



WOMAN TO WOMAN MARRIAGE: THE CASE OF FEMALE HUSBANDS AMONG THE AKAMBA OF KENYA

Nyamongo, G. B.

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Nyamongo, G. B.

Ph.D, University of Nairobi [UoN], Kenya

Accepted: November 22, 2020

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine woman to woman marriage relationships from the African perspective through interviews with women who marry other women ('female husbands') in the Kamba community of Machakos County. The study investigated the experiences and perspectives of women in woman to woman marriage and the importance of this form of marriage, reasons for its persistent as well as challenges and implications. Ten respondents were identified through purposive and snowball sampling procedures. Primary data was collected through questionnaires with the assistance of a local research assistant who also translated the questionnaire in vernacular. Data collected was analyzed and presented descriptively. The study found out that barren or sonless women opted to marry other women who already had children especially sons for the purpose of enhancing the continuity of a lineage. It was found out that female husbands controlled their female wives as they made decisions for them. The study also found out that the relationship between male lovers and female wives was temporary. It was further established that children in woman to woman marriage became legitimate heirs. The study concluded that both barrenness and 'childlessness' are persistent conditions which affect women. Hence, they had to devise strategies for redress.

Keywords: Akamba, Barrenness, 'Childlessness', Female Husband, Female Wife, Kenya, Sonless, Woman to Woman Marriage

CITATION: Nyamongo, G. B. (2020). Woman to woman marriage: The case of female husbands among the Akamba of Kenya. *The Strategic Journal of Business & Change Management*, 7 (4), 1462 – 1474.

INTRODUCTION

Woman to woman marriage is one of the indigenous marriages commonly practised in many patriarchal communities across the Sub-Saharan Africa such as: the Nandi, Gusii, Kamba¹ and the Gikuyu of Kenya; Igbo and Nnobi of Nigeria, Kalabari and Igbo of the Niger Delta, Lovedu of the North eastern South Africa, and Fon of Benin among others (Nyamongo, 2012; Kevane, 2004; Uchendu, 2000; Van Balen, 2008; Greene, 1998; Amadiume, 1987; Oboler, 1980; Le Vine, 1982; Krige, 1974).

Woman to woman marriage involves a female husband² (a woman who marries another woman); female wife (the woman who is married by the female husband); the male lover (men who befriend the female wives mainly for procreation and sexual pleasure); the children (of the wives—who are the main reason for this marriage). The purpose of this study was to interrogate the perspectives and experiences of the female husbands in a contemporary African society by answering the following questions: Why should women marry other women and there are available possible modern alternatives? What challenges do women experience in woman to woman marriages? What is the implication of woman to woman marriage?

In communities where woman to woman marriages are practised, a woman marries a wife (who has children) by paying bride price just as a man does and afterwards takes control over her wife as well as her children. The wife is expected to be responsible for all the duties of a wife. In this case, the woman who marries takes the overall responsibilities of a 'man'. For instance, among the Nandi of western Kenya, "a female husband is a "man" and behaves in exact accordance with the ideal model of the male role" (Oboler, 1980, p.70). Woman to woman marriage, therefore not only frees the female husband to turn to other

activities but it also elevates her social status in society. Although such a woman takes on the role of a husband, she does not necessarily engage in sexual intercourse with her wife as shown by some secondary data (Kjerland, 1997; Oboler, 1980; Telewa, 2012). The relationship remains mutually social rather than sexual.

In some African societies an elderly woman is culturally permitted to marry a wife if she is barren. Such a woman takes a wife (s) in order to continue her lineage through the children produced. Similarly, a woman with only daughters may marry a wife (s) so as to have male inheritors who will enhance the longevity of the female husband's lineage (Ahonatu, 2000; LeVine, 1982). In some situations, wealthy women (not necessarily widows or unmarried) would take more wives just as men do to gain prestige and social status (Herskovits, 1937; Nyanungo, 2014; Sacks, 1982). In all these situations the flexible gender system in patrilineal societies where woman to woman marriages are practised allow women to access and assume positions of power and authority which is normally the preserve of men (Amadiume, 1987; Oboler, 1980).

The value placed on children in all institutions of marriage in the African communities is the obvious reason for the existence of woman to woman marriages. In this case, a male child is not only considered a future heir, but principally as one who will eliminate irrational fear from women who believe their property and name will vanish if they die without future heirs. This is because traditionally inheritance has always been passed from father to son and never from father to daughter (Nyanungo, 2014; Uchendu, 2000). This explains why women will continue to experience uncertainty for being barren or sonless and hence blamed for birth deficiency. Therefore, women who are mothers and have no sons, become "targets of silencing and intimidation. This renders them powerless, helpless, and hopeless" (Caplan, 2012, p.83) in society. Consequently, such women can only become "perfect" after conforming to

¹ In this study the term Akamba and Kamba was used interchangeably to refer to the same ethnic community

² Female husband refers to the woman who marries another wife because of her status of sonlessness/childlessness

community norms and expectations of motherhood.

The persistence of woman to woman marriages in many African ethnic communities including the Kamba (Ngila, 2013) disregard other available possible solutions such as child adoption, 'child buying', and contemporary cure for infertility, traditional healing or polygamous marriages practised to address the problem of childlessness. Moreover, the endless search for the male child through woman to woman marriages among some ethnic communities in Kenya does not take into account the Kenya Constitution (2010) which is highly gender sensitive and girl child friendly in regard to allocation of resources. It is interesting that the barren/sonless women are still suffering from male child preference syndrome as a result of community expectations of future males heirs. Hence, such communities cannot abandon 'old' practices which are believed to provide quick solutions to their problem of 'childlessness'.

This sheds light about woman to woman marriage which is commonly practiced in African society as a mechanism through which women in oppressive patriarchal cultures device to access social power, rights and status so as to empower and position themselves in society. This study shows that in this female husbands also behave like male spouses in heterosexual marriages. Most importantly the study establishes and presents the challenges experienced by main actors in the marriage. While most studies have focused on male heirs as center of this marriage the current study shows various challenges experienced in this institution. This study is unique because it presents female husbands a controlling position on female wives and their male lovers therefore raising a question of sexual freedom in this form of marriage.

This study focused on a group of AKamba women in the Central Division of Machakos County. The Kamba is the fourth largest Bantu ethnic community living in the eastern region of Kenya where various forms of marriages including woman to woman, child, ghost, polygamy, monogamy,

Islamic and Christian marriages are commonly practised (Kyalo, 2011; Mbiti, 1975). For example, among the Kamba people, before marriage, a man pays a substantial bride price to the family of the bride. The husband is usually the head of the household, and the wife is responsible for all domestic chores as well as nurturing the family farm.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher accessed ten female husbands through a "snow-ball" sampling method that locates appropriate participants through contacts and references (Cottrell and McKenzie, 2005; I.Hall and D.Hall, 2005; O'Leary, 2004). The choice of a 'smaller' sample size was influenced by the works of Cottrell and McKenzie (2005), who advise researchers to choose their sample size depending on the nature of the study in terms of representativeness, manageability and reliability. Therefore, the researcher interviewed ten female husbands. Moreover, a small number of women engage in this form of marriage. The choice of a small sample was also supported by Davis (2007,p.139) who says that "working with a small sample of 5 and 20 is less problematic" and that small sample studies have a valid part to play in research. So they can be used"

This approach allowed the researcher to study participants within a liberated environment where they shared their own experiences and perspectives about their situations. This approach concurs with scholars who point out that reliable data may be collected by studying individuals or events through field research, and to allow researchers to present a broad view of their participants within a specific context (Hammersley, 1995;Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006).

The researcher engaged one male research assistant who hailed from the local community . Hence, he was able to locate the respondents since he was known to them. During data collection he also translated some of the interview guide into local language.

This study was based on Caplan (2000) theory of “Bad Mother Myth” where women are blamed or blame themselves for failure to be perfect mothers. In the African society, a childless woman is not only blamed for being barren but also blames herself for bearing children of the same sex. It is for that reason that ‘childless’ women, in some African communities, struggle to become “perfect mothers” through woman to woman marriages in order to meet societal expectations on motherhood.

‘outsider’ ‘insider’ approach

The author’s perspective on women’s issues was influenced through socialization into society. She observed the challenges that many women in her community (Gusii) encounter as a result of ‘childlessness’³. Yet, women hardly have adequate interventions to address their situation apart from turning to woman to woman marriages to address their problems of ‘childlessness’.

Her past personal experience in an African indigenous society and her familiarity with the group inspired her to establish more insights about woman to woman marriage relationships and, for future comparative research. Therefore, the study provides a platform for establishing and discussing the experiences and perspectives of the women involved in the advancement of woman to woman marriages from the African point of view. This study shows that women can devise strategies which can liberate them from societal cultural practices which play a big role in their subjugation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the following sections the findings were discussed and presented thematically. This was followed by implications and conclusion of the study.

Demographic characteristics of the female husbands

Accessible ten female husbands were purposively sampled for the study. The researcher first sought to establish the female husbands’ backgrounds in terms of their age, level of education, and their marital status and reasons for engaging in woman to woman marriage. Only one out of ten participants was above eighty years old. Five aged between Seventy and Seventy nine years old and four were between sixty and sixty eight years old.

None of the female husbands had any formal education. Of the ten female husbands, five were presently married, four were never married (they were single), while one was a widow. Prior to engaging in woman to woman marriage, three female husbands said they had daughters while the rest had no children. Meaning that, they were in a state which Van Balen (2008,p. 24) defines as “involuntary childlessness.” In the Kamba community, just like in many other African patriarchal societies, having a girl child only is not ‘enough’ to become a mother of future heirs especially where inheritance is passed from father to son. That is why it was critical to have a son who will not only be a future heir but also ensure the continuity of a lineage.

The issue of childlessness may be addressed by women differently depending on the individual’s social status. Female husbands were asked whether they had tried to address their problem before resorting to woman to woman marriage. Five of the female husbands said that they had first engaged in sexual affairs with a variety of lovers in attempt to conceive without any success; three tried traditional medicine for healing barrenness. One did not seek any alternative, while another one tried both modern and traditional medicine. Despite all these attempts, nothing worked in their favour.

This demonstrates that most sonless women had made some attempts to address their problems before opting for woman to woman marriage for the purpose of enhancing the continuity of a

³ In this study, childlessness was used to refer to a woman’s situation of barrenness or sonlessness.

lineage for the father or the female husband in the case of woman to woman marriage.⁴

Likewise, the prominence of male children featured among Jews. For instance, in the book of Genesis Sarah the wife of Abraham was so concerned about her childlessness to the extent that she gave her maid Hagar to Abram to bear a child on her 'behalf'. However, Sarah was not satisfied until she finally gave birth to her son Isaac (Genesis 16-18). Even though it was at an old age. A similar practice was found among the Yoruba of Nigeria (Herskovits, 1937,p.335).

Equally, a polygamous marriage did not solve women's issues related to childlessness. For instance, in a Jewish marriage between Elkanah and his two wives. Hannah's afflictions and humiliations from her co-wife Penninah who had children demonstrated that polygamy was not a solution to childlessness. For that reason, Hannah prayed to God so that she could bear a "man child" (1st Samuel 1: 11, 20). The situation was not different for Naomi, the wife of Elimelech, a widow whose two sons had died leaving behind childless wives. The main issue is that all the three women were childless. This prompted Naomi to address the issue of childlessness by introducing Ruth one of her daughter in-law to her kinsman Boaz who finally 'purchased' her (Ruth) to be his wife so as to enhance the continuity of Elimelech's lineage (Ruth 4:1-11). This kind of practice was also common among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria where families whose lineage were in danger of disappearance due to lack of male heirs (Zabus, 2008,p. 92). The aforementioned texts demonstrate that, childless women experience "social pressures of motherhood" as observed by Van Balen (2008:26) as well as the female husbands in this study. For that reason some married childless or sonless

⁴ Mbiti (1969:110), a renowned, African scholar from the Kamba community agrees that children are significant in marriage relationships. Consequently, he observes that a marriage "is not complete until the wife gives birth especially to a boy child..."

women in this study opted for woman to woman marriage instead of encouraging their husbands to marry other wives.

Reasons for not choosing alternative methods

Three of the five women who had spouses said that their husbands allowed them to acquire female wives for themselves as they believed that children born out of this relationship would benefit both of them. One of these respondents revealed that all her daughters were already married and her husband was not interested in marrying a second wife so he encouraged her to marry a female wife (also known as *Iweto*). The other two married female husbands explained that they feared that co-wives would not respect them so they opted to marry female wives (*Maweto pl.*)⁶. Moreover, they were encouraged by their husbands to take that option. Therefore, the marriage was sanctioned by their male spouses.

Female husbands were asked whether they were aware of the existing modern methods of acquiring children including adoption. Five out of ten female husbands said that they were aware of the existence of alternative methods but they preferred to marry their own female wives. They gave various reasons :

Female husbands did not opt for adoption for various reasons such as the phobia for adoption procedures and the character of the adopted child as well, there is no blood relationship, and that traditions did not allow such practice. Since woman to woman marriage is purposely for having more children, then female husbands preferred female wives because they could bring forth many children. However, other female husbands said that given an opportunity they could adopt children. The reason being, adoption was is a more friendly practice which is also acceptable by Christians. Nonetheless, female husbands are left with woman to woman

⁶ Maweto (Iweto sl) is a local term used to refer to the Kamba female wife. In this study female wives and Maweto/ Iweto was used interchangeably .

marriage as the only convenient solution to their problem of 'childlessness'.

Female husbands chose to engage in woman to woman marriage for three major reasons: Finding an lweto to sire children was the only solution to the female husband's barrenness or sonlessness.

Each respondent said that she needed a female wife to produce for her male heirs since they did not have their own and yet they had property to be inherited.

Since barrenness is not taken lightly by many African societies a childless woman may believe that after her death her lineage will cease. In the case of the Gusii of western Kenya, a childless woman feared the risk of being driven out of her matrimonial home by her kin upon the demise of her spouse. Similarly, among the Kuria, barrenness was not only feared but it was seen as a bad omen. Hence, children born in this form of marriage will ensure that a barren woman's name and lineage will continue to the future generations. Sonlessness means that a woman has no status in the community. Hence, according to the Kamba people female husbands believed that female wives will act as a sons (daughter in laws). For this reason, the female wife and her children are a source of security for the female husband.

Although female husbands mainly sought other women to produce children on their behalf for the purposes of inheritance and continuity of the lineage, there were also some gains accrued from the marriage. Female husbands concurred that their wives mainly performed the household chores, took care of them as well as farm activities, while others managed the family at large. Since some of the female husbands were aged while others were in poor health, the care they received from their female wives was so valuable. For instance, an 80-year-old Wanza confirmed that her lweto *"is the source of livelihood, she helps in farming and cooking our food. I am very peaceful. I always wake up a happy woman..."* The 69 year old Mwelu, added that her female wife was *"in charge of all*

activities including taking care of me, washing my clothes and taking care of my great grand children..." Generally, the female wives were responsible for other tasks that are usually performed by sons. Hence, they took on the responsibility of their 'invisible' sons.

The main benefit accrued from woman to woman marriages is children. Female husbands concurred that children brought them a lot of hope and happiness as Jane one of them expressed:

I am very happy now even when I sleep⁷. I now have children and a large family. Nobody will laugh at me...I know when I will not be there, my name will be there, and my name will live for long, through my grandchildren.

Another female husband, Mary (not her real name) concurred saying: *"we are happy now that we have children and they are happy for what we gave them. That is our property from I and my husband."* Although the benefits of having children were expressed in different ways, they all revolved around children being the source of happiness and continuity of the female husbands' lineage. As one of the respondents confirmed. *"Yes, the sons I have do take care of me very well and they have named their children after me and my husband."* The female husbands also showed their gratitude for having children who respected them as grandmothers.

Power relations in woman to woman marriage

The concept of power is important to interrogate as it has a strong bearing on relationships. Likewise, within a marriage relationship, power relations tend to influence people's behavior. First, it was to establish whether female husbands chose lovers for their *Maweto* or not. In response, one of the married female husbands said that she chose a

⁷ In this conversation, "when I sleep" literally meant when I die. In this context, the respondent believes that because she has acquired children her property and name will not disappear after her death.

lover for her *Iweto*. This concurs with some scholars (Nyanungo 2014; Njambi and Obrien, 2000) who point out that although female husbands chose lovers for their wives, children socially belonged to the female husbands and not the biological parents. Although such in some cases the chosen male lover was allowed to visit her freely. As Mweni explains:

the lover comes at night. He is a member of our family. We wanted a lover who hails from our line so that we can get close blood children who will bear our name and they will own our property...

The rest of the female husbands said that they did not choose lovers for their *female wives*. According to them, they gave their female wives the freedom to choose whomsoever they wished to relate with. This liberty was however, limited because female husbands did not allow male lovers of their female wives into their compounds which they shared with their female wives. Female husbands had powers to control the interactions of male lovers with their *Maweto*. However, only three female wives had their own separate houses but in the same compounds.

Restrictions for female wives

The practice of sharing residence in woman to woman marriage was common among the Gikuyu and the Nandi. However, in both cases female wives were not restricted to meet with their male lovers (Njambi and O'Brien 2000; Oboler, 1980). Nevertheless, among the Kamba, male lovers hardly visited female wives who shared residence with their female husbands. The female husbands did not allow their *female wives* to bring male lovers into their residence for various reasons. Those which commonly featured were that some of the female wives were related to the female husbands so socially they could not romance in the presence of their seniors. Additionally, they already had children so the female husbands did not see the need for female lovers (whose role was only associated with procreation). Moreover, it could

be disrespectful to interact with male lovers especially in the presence of grown up children.

The female husbands who had spouses did not encourage their female wives to bring their male loves into shared residence as this could be disrespectful to the male household head. However, some of the female husbands did not mind their wives secretly interacting with male lovers.

Magesa (1997,p. 126) believes that marriage is "meant to ensure procreation and the preservation of life" However, in this study, some of the female husbands assumed that their female wives only needed men to sire children. This was most probably based on the assumption by the female husbands that since the female wives already had children at the time of marriage they did not need men around them. It may be observed that female husbands did not recognize sex as a basic need as demonstrated by Abraham Maslow in his theory of the hierarchy of needs. Such female husbands, especially those who had spouses felt that entertaining male lovers in a shared residence with female wives was not only being disrespectful to the children but to their spouses as well.

Interestingly, some female husbands confirmed that their wives did not make any attempt to bring their lovers into their houses either because they already understood their female husband's attitude towards male lovers or because their houses did not have privacy due to lack of adequate space . The level of control over female wives by their female husbands shows a new phenomenon of women dominance over other women. It is evident that female husbands experienced powerlessness at the hands of fellow women.

The findings of this study showed that woman to woman marriage can only endure if such rules are observed. One of the female husbands said that her relationship with the female wife was very good. She gave the following reasons: she respects me (the female husband); she is young and treats me like her mother; she is like my own son; she

respects my decisions (which means she is obedient); she is very supportive; she gave me what I was looking for (meaning male heirs). This demonstrates a lopsided reciprocity in terms of relationship between female husbands and their wives.

Because of the unequal power relations exhibited by the female husbands, it was important to interrogate further the plans they had for their female wives' children. The female husbands were asked whether their grandchildren would live in their compound permanently or not. Seven, of the ten female husbands, said "YES" while the rest said "No". Those who said yes indicated that their female wives' children will live in their compounds permanently. They gave the following reasons: that was their home, they were their grandchildren and that grandchildren live with their grandmothers, once they are old enough to get married the boys will be shown where to build their houses. One of the respondents said that last born grandchild will permanently stay in the grandmothers' house.

However, the female husbands who said that the grandchildren would not live permanently with them indicated that they had allocated their grandchildren land upon which they would build and stay with their own families. This indicated that the relationship was permanent. Moreover, the grandchildren continued to live on the female husbands' land.

Female husbands made the following remarks: they were happy to have large families; they were happy to have grandchildren whose children will bear children who will be named after them (female husbands and their husbands as well); the grandchildren will ensure longevity of the female husbands' name. These statements, depicted the continuity of a lineage). As Mueni explains, "*my grandchildren are taking care of the me and their mother as well, they have children who have been named after us (both husband and wife), they now live happily on the property that we gave them*". This shows that grandchildren are a source of care. All the female husbands pointed out that, their

grandchildren, looked after livestock, helped with farm work, and generally cared for them.

Divorce in woman to woman marriage

All forms of marriage have rules which determine their existence. Therefore, woman to woman marriage is not an exception (Herskovits, 1937, p.335; Oboler, 1980,p.73). In this study, some (six out of ten) female husbands pointed out that they were too old to think of divorcing their female wives therefore, divorce was out of question. While the rest felt that bride price had been fully paid so it was not easy to dissolve the marriage. Furthermore, their female wives had brought forth children to their families. Some female husbands were living peacefully with their wives and so there was no reason for divorce. Kyalo (2011, p.87) observes that bride price was an important factor in African marriages and that "*it was not only a seal of marriage bond but affirmed the rights of children in a family*". Female husbands found it unacceptable to break up with their female wives and maintained that they will not break their marriage until they die. This concurs with Njambi and O'Brien's (2000) who points out that female husbands refused to listen to any gossip about their female wives in order to protect their marriages.

Female husbands said that they could divorce their female wives because of the following reasons: lack of respect, bringing male lovers to the compound when the children (grand children) are grown up, failing to produce children, not supporting the female husband, misusing female husbands' property, if children become unruly. Three female husbands explained that they could divorce their wives by simply telling them to go back to their parents if they did not obey them. This concurred with Oboler's (1980,p.73) assertion that "rules of marriage do apply". Which means when the contract is breached, then divorce was unavoidable.

According to the female husbands executing a divorce was not easy in woman to woman marriage because of age and the existence of children. It was evident that at the time of marriage female husbands were already aged and required to have

children around them. Hence, divorce could have negative implications on both parties. On the whole women in this form of marriage also faced various challenges.

Challenges in woman to woman marriage

Female husbands were happy because this form of marriage gave them children especially male heirs. However, they were pessimistic about the attitude of the broader community towards their female wives' children even though their presence was a solution to childlessness. The question on how 'children in woman to woman marriage were treated by the wider society. According to one participant, other women consider "these see them as children fathered by their husbands, they openly tell them to go and tell their mothers to stop that behavior, some women are kind to them". While the other respondent lamented that "men want to have sex with the girls even at early age, they want to sexually exploit them, they call sons names " *mbozwa*" meaning adopted child (negative connotation), mock the boys because of their *maweto* status". Similarly, according to another respondent, other children and peers in society called them names and considered them to have come from unwanted families.

Female husbands narrated how their grandchildren were teased by some members of society. According to the female husbands, even though they treated the female wives' children with dignity, other women in the society treated them grudgingly because they considered such children to be the 'products' of their husbands (male lovers). Even though some members of society treated the female wives' children with a lot of contempt, female husbands also faced other challenges which had negative implications on the survival of woman to woman marriage relationships.

Female husbands were further interrogated to state the kind of problems they faced in their bid to address the issue of 'childlessness' in contemporary society. The problems stated included discrimination by society; lack of adequate

resources, they bore the burden of continuing to provide for the female wives and children regardless of age; the problem of socializing with new family; discrimination by the church among others.

Female husbands felt disregarded and discriminated against by Christian Churches. They said that the Christians believed that this type of marriage was not ethical. Hence, members of society treated female husbands with a lot of contempt. Consequently, some female husbands abandoned church services because they felt disregarded by other Christians.

Some female husbands found it a challenge to manage children who had come into their custody as teenagers. Given the fact that the female wives' children were brought up in different and varying environments it may be a challenge for the female husband to handle them. The female husbands were blamed for marrying other women instead of allowing their husbands to marry co-wives (for the married ones) because the presence of female wives in the society was considered a threat to their marriages as they were believed to be husband 'snatchers'. In this study women who had grudges against the *female wives'* children openly told them to tell their mothers to stop taking away their husbands. Consequently, they scornfully referred to them as children of "husband snatchers." This equally humiliated the female husbands.

Female husbands further pointed out that other women in similar situations lacked resources for supporting their families; they endured abusive language which was meted out at them by people who also thought that childlessness was a curse as in the case of the Kuria people of western Kenya (Kjerland (1997). Others female husbands were afflicted by their relatives who were eyeing their property and so they were opposed to this form of marriage which they felt had undermined their expectations of acquiring or rather 'grabbing' the female husbands' property upon her death. Nonetheless, the female husbands found it difficult to divorce their wives.

Despite the challenges in woman to woman marriages, female husbands unanimously said that they would encourage other childless women to involve themselves in woman to woman marriage for survival of their lineage. Although all answers for such involvement revolved around the efficacy of children, other views captured were as follows: this was a convenient way of acquiring children; it ensured the continuity of a lineage through children of other women; it's a traditional way of addressing the problem of childlessness and ensuring continuity of family lineage; it is the only sure way that barren women can acquire children. Woman to woman marriage will ensure that the name of the female husband lives forever. For that reason, Mweni one of the female husbands appeals: "*we call upon the society to respect women like us (which means those who are childless or sonless) and also support our children because they hold an essential position in society*".

Implications of the study

This study established that woman to woman marriage ensured the continuity of a barren or sonless woman's lineage through the children sired by their female wives encountered disapproval by some Christian Churches and members of society. Yet, woman to woman marriage is a form of marriage conducted just like any other African traditional marriages. For instance, there are negotiations between the two families, payment of bride price was mandatory, and that it has rules and regulations to sustain it.

Another disapproval of the woman to woman marriage relationships was demonstrated by some relatives of the female husband whose desire to grab the property upon her demise. Such plans may have been frustrated by the marriage of the female wives who were henceforth given social and legal rights over the female husbands' assets. Moreover, the Kenya constitution of 2010 clearly protects sonless women.⁸ So childless women should be

⁸ Before the promulgation of the new constitution in August 2010, land was passed from father to son from one generation to the other. Hence, daughters could not be heirs. The

encouraged to explore other suitable⁹ strategies of acquiring future heirs or safeguarding their properties

The fact that female husbands hardly allowed their wives to entertain their male lovers in their residence does not imply that men were restricted from meeting female lovers but it shows the temporality of the relationship in this kind of marriage. In any case, intimacy was meant for sexual gratification, and procreation which was the intention of woman to woman marriages. The control of men's easier access into residence shared between female husbands and their wives was mainly to maintain respect for the female husbands especially those who had their spouses. Because, allowing men to freely enter into the compound of married female husbands would be inappropriate, unethical and unAfrican to have two men under the same roof or compound. At the same time this kind of control shows the level of powerlessness among the male lovers. It further shows that their relationship with the female wives was not openly sanctioned by female husbands. Yet, there was nothing secret about this marriage.

It also shows that female husbands also enjoy social privileges over their wives as in heterosexual marriage relationships. For instance, by choosing male lovers for their wives, having more rights over the children while ignoring their biological parents (especially fathers), a general belief that female wives do not need men because they already have children, that female wives only need men for procreation. These examples demonstrate unequal power relations where female wives who do not comply with the female husbands expectations are likely to be divorced. However, some of the female

current constitution stipulates that parents should allocate land equally to their children regardless of gender. Hence, childless women's property is now protected by law.

⁹ For instance if a childless wishes to be a Christian then instead of involving herself in woman to woman marriage she can adopt a child. Thus suitability is determined by one's individual situation.

husbands' powers were however undermined by female wives 'sexual relations with multiple male lovers and on the other with men's refusal to have protected sex.

The general belief that marriage is meant to be permanent appears among the female husbands who clearly indicate the difficulties in dissolving a marriage because it was initiated with a purpose of providing companionship and children to the childless female husbands. However, under some circumstances like in any marriage, even woman to woman marriages could be dissolved. This is also observed by some scholars (Herskovits 1937:335; Oboler, 1980) who concur that divorce is inevitable in any marriage relationships.

It is widely presumed that female husbands looked for female wives who already had children. However, they also married women who were prospective mothers. Failure to prove the motherhood potentiality was likely to cause eventual dissolution of the marriage. This strongly implies that stability of woman to woman marriage is based on procreation and the existence of male heirs. Additionally, payment of bride price in woman to woman marriage implied its authenticity in society. It also enabled the female wives and their children gain to social status in society future legal access to and control rights over the female husbands' resources.

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CONCLUSION

This study concurred with similar studies' assertion that sonless women who had resources often married other women to provide future male heirs. However, the number of children brought into this form of marriage was found to surpass available resources thereby causing challenges to the female husbands. This is because from the African perspective resources to be inherited could just mean a small plot of land. Hence, it might not be adequate to be shared by several children. Yet, female husbands in this study did not indicate that they had so much property that could be shared sufficiently among several heirs. Because of this, some female husbands complained that they were overburdened with the responsibility of supporting newly acquired large families with inadequate resources. This was in contrast to the assumption that children in this marriage would offload the elderly female husbands' burden of family support.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge Professor Edward Ontita and all other anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback. I appreciate with gratitude the CEU support during the writing process. I also thank Mr. Mutisya- my research assistant for dedicating his time in assisting to locate the study respondents and providing translation services when needed.

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