may be because of *impotence*; could be there is lack of ovum in a woman or sperms in a man. Childlessness could also be due to *God's plan* or could be when a woman had given birth before marriage and *she threw the child away* or may be the woman had procured an *abortion*. Today there are many cases of drug abuse which may affect those who use them. Also those who contracted *diseases like syphilis* before they are married risk not having children since it affects the reproductive system. There are also cases where the ovum comes at the same time during menstruation and so this makes it difficult for a woman to conceive. Some couples may give birth to children but then they may again all die leaving the parents childless.

The SCC leaders also observed that childlessness could be caused by *witchcraft*. There are evil people in the African society who would not want other people to be happy and to live normally. Such people may use witchcraft and sorcery to make couples unable to bear children. This data is supported by Field (1960) who explains that among many African communities, childlessness was caused by witchcraft. This she says is the reason for these affected couples going to consult the diviners so that the diviners diagnose the cause and then assist the people with the problem. This scenario is also experienced among the Luo, one of

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the remedies that will be discussed later is that they visit *ajuoga* (diviners) to tell them the cause of their problem. These diviners are able to reverse the witchcraft and the couple can have children.

Other than the above causes of childlessness, the SCC leaders of Aluor Parish said that when the *blood of the couples* does not rhyme then they may end up not giving birth. Dutney (2007) also points out that one of the causes of childlessness would be if the *ancestors are not pleased* with certain rituals in the community. He says that the problem of childlessness has socio-religious dimension. They are caused as a result of *breaking the social norms* which in turn have some religious implications. Mariano (2008) also consents with the causes of childlessness as presented from the field study; he points out that childlessness could be due to *punishment inflicted by the spirits of ancestors* for bad behaviour or deviating from the rules or customs. This is seen from the findings as presented by the SCC leaders especially when they talk of the causes due to *chira*. It is believed to be a punishment from the ancestors because one has deviated from the customs or has broken a taboo. The taboos here are majorly sexual taboos. Given that the taboos are sexual in nature, the consequence is childlessness.

There are cases of unexplained causes of childlessness which have been on the rise in Kenya in the recent past. Akinyi (2012), in her study on infertility explores the possibility of being unable to conceive normally yet the woman is well and the man is also normal from the doctor's findings. She points out that such a scenario frustrates many couples since even the doctors may not be able to establish the cause. She points out that even doctors concur that unexplained infertility is quite disturbing for both doctors and patients. She reports that the situation is incredibly stressful for everyone involved. She observes that according to the fertility records in the country, unexplained infertility accounts for ten to twenty per cent of the couples with infertility. This argument is supported by Blackburn (2001) who says that in Britain 10 percent of cases of infertility, the cause is not known.

Women have been blamed for childless marriages and many women have suffered in such situations yet in reality men are also capable of being impotent and unable to sire children. Biologically it has been proven that men can also be the cause of childlessness in marriages. The male ego may not allow them to accept this fact. This is the reason for blaming women without any tangible proofs. In most of these cases, they do not have medical proofs since most of them do not seek medical attention. The fact that it is the women who carry the burden of pregnancy should not be the reason for blame if they are not seen pregnant.

Contrary to the popular African traditional belief that childlessness is due to barrenness of the woman, the study established that male infertility or impotence can be a cause of childlessness. The study therefore affirms that it is not only women who should be blamed in cases of childless marriages since men may also be responsible. The SCC leaders were in consensus that either the man or the woman can suffer infertility. These observations counteracted the biases of the Luo culture that put blame on women when cases of childlessness are experienced in a marriage. Burnett and Panchal (2008, p.188) concur with these findings and they say that males too can be responsible. *“Male factors account for 40% of the causes of infertility, female factors account for 40%, interactive factors account for 10%, and 10% of the causes of infertility are unexplained”*.

The study established that majority of the couples did not attempt to find out the cause of their childless marriages. Some of the couples when asked if they tried to find out the cause of their childlessness, they responded that they did not try to find out. The best some did was to seek traditional medication. Only a few had gone to the hospital and established what was

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wrong. Caroline Akinyi (of Nyabondo) is one of such women who did not seek to know the cause of her childless marriage. She said: *“We did not even try traditional medicine. We were just living in hope that one day God would remember us, but bad luck my husband died before God remembering us”* (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

Similar sentiments were echoed by many others like Leonida Ajuang’ (from Ojolla), Monica Awino (from Ojolla) and Tabitha Anyango (from Nyabondo). Tabitha indicated that they were not able to establish the cause of their childless marriage. She said that they were waiting to see how things would unfold for the better. She narrated the following:

We have not tried to establish the cause of our childless marriage. We just decided to wait if it is the will of God then he will give us a child. But this wait has been fruitless (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kodong’a).

Cleophas Okwiri and Janet Agutu (from Aluor) on their part admitted that they did not try to find out the cause. Their reason was more or less influenced by cultural undertones. Cleophas responded that:

It is because of ignorance, we did not know that it is possible to establish the cause. We were also convinced that the cause of our childlessness was cultural since I married immediately after the death of my father (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Kanyauma).

Tradition here seems to play a major role as per Cleophas and Janet’s argument. They believed that their problem was as a result of not observing the rituals after the death of a father. According to Mboya (2001), the culture of the Luo dictates that after the death of a parent, one is not to engage in any sexual relations before all the burial rituals are finalized, after which children of the deceased disperse from the home and can engage in sexual intercourse in the order of their birth starting with the eldest. If a younger sibling engages in it before the elder siblings then this brings a curse.

The study established that some couples were ignorant that they could find out the cause of their problem. Mary Auma and her husband Anthony Owino (from Aluor) did not bother to go for any medical checkup. Mary said: *“No, we never went to the hospital or anywhere to find out the cause of not being able to bear children. We did not know that such was possible to establish medically.”*

The use of traditional medicine was common among many women. This indicates that many of them attributed their state to some cultural reason. This explains why some couples were reluctant to go to the hospital to determine the real cause of their childlessness. Clementine Odhiambo (from Nyabondo) is among those who sought the help of traditional medicine. When asked if they ever tried to establish the cause of their childless state she said that: *“No I have not gone to the hospital. I was just drinking some traditional medicine but when it did not work I stopped”* (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo Dago). Monica Awino and Leonida Ajuang (both from Ojolla) admitted that they tried using the traditional medicine from a *nyamrerwa* (traditional healer).

Despite the fact that majority of the couples did not seek medication to find out the cause of their childlessness, the study also established that there are some couples who sought medication and they found out the cause of their childlessness. Maureen Atieno and Jacob

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Owiti (from Nyabondo) on their part went for medical checkup and they established that Maureen had a uterine problem. Maureen in tears narrated the following:

We went to the hospital and it was found that I had a problem with my uterus. I had to be operated on every time. I was told that there was a tube that was removed when they were operating me so I could not conceive (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kamgan).

Joseph Oloo and Anne Maria Oloo emotionally narrated how they tried to seek medication for their childlessness. Joseph said that:

When she miscarried, we went for the traditional medication. After that she started experiencing stomach problems and she ended up in Kenyatta Hospital. So at Kenyatta I do not know the kind of treatment she received which interfered with her. I do not know what the doctor may have done. When I saw what she underwent I told her that since she almost died, we leave that issue even if it is staying without a child. Till now we have not tried anywhere else (oral interview on 20/10/2011 at Rang'ala, Mudhiero).

The same was experienced by Rosemary and Gregory (from Ojolla). Gregory with a lot of pain had the following to say:

This problem has caused us a lot of pain and misery. We have gone to so many hospitals. If childlessness was treatable, we would be having children with Rosemary. But maybe this is what God wanted (oral interview on 11/4/2013 at Ojolla, Nyahera).

The study also found out that men were finding it difficult to go for medical checkup. Susan Achieng' (from Rang'ala) described how she had to plead with the husband Carillus Okoth so that they could find out the reason for their childlessness. She was worried since they were a young couple. She sadly narrated that:

We had been married for two years and got worried that we were not having our first born yet. When I asked my husband he told me that it is my problem because he knows very well that he is not the cause. This worried me a lot and I went to see a gynaecologist alone without telling him. The doctor told me that I have no problem and that I should come with my husband. When he accepted and we went, it was found that he had low sperm count. It really took him time to accept this. He even refused to use the remedy that the doctor recommended (oral interview on 26/4/2012 at Rang'ala, Ugunja).

This is the observation that Maseko (2009) makes in his study of the South African situation. He describes how culture has discouraged many males from visiting fertility clinics. This is in disguise that males are always fertile and it is the women who can be infertile or barren. Due to such a conception, many couples would still suffer silently even in situations where they would have been helped to get children. It would be in order for the males to come out of the cultural cocoons and accept that they may be having a problem. This would allow them to embrace new technological advancements that would help them to discover the cause of their childlessness and even give scientific remedies.

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Whatever the cause, childlessness is something that is quite difficult to put up with. This is the reason for many Luo couples seeking solutions from various places to remedy their childless marriages. The agony of childlessness is explored by Ogola (1994) who describes how Chief Owuor Kembo was under pressure to marry another wife since the wife was not able to conceive regularly. The wife Akoko had two children but to the clan this was not enough, they considered them childless. As a chief, he was expected to have many children. Ogola (1994) further presents the issue of the Luo culture on childlessness and how it disturbed the mother of Mark who had married Elizabeth and for the third year they did not have any offspring. This made the mother come to ask the son what was happening that they could not have children. She needed to see her grandchildren. This therefore proves that childlessness is a concern for the whole family and the community at large. This is not among the Luo only but in most of the African cultures as literature indicates. Oduyoye (1999, p.105) explains the importance of child birth among the Akan of Ghana. She says that: “*The seven signs of human well-being include the power to procreate*”.

In this section, the study undertook to find out the contextual meaning of childlessness and its causes among the Luo. The study discovered that childlessness is not only the state of having no child at all, but having a single child or even having only female children. This is contrary to the definition of many authors who have written on childlessness. They define childlessness as lack of children. Ram (2006) states that among the Indians, childlessness is complete lack of offspring. The study further indicates that childlessness is associated with the place of residence, religion, caste, standard of living and educational status, age of marriage, substance use and experience of sexual transmitted infections. The same view is held by Schoech (2012) who says that voluntary childlessness is not childlessness *per se*, but it is where couples are said to be “child free”. He further argues that childlessness is where couples are going through a biological infertility. It is a state in which they are in need of children but they cannot get them.

The study also found out that the causes of childlessness are enormous and that they are both natural and unnatural. There are some causes which are directly associated with the couple in which they are responsible while there are some causes that are beyond the couple. This is similar to Banzikiza (1995, p.13) who attributes barrenness to certain omission and commission in the marriage ceremony, malicious and angry human as well as spiritual agents and refusing to share bride-wealth to aunts and uncles. Some studies show that there are differences in the causes of childlessness. According to Ram (2006), childlessness among the Indians is associated with the place of residence, religious caste, standard of living, educational status, age at marriage, body mass index, substance use, and previous experience of sexually transmitted infections.

Summary

The study established that among the Luo, involuntary childlessness means more than having completely no child. Those couples having only female children or only a single male child are also considered childless. This is because male children among the Luo are preferred over the female ones and they are viewed to be of greater importance than the female ones. Having only one child is considered risky since if in any case the child may die, then one would easily become childless. Therefore among the Luo, involuntary childlessness is more than having no child. The study also established that childlessness has many causes such as witchcraft, curses, breaking of taboos, punishment from ancestors, and sickness among others. These causes are attributed to both natural and supernatural forces.

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Conclusion

Involuntary childlessness is broader in meaning among the Luo. It does not mean complete lack of children in a marriage. It could also mean having only female children or having only one child. The Luo find it difficult to appreciate female children only. When a couple gives birth to female children only, they still feel that they have not had enough. They would try as much as possible to have at least even one male child among the females. This would satisfy their desire because when the female children are married off, it is only the male one that would remain to assist them at home and to take care of the home. On the other hand, if they have only one child, then they find it risky since one child can die and they remain childless. The study established that childlessness is as a result of both natural and supernatural forces.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

1. Given that childlessness is more than having no progeny, the Luo understanding of childlessness ought to be put into consideration to avoid misunderstanding and misconception.
2. The Catholic Church ought to tailor their teachings to accommodate the Luo worldview to help find solutions to the pain and dilemma that these childless couples undergo.

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