

CHRISTIANITY AND MATRIMONIAL CONSEQUENCES ON WOMEN IN ZAMBIA: A CASE OF THE CHEWA PEOPLE OF KATETE DISTRICT

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Abstract

Research on Christian marriage and family life has documented less on how Christianity has indirectly influenced the family set-up across ethnic groups in Zambia. Theologians, anthropologists, academicians and other contemporary scholars have not given this concern serious thought, as they have extensively written on the functional aspect of Christianity and less on the dysfunctional. Guided by Bronislaw Malinowski's (1922) latent and manifest theory, this study sought to establish the influence of Christianity on the matrilineal system of the indigenous Chewa people of Katete District in Eastern Zambia. The qualitative approach was used to collect and analyse information from participants who were purposively sampled. The findings showed that there were socio-economic changes in a woman whose brother became a Christian, such as the brother stopping to support his sister due to Christian teachings which emphasise that a man should care for his own family. Socially, there is a change in the relationship between the uncles, nieces and nephews since the uncle who becomes a Christian rarely interacts with his nieces and nephews as his obligation is switched to members of his own family. Economically, the woman's husband suffers the burden of caring for his biological children who, traditionally, are supposed to be cared for by the uncles. The study concluded that Christianity has negatively affected the relationship that existed between uncles and their sisters' children. Therefore, the study recommends that, although Christianity has been introduced among the Chewa, uncles should not forsake the responsibility of caring for their sisters' children as this might lead to exposing the children to untold misery related to lack of parental/guardian care.

Keywords: *Christian Marriage, Matrimonial Consequences, Changes, Indigenous, Chewa people*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Every human community has a system of descent which broadly follows matrilineal or patrilineal systems. A community is expected to subscribe to either of the two and not both (Schneider and

Gough, 1962). In support of Schneider and Gough, Lowes (2022) asserts that a key source of variation in kinship structure is whether lineage and inheritance are traced through women, as in matrilineal kinship systems, or men, as in patrilineal kinship systems. In patrilineal societies, an individual's family membership is traced from and recorded through his or her father's lineage. On the other hand, matrilineal society traces its kingship through the female lineage. It may also correlate with a social system in which each person is identified with their mother's lineage. Ancient history (for example, Herodotus, 400 B.C) indicates that matrilineality dates back at least 2, 400 years and the essence of matrilineality was that a woman's family remained the family of her mother, brothers, and sisters even after she married. The same holds for a man. Matrilineality is not the mirror image of patrilineality; it is a system in which both husband and wife remain exclusively members of their respective natal families (Lowes, 2022). In comparison to patrilineal societies, matrilineal societies place less emphasis on the marriage ceremony. For example, Bleek (1987) reports never having seen a marriage ceremony in his fieldwork among the matrilineal Twi-speaking Akan of Ghana. It seems that the husband-wife bond may be even weaker among matrilineal groups than among patrilineal groups, although little direct evidence is available on this point.

Detailed features of matrilineal societies emphasise the economic and social security of women and their children (Lowes, 2022). For example, a woman in such a society is less likely to move away from her maternal village upon first marriage. If the marriage dissolves, a divorced woman who has moved away can reactivate land rights in her maternal village much more easily than a divorced woman in patrilineal societies. Additionally, upon divorce, a woman's children remain with her because they belong, by right, to their maternal rather than to their paternal kin (Brain, 1976; Bleek, 1987; Henn, 1984; Parkin, 2020).

Over time, important tenets governing matrilineal and patrilineal systems have declined due to factors such as political, economic, and religious transformation (Parkin, 2020). The assumption in this paper is that provisions of the new Christian faith to which most people have converted contradict matrilineal and patrilineal customs thereby bringing about positive or negative modification of the indigenous marital norms. The implications of obfuscating such customs are poverty, gender inequality, family lineage breakdown, and intra-family conflicts (Schoffeleers, 1968; Mizinga, 2000). This assumption is tested as we examined the influence of Christianity on the matrilineal system of the indigenous Chewa people of Katete District of the Eastern Province of Zambia. To facilitate an easier understanding of the Chewa matrilineal family, it is important to explain the concept of matrilineality as given below.

1.1 Conceptualizing Matrilineal Society

Different ethnographic analyses of matrilineal society trickle down to the special position held by a woman, her children and her blood brother who is the uncle to her children, in the family setup. In other words, the uncle from the mother's family, the maternal uncle, assumes responsibility for the welfare of his biological sister together with her children (Rynjah, 1999). In a matrilineal society, a man takes leading roles if any of his sisters is getting married. He takes a presiding role and arranges for his sister's marriage with representatives of the man who wishes to marry his sister. Even after marriage, the sister respects her brother, obeys his commands and regards him as the legal head of her family of procreation. For some authors (Marwick, 1963; Bleek, 1987), this kind of relationship between a married woman and her blood brother is the main cause of the weak marriage bonds among matrilineal people. In as much as a man has authority over his sister's marriage, he cannot arrange for his sister's daughter's marriage, except if there is a betrothal to his

son (Fathauer, 1962). He may be instrumental in getting a child spirit to impregnate his sister's daughter and, as a practice, she should give birth at the house of her father or mother's brother. In the opinion of Sweetser (1966), a maternal uncle assumes three different categories of roles: non-authoritative, indulgent and intermediate role. With regard to the role of a man as a maternal uncle and his role as father of his children, he asserts that the degree and nature of authority present in one role would be directly related to that in the other role, but the two different roles cannot have the same rights and obligations. It was also noted that the mother's brother had a distinctive role in the organisation of kinship and that the type of distinctive role for the mother's brother might differ with the conditions of marriage (Sweetser, 1966).

Homans and Schneider (1962) assert that in a matrilineal community, the maternal uncle is a non-authoritarian, indulgent figure; a sort of "male mother", with whom there is frequent interaction and considerable freedom. They concluded that this sentimental attachment is the efficient cause of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage where the daughters of the maternal uncle's clan or tribe, are marriageable women from whom a wife may be sought. In giving his daughters in marriage to nephews, a maternal uncle is providing for their future, as well as that of his daughters. By extension, such marriage arrangements meant that, if a man marries his mother's full brother's daughter, he marries back into his mother's clan, into which his father married before him.

Regarding authority, Homans and Schneider (1962) clarify that a maternal uncle does not normally hold jurial authority over his sister's children. He does so only when she is a widow. The man's sister, as a widow, looks to her brother for protection and seeks shelter of his camp. He is responsible for her and her children until the mourning for her husband is past and she remarries. This simply indicates that in a matrilineal community, a woman who does not have a brother is vulnerable as there is no source of protection and support during challenging situations. It can be understood that in a matrilineal society, fathers are like alien residents in the mother's village and they are mainly for reproduction while mothers care for the children. At the same time, a maternal uncle has the responsibility and obligation of socialising his sister's children in etiquette and manners, rules of kinship, transfer of knowledge and skills, and discipline of his nephews and nieces (Shipton, 2007).

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The current study was guided by the manifest and latent functions theory which was first propounded by anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski in 1922 and later modified by sociologist, Robert Merton in 1936. Though criticized due to unintended consequences which may arise because of interaction among several persons, resulting in things not turning out as expected (Elster, 1989), renowned sociologists (Brinkerhoff, 2011; Zwart, 2015) have found it useful in explaining human behaviour towards deliberate social policies in different societies. According to Merton (1936), manifest functions are conscious, deliberate and beneficial. Conversely, latent functions are unconscious, unintended but beneficial. Berger (1963) refers to latent functions as dysfunctions. Noteworthy, while functions are intended or recognised (manifest), and may have a positive effect on society, dysfunctions are unintended or un-recognised (latent), and have a negative effect on society (Brinkerhoff, 2011).

Christianity came into present-day Zambia towards the close of the 19th Century. Christian missionaries came to matrilineal Chewa land, and other lands in Zambia, with the primary purpose of introducing Christianity which could in turn win people's souls and lead to salvation (Lamba,

1985). These were manifest functions of their activities among the local Chewa people. To realise this mission, the missionaries built churches and missionary stations. As a way of helping new converts read the Bible, the missionaries also built schools (Henkel, 1989). Malewezi (2016) reported that before 1964, missionary education equipped some Chewa youths to aspire for Zambian political liberation. At some point in their stay in Zambia, the missionaries could practically take part in the struggle for Zambian independence even if it was off their main agenda. For example, the record has it that when the Colonial Office took over the running of the government in 1924, the church became active in its spiritual and political roles (Jesuits Archives Xavier House, 1925). In that very year between the 9th and 15th of June, a General Missionary Conference (GMC) was held in Kafue Town where the missionaries continued to press for the rights of Africans. This was a latent positive function of the missionaries' activities in Zambia.

The missionaries did not end up introducing learning institutions. To thoroughly plant the new faith, missionaries discouraged and abolished Chewa village initiation schools or societies in the form of *Cinamwali* and the *GulewaMkulu 'Nyau'*, together with their practices (Probst, 2002). As observed by Phiri (1975), the missionaries resisted accommodating indigenous faith into their missions of planting Christianity among the Chewa people. They collectively described traditional practices with terms such as primitive, savage, fetishism, *juju*, heathenism, paganism, animism, idolatry, and polytheism, among others. To a larger extent, the teachings by Christian pioneers brought about an erosion of important matrilineal norms, values, and practices among the Chewa people (Kaler 2001). This fits to be described as manifest negative functions or better still dysfunctions of the missionaries' activities in Chewaland.

Going by the above assumptions, this study examined the influence of Christianity on the matrilineal system of the indigenous Chewa people of Katete District of the Eastern Province of Zambia.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars (Evans-Prichard, 1951; Basehart, 1962; Colson 1962; Lyngdoh and Nongkynrih, 2015) have done studies on different matrilineal communities around the world. Their findings suggest that, before the 18th century many societies could strictly go by the tenets bounding matrilineality; after this period, only indigenous societies could practice original matrilineal customs as many societies had abandoned the system due to religious, political and economic interference.

Evans-Prichard (1951) observed that among the Nuer people of South Sudan, a man could rely on his maternal uncle for assistance even if the man's own paternal uncles did not come to his aid. The maternal uncle was recognised as both 'father and mother' to his nephews and nieces but more importantly 'the mother'. He further observed that their relationship was based on mutual love and tenderness. Due to this special relationship, young men preferred living with their maternal uncles to the father's brothers when their own father died. Evans-Prichard (1951) further reports that in Nuer society, the maternal uncle gave cattle as a form of assistance to his sister's eldest son and made further contributions towards the marriage of the younger sons of the sister. If a niece was given in marriage, a maternal uncle received bridewealth on behalf of the sister's daughter. However, Lesthaeghe (1989) observed that the advent of literacy, Westernisation and the new faith brought about the gradual erosion of the powers of the lineage among the Nuer community.

Furthermore, Basehart (1962), who did a study on the Ashanti matrilineal community of Ghana, reported that the children lived with their mothers or fathers and when they grew older they lived with their maternal uncles. The maternal uncle's area of control over his sister's children was extensive in that he could pawn his nephews and nieces. His approval was crucial for marriage, and he could demand that divorce be instituted. He could insist upon cross-cousin marriage and a nephew could not refuse, though a daughter might; likewise, a niece could be forced to marry her uncle's son (Basehart 1962). However, considerable ambivalence characterises this asymmetrical relationship, particularly concerning inheritance and succession. Like elsewhere, Crentsil (2007) observed that the Ashanti community suffered matrilineal destructive effects from colonialism, Christianity and Western education. Among other suspicions, the missionaries and their counterparts (colonial officials) considered matrilineal practices as the sole cause of divorce among couples as it was thought of weakening conjugal ties thereby condemning it by preaching love and sacred bond between two married people (Crentsil (2007). Similarly, from Malawi, Kaler (2001) asserted that the colonial officials were particularly concerned about the practice of matrilineality and blamed it for the high divorce rate in that region of Southern Africa.

Among the Khasi community in India, a maternal uncle performed central roles in the clan. As reported by Lyngdoh and Nongkynrih (2015) and Bairo (2009), the maternal uncle: (i) takes the responsibility as the counsellor, advisor and guide to his mother's group or family; (ii) performs religious rites in the household, such as naming ceremony; (iii) controls property in the sister's household; (iv) is involved in taking decisions on all major family issues; (v) looks after the welfare of his nieces and nephews, and his siblings; and (vi) provides care and support, particularly in times of crisis. However, the position of a maternal uncle is changing. According to Lyngdoh and Nongkynrih (2015:40), 'the position of the *Kni* (*maternal uncle*) has been undermined from the period of colonial subjugation and the changeover in faith has affected adversely the beliefs and practices of Khasi society; this has created chaos and confusion in the family, clan and culture as a whole'. Lyngdoh and Nongkynrih further report that in the present-day Khasi society, the Khasi man has lost his position, role and authority, and is insignificant both in his sister's home and also in his children's home. They noted that 77.5-80 per cent of their respondents stated that the role of the *Kni* was symbolic; he is now informed of family happenings but he does not make decisions. Only 22.5-20 per cent of the participants indicated that the mother's brother continued to play a decisive role in the family. They further noted that the participants who affirmed the decisive role of the *Kni* belonged to the Khasi indigenous faith.

Among the Tonga of Southern Zambia, Colson (1962) observed that the matrilineal role of a maternal uncle was a source authority and respect regardless of one's age. Inasmuch as he could assist in farming activities and emergencies, he could as well call upon his nieces to help him in his own household. On the other hand, his nephews considered as his potential heirs remained attached to his household and also contributed their work to the building of the estate. Nevertheless, later studies suggested a decline in matrilineal practices among the Tonga. For example, Mizinga (2000) reported that Christianity, together with British administration, introduced new cultural traits among the local people in that they started questioning some aspects of their culture including matrilineal tenets. Christianity encouraged Christian marriages and values, some of which were not in conformity with the customary marriage practices.

The above literature provides information on social organisation in different matrilineal societies. It also shows how Christianity negatively perceived customs, norms, and values governing

matrilineal family systems. With this understanding, this study looked at the Chewa matrilineal family system and how it had been affected (or not affected) by Christianity. Thus, the following sections give a discussion on the Chewa people; their matrilineal family organisation, matrilineal changes due to religious conversion, and effects of conversion on the Chewa people, especially women.

2.1 The Chewa-Speaking People

The Chewa people migrated into South Central Africa from the south-east of the Niger-Congo Basin between 800AD and 1200AD. During this movement, the group was led by Kalonga (King) Mazizi from Uluba in Eastern Congo Basin (Nthala, 2009). During the reign of *Kalonga* Chidzonzi (third king), the Chewa had their first traditional headquarters at Mankhamba near Mtakakata, Dedza District in Central Malawi. Nthala (2009) further asserted that due to reasons such as kingdom expansion, trade, climate change, and the reigning King's experiences, the Chewa people have not had a permanent place as their headquarters. Currently, the Chewa traditional headquarters is in the Mkaika area of Chief Mbang'ombe of Katete district in Eastern Zambia. It was shifted into this area from Mnthipa Village of Chief Kawaza in 1939 under the reign of *Kalonga* Gawa Undi Chimphungu II. The title *Gawa* means 'the one who gives out land' and *Undi* means 'the one who protects his subjects' (Nthala, 2009). Thus, as sustainer, Gawa Undi presides over all the installations and funerals of senior chiefs in the Chewa kingdom in Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique (Nthala, 2009:52).

Currently found in Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, and partly Zimbabwe the Chewa population is approximately over 15 million. As matrilineal people, the Chewa share the same *tsinde* (root) regardless of where they are found. According to Malewezi (2016), Nyangu Phiri, the mother to Kalonga Mazizi (the first Chewa King) is the first Queen Mother. As such, Nyangu Phiri is known as the Great Mother for the Chewa family and all subsequent Queen Mothers bear the title Nyangu. Because of sharing the same *tsinde*, the Chewa people have always remained traditionally united. For example, they are all loyal to the authority of one Paramount Chief residing at Mkaika (Katete district) where they assemble every year in August to commemorate their traditional ceremony called *Kulamba mwambo wa aChewa*.

The fact that the Katete district remains the headquarters of the Chewa people and that it is the place where all the Chewa people meet every year in August to culturally refresh themselves justified the choice of Katete as the study site for this paper. Hinging on the assumption that, apart from belonging to the Chewa clan, some Katete residents are also Christians, the study sought to establish how Chewa women have been matrimonially affected by Christianity.

2.2 The Chewa Matrilineal Society

As elsewhere in Africa, matrilineality among the Chewa is a complex of several variables, including the nature of marriage, residence during marriage, the exercise of domestic authority and the control or custody of children. As reported by Phiri (2007), the Chewa embraces the social importance and rights for women more than men. They consider women as reproducers of the

lineage hence the need to protect and respect them. They show respect for women in ways such as speech, observing taboos and in songs. For example, among the Chewa, there is a GulewaMkulu 'Nyau' traditional song which states, "Tiwa thokoze aNyangu onse, a nagwira nchito ya ikulu pobala Gawa mfumu yanzeru" (let us praise all Queen Mothers, for they did a great job for giving birth to Gawa, the wise king). Phiri (2007) further asserts that in view of this, a married woman reason or another, a man was simply not happy in his wife's village (Phiri, 2007).remains in her village with her blood brothers and together with them retains the right to take possession of and control her children. In this vein, the man has limited control over his wife and children. The greater role goes to a wife's blood brother as he takes the position of the guardian (Nkhoswe) to his sister and her offspring, and is also the sustainer of their economic and legal welfare. This entails that among the Chewa matrilineal community, a woman without aNkhoswe is virtually a slave and, therefore, extremely unfortunate. Bruwer (1955) points out that such a woman needs male kinsmen to protect her, arrange her marriage, and to represent her in dealing with outsiders.

Going by the above, Rasing (2001) described the Chewa family as an integral part of the wife's rather than the husband's lineage. In simple terms, the locus of control of the productive as well as reproductive capabilities of the Chewa nuclear family lay within the woman's group. In particular, it lay in the hands of the *aNkhoswe*. This, in turn, meant that the family was, for the most part, dependent on the larger social unit to which it was affiliated; the matrilineage which embraced most of the woman's relatives. Phiri (1975) further asserted that it was matrilineage that defined the rights and obligations of the individual family or household, gave it its sense of belonging, provided it with both social and material security, and defined its status within the larger community. In addition, the Chewa matrilineage also locally referred to as *Bele* (breast) was viewed as consisting of all those who could trace their descent from a common ancestress. In the traditions of such a group, this founding ancestress or her male guardian was called *Tsinde* (the root) (Phiri, 1975). Furthermore, in each generation, collateral members were divided along sex lines into two groups: the women constituted the *Mbumba* (defendants) while the men acted as *Nkhoswe*. In this way, the dependence of the women on their male kinsmen was emphasised (Phiri, 1975).

This description of the Chewa matrilineage, however, would be incomplete without taking into account the institution of marriage, for, through it, a matrilineage acquired the productive and reproductive services of other lineages. There are several descriptions of Chewa marriage in its various forms. As far as regular marriages were concerned, Phiri (1975) observed that it was up to a man to take the initiative in identifying his spouse, but, thereafter, the matter was taken up by the marriage *Nkhoswe* on both sides. In addition, a token payment (in beads, chicken, iron hoes, or cloth) had to be made to the bride's parents by the groom's family, and the groom had to render bride service to his parents-in-law before the marriage could be consummated. In the early stage, the residence of the couple was uxorilocal, meaning that the man had to leave his village and reside in the wife's village.

Schoffeleers (1968) observed that uxorilocal had several implications for both wife and husband. For the wife, it generated conflict between filial and conjugal loyalties (that is, between loyalty to her kinsmen and loyalty to her husband). For the husband, on the other hand, uxorilocal meant isolation from the base of his authority in his matrilineal village. He could give his own *Mfundu*

(family name) to his children although the latter were also free to adopt the family name of their mother's brother. Schoffeleers (1968) also stated that the husband could also secure their love and respect, and the respect of the community at large if he was generally wise and hardworking. Otherwise, he suffered from being described as a stranger in his wife's village, where he worked gardens that were not his own, begot children that did not belong to him, and was wedded to a woman who took her orders, not from him, but from her brother. In brief, he was in the eyes of his wife's people, 'someone who belonged elsewhere'. To them, he was *aKamwini* (a work-horse). Consequently, as Schoffeleers further reports, *aKamwini* could not aspire for high status no matter how influential he became in other respects. In particular, he was subject to the authority of his wife's brother (*mwinimbumba*) or owner of the village, who could demand the husband's departure if his continued presence in the village became a liability (Schoffeleers, 1968).

The single most important hope for most Chewa men, however, lay in the possibility of exploiting institutional arrangements for ameliorating or escaping the full consequences of uxori-local. As Vansina (1966) noted, uxori-local attracted many contradictions for men in their capacity as husbands and brothers-in-law. It served their interests perfectly in the latter capacity, but as husbands, they tried as much as possible to avoid its full consequences. For example, they resorted to cross-cousin marriages, marrying within their neighbourhood, and applying for the right to take their wives to their own homes after only a few years of residence. Vansina (1966) further stated that the extent to which cross-cousin marriage was practiced among the Chewa in the past is debatable, although most authorities believe that it was more common than nowadays. For a man who opted for this kind of marriage, the advantages were obvious; he did not go to live with his wife in a village where he was a stranger and, if the cousin he wished to marry was a headman's daughter, he did not have to change residence on getting married at all, for his prospective wife's village was the same as his own (Vansina, 1966).

A more widespread practice than cross-cousin marriage was that of marrying within one's neighbourhood. The majority of Chewa men today marry within a five-kilometre radius of their village; this trend must have been even more marked in the past when the population was low and most communities were separated by vast stretches of uninhabited land (Mair, 1955). This made it possible for them to visit their kinsmen as frequently as possible, a source of psychological security when they were less than at peace in their wife's village. Mair (1955) noted that, in the 1940s in the Dedza district of present-day Malawi, marriages were extremely localised, with about 40 per cent of the young wives claiming to have found their husbands from their villages, and about 80 per cent claiming to have secured them within a five-kilometre radius of their village. A similar trend was observed by Mitchell (1956) among the Yao of southern Malawi.

According to Phiri (2007), the arrangement which best suited most men, however, was that in which permission was granted to the husband to take the wife to his village after a few years of uxori-local residence. This arrangement was called *Chitengwa* and was secured using a mutual agreement followed by a token payment. *Chitengwa* was readily granted when a man was appointed headman of his matrilineage or chief guardian of the women of his lineage (*mbumba*). A man could also secure *Chitengwa* if he was the only active guardian (*Nkhoswe*) of his matrilineal dependents while his parents-in-law had several other sons-in-law to work for them. Occasionally, it could also be secured through pressure if a man came from a wealthy lineage in the management of wealth he wanted to be directly involved. The weakest ground for demanding this prerogative was where, for one

2.3 Changes among the Matrilineal Chewa People

The Chewa family system has changed along with changing seasons. Early matrilineal changes among the Chewa society were first witnessed around the 19th century due to growth of slave trade. The slave trade enabled matrilineage to accumulate slaves or pawns (*akapolo*) whose productive and reproductive services were then appropriated by the lineages in question (Phiri, 1975). Similar experience was observed by Peel (1981) among the residents of Yorubaland in West Africa. Peel reported that the Yorubaland revolution and war enabled famous warriors to accumulate wives, slaves and clients, and to use them to create great houses which enabled them to exercise influence on public affairs. Similarly, Mary Douglas noted that some matrilineal communities (Chewa inclusive) in Central Africa could use slave trade to expand their lineage and flourish. According to her, the head of a lineage who had inherited pawns could keep his male kinsmen in his village by marrying them to female pawns, while doing the same for his female dependents only as a matter of preference (Douglas, 1964).

Matrilineal systems among the Chewa in the 19th century also changed through their interaction with the various patrilineal groups which then migrated into their country (Reefe 1980). These included the Chikunda from the Zambezi, the Ngoni (Nguni) from Southern Africa, and the Swahili from the East Coast of Africa. The Nguni, in particular, greatly influenced the Chewa social structure. As Reefe (1980) has argued, the various invaders of Central and Eastern Africa in the 19th century were affected by the cultures they came in contact with, and, in turn, imparted some of their cultural characteristics to the peoples they conquered. Schoffeleers (1968) agrees with Reefe's argument as he cited the example of Lower Shire Valley in Southern Malawi where he showed how the immigration, since about 1860, of patrilineal peoples (such as the Kololo, Sena, Chikunda, Phodzo and Zimba) had altered Mang'anja social organisation which had since divided into two groups due to foreign influence. One group maintained the original matrilineal organisation whilst the other became patrilineal.

Like elsewhere, scholars on the Chewa family system have observed that religion in general tops all the causes of change in the original Chewa matrilineal system. In the following, the article describes the matrimonial effects which resulted from Christianity among the Chewa people.

2.4 Christianity and Chewa Matrimonial Consequences

Christianity was first introduced among the Chewa people in 1876 when Scottish Presbyterian Missionaries (SPM) settled on the South Western coast of Lake Malawi. They were joined by Dutch Reformed Church Missionaries (D.R.C.M) from South Africa who began work at Mvela in the Dowa district in 1880. The Universities Mission to Central Africa (Anglican) later joined in 1895 by opening a station at Nkhota-kota. Finally, the Catholics settled among the Maseko Ngoni in the Ntcheu district in 1901. By 1910, many parts of Chewa country had been brought under some Christian impact primarily because the various missionary societies operated in a competitive spirit.

Until the First World War, however, these missions made very little progress in their effort to evangelise the Chewa. According to Stuart (1990), this was because in being interested in men's souls, as opposed to political power, the missionaries posed a more serious threat to Chewa traditional values than the colonial administration which came after them. A more basic explanation than this, however, is that in calling for the young men whom they were anxious to educate and socialise, the missionaries automatically came into conflict with Chewa village

initiation schools or societies in the form of *GulewaMkulu 'Nyau'* (Probst, 2002). It is not surprising, therefore, that opposition to the missionaries came from the headmen or senior *ankhoswe* and those who were responsible for the initiation ceremonies. In Ntchisi district of Malawi, for example, the elders saw the Anglican missionaries and school teachers as a real threat to traditional Chewa values and rituals (Phiri, 1975). The problem was compounded by the missionaries themselves, most of whom adopted a stern and uncompromising attitude towards certain Chewa rituals, as they took long to understand the educational importance of such rituals.

Besides initiation rites, there were many other areas in which Christian teaching as presented by the missionaries came into conflict with certain matrilineal family notions. They included that of the relationship between husband and wife, responsibility for children, polygamy, and divorce. All the missionaries (D.R.C.M, Anglican and Presbyterian) stuck to the Pauline (1950) view that the husband was head of the nuclear family unit and that this authority, therefore, had to precede that of the wife or wife's guardian. They also laid emphasis on parental control and responsibility of husbands on their family. If taken seriously, such teachings would obviously have undermined the relationship women had with their brothers among the Chewa and, indeed, the authority which they enjoyed over their husbands. As Stuart (1990) has argued, for the Chewa, the acceptance of Christian teachings on marriage would have entailed rejecting certain fundamental matrilineal principles, diminished the status of the *ankhoswe*, and in some respects jeopardised the women's social security. Aquina (1963) noted similar Christian influences on the African marriage and family system in Zimbabwe. According to her, the Catholic missionaries who settled at Chishawasha near Harare, for instance, interfered with some traditional marriage customs (such as polygamy and remarriage of widows) but at the same time perpetuated and reinforced others, such as *lobola* (bridewealth). Apart from this, the missionaries developed a tendency to retain educated Chewa teachers and evangelists for their service as well as for government service where they worked as policemen, clerks, messengers, and watchmen. According to Pauline (1950), these men were usually posted far from home and took their wives with them. In this situation, the husband's authority over and responsibility for his wife and children was enhanced and the wives learned to do without the support of their *ankhoswe*.

Looking at the above arguments and observations, it can be concluded that Christianity, though unintentionally, has over time modified the Chewa family system in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. While it is true that, they (missionaries) now understand the traditional Chewa family system, scars from their teachings and practical works still have effects on modern marriage and the Chewa family system. For example, from the onset, Christianity strove to establish schools which virtually replaced the traditional initiation ceremonies as far as Christian families were concerned (Chanunkha, 2005). Christian teachings also underlined the need for the husband's authority and responsibility over his wife and children. It further led to a redefinition of marriage; instead of viewing marriage as a contract between two families or lineages, wives and husbands to-be were made to view marriage as a contract between husband and wife on one side and with God on the other side (Chanunkha, 2005).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Katete District. The Chewa people of Katete District were chosen because Katete is the headquarters of the Chewa people in Zambia. A case study design was used to gather information on the Chewa people's matrilineal system. Since the system has been in existence from time immemorial, we used qualitative interview method to gather information from

7 Chewa-speaking participants, four men (Participants 1 to 4, P1-4) and three women (Participants 5 to 7, P5-7). The participants had lived in Katete District for at least thirty years. Among the males, there was an elderly man whose wife also agreed to be interviewed. The participants agreed to be interviewed on condition that their identity (in terms of their names) was not disclosed. So the purposefully selected participants were interacted with knowing that they were elders who should be respected and interviewed in their local language, Chewa. Data was analysed according to the themes that emerged during data collection.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study gathered data on “Christianity and its matrimonial consequences among the Chewa-speaking people of Katete district”. The findings are presented according to themes as follows:

5.1 Understanding of Matrilineal Chewa Kinship System

The participants gave their understanding of the matrilineal Chewa kinship system. The first participant (P1) submitted that three figures were the key custodians of the Chewa kingship system as follows: maternal uncle, his blood sister and his sister’s children. “Any oldest man has the authority and power to look after the affairs of his family which comprises his mother, sisters and the sisters’ children; and in an event that he dies, the oldest son from his sisters’ womb takes the lead in that family,” P1 said. His wife (P5) added, “Any village without either *Nkhoswe* or *Mbumba* is dead”, referring to the respect accorded to women as producers of kings.

According to the narration given by P3, one of the male participants, all the Chewa people shared a common root (*tsinde*) or ancestry, the great Queen Nyangu Phiri who gave birth to the first Chewa chief. Participant 3 further indicated that the queen mothers who came after Queen Nyangu followed her good example of giving birth to kings. In this vein, women are exemplified as the special tool of reproduction and sustenance among the Chewa clan. As special tools, women in Chewa land should be respected and given honour as mothers of kings.

It was further learnt from P7, a female participant that the duty of a maternal uncle was to ensure that his sister’s children were taken care of, both materially and socially; he was looked at by his sister’s children as male mother. P7 indicated:

It is the duty of a maternal uncle to have a final say on serious decisions his nephews make, for example when to marry, and who to marry. Biological fathers have limited powers in the lives of their own children compared to their maternal uncles. Fathers are like a borrowed male goat which is expected to be taken back to its home after performing duties. (Interview, 2022)

The Chewa matrimony is special to the people because they share a common root(*tsinde*), and subsequent queen mothers have emulated the good example of the queen mother by rendering a similar service to the clan of giving birth to kings. Unlike in some ethnic groups in Zambia where women are taken to have nothing to do with the reproductive health of a king, among the Chewa people women are considered as special tools of reproduction and sustenance. Women, along with their blood brothers, are custodians of the kingship system and their absence would pose serious risk on the continuity of the clan. The Chewa women can be likened to the girls in Ziwa’s (2014) study who endeavoured to acquire the education provided by the Holy Cross Sisters (HCS) through the Ministry of Education. The education the girls received enabled them to attain what Ziwa called the eight ARCCLEIIs of education for empowerment: Assertiveness, Rights

awareness, Children's education, Community participation, Leadership, Employment status, Income and Income generated activities (Ziwa, 2014). So a woman who had been educated by the HCS could confidently say, "Do not kiss the bubble fish, kiss the spear that killed the bubble fish". For the Chewa people, the spear that killed the bubble fish could be likened to the Chewa matrilineal system in which men and women were seen to be performing antagonistic roles and at the same time depended on each other (Phiri, 1975).

In view of the above, the findings suggest that men could do all they can to maximize the social security and welfare of their blood sisters (*mbumba*). Additionally, P4, a male participant, indicated that in the olden days, this social support ranged from rendering intermediary services ranging from giving the final say when a nephew wanted to get married, to economic support, such as provision of food. As such, women did not have to leave their brothers' villages to follow their husbands upon marriage. When asked whether the Chewa matrimonial system was still followed in modern Zambia, P4 responded in the affirmative. "It will be unthinkable to do away with this system which unites our clan, no matter where people live in this country, let alone the whole world," he concluded.

The findings showed that the Chewa had deliberately untagged pride price, *malowolo*, for their sisters. This implied that no man could afford to pay the permission price to take a woman to his matrilineal village upon marriage. Conversely, sisters had faith, trust in and respect for their brothers who they regarded as shields and sources of refuge. Women could easily submit and follow the directives from brothers more than they did with those from their matrimonial husbands. For some scholars (Marwick, 1963; Schoffeleers, 1968; Bleek, 1987), this kind of relationship attracted various matrimonial consequences on both men and women. This included weak marriage bonds among married people, women experiencing conflict between filial and conjugal loyalties, and men's isolation from the base of their authority in their matrilineal village.

P6, one of the female participants, indicated that the relationship between the children and their fathers was weakened by the dependence of the children on their maternal uncles for social and economic well-being. This was exemplified by P6 as follows:

It is the responsibility of every maternal uncle to groom the sister's children according to the rituals, taboos and beliefs of their matrilineal village. Children also reciprocate their maternal uncle's gesture by respecting and obeying the traditional teachings. (Interview, 2022)

Furthermore, information gathered from P3 indicated that a nephew had the rights to get any of his uncle's daughters as a wife to marry, and the uncle could not object. Reviewed literature (Homans and Schneider, 1962) justified this by explaining that the uncle also had similar rights to ask the nephew to marry his daughter. Homans' and Schneider's justification was supported by Vansina (1966) who asserted that to avoid serving in a foreign land, men resorted to cross-cousin marriages. The custom of cross-cousin marriages negated women's freedom to choose who to marry. However, in villages where life may be hard regarding the well-being of the entire community, it is good for women to be married to someone who respects them since they are related to each other. In such marriages, cases of gender based violence may be rare.

4.2 Perceptions on Family System Changes

With regard to the perceptions participants had on the changes in the Chewa family system, according to the findings gathered from P6, unlike in the distant past, brothers did not give much support to their sisters and only visited them when there was an issue to be discussed. She said, “To the neglect of their sisters’ children, maternal uncles now concentrate on providing for their own biological children”. This might be due to current times which require men (and women) to leave their villages and migrate to urban areas for employment or businesses to help sustain their own families.

The findings further showed that the changes in the relationship between brothers and sisters were caused by modernity and other factors such as human rights, education, economy, and religion. In terms of human rights, brothers had limited control over their sisters as the sisters could make reference to human rights which supported their freedom of choice. Zhang (2008) touched on this aspect when he asserted that in rural North China, in uxori-local marriages women had freedom to decide who to marry due to changing times. Furthermore, the findings gathered from P1 indicated that among the Chewa people, modern education had an empowering and liberating force for women. This finding was supported by Lyngdoh’s and Nongkynrih’s (2015) findings among the Khasi people of India where they observed that, due to education, a maternal uncle had lost his position, role authority and significance in his sister’s home. Similarly, the Chewa people of Katete District cannot practice matrilineality in its ideal sense due to the changing times.

When asked how economic hardship could be a factor in the Chewa matrimonial system, P2 indicated that economic hardships had contributed to the change of priorities and subsequent support men offered to their sisters’ children. He said:

In the olden days, a sister’s children were a priority for any man while his children came secondary. In the present day, it is vice-versa. Of course, most men still know their traditional responsibility of caring for their sisters’ children and the Biblical instruction of cultivating happiness by giving. However, they are constrained by economic hardships. (Interview, 2022)

The situation was compounded by the modern economic setup where family members live in different places of the country due to employment, business, education and other factors. This led to some degree of independence among family members who were once closely knit. Pauline (1950) observed that when families lived in isolated places due to employment, women learned to do without the support of their guardian brothers, *ankhoswe*.

4.3 Christianity and Chewa Family System

Christian teachings were used to rationalise acts of deserting ancient Chewa matrilineal culture on family system as they were viewed to be against the tradition of a man having authority over a blood sister’s home, especially if she was married. Ephesians 5:23 instructs believers that a husband is the head of a matrimonial home and exerts sole authority over his children and wife without seeking counsel from her blood brothers. Though it is something without clear evidence, the clergy have always rationalised this monotonous matrimonial power system, that it is done on the basis of love and care for women. Whatever the reasons may be, scriptures such as Ephesians 5 appeared to give no room for brothers to have any say in the lives of their married blood sisters. Doing so, in Christian lenses, would be deemed as squeezing oneself into other people’s matrimonial bedrooms and, above all, weakening matrimonial bonds between two people. Crentsil

(2007) made similar observations on Christian attitudes towards the Ashanti matrilineal community when he noted that missionaries who entered the community on proselytizing missions labeled indigenous matrilineal practices as being responsible for weakening conjugal ties. They, therefore, condemned matrilineal practices by preaching love and sacred bond between two married people.

Nevertheless, with their efforts often being in vain, Chewa men wrestled with such Christian teachings, as their sisters were more inclined to submit only to their husbands like the Bible commanded them in Ephesians 5:22. It was observations such as this which compelled Stuart (1990) to conclude that, among the Chewa, acceptance of Christian teachings on marriage meant rejecting certain fundamental matrilineal principles, diminished the status of the *ankhoswe*, and in some respects, jeopardising the women's social security. These were the latent functions of religion which Merton (1936) regarded to be unconscious and unintended as opposed to being conscious, deliberate and beneficial. So Christianity had a negative latent influence on the Chewa people.

Speaking of the above effects of the new faith on the indigenous Chewa family system, many questions begging for answers can still be posed: did the missionaries willfully preach against Chewa matrilineal family system? If so, were they aware of the effects of their position on the matrilineal family system? Kaler (2001) asserted that missionaries and colonial officials were particularly concerned about the practice of matrilineality and blamed it for the high divorce rate in Southern Africa region. In effect, they preached against it. For example, they emphasised that the husband was the head of the nuclear family unit and that this authority, therefore, had to precede that of the guardian brother, *nkhoswe* (Pauline, 1950). At the same time, Christianity preached care, love, giving, and family unity (Matthew 22:39; Acts 20:35). It, however, seems that evangelists were ignorant of how local people practiced their indigenous religions before the arrival of missionaries. Indigenous faith was considered from a single side and condemned by Christian missionaries. This conclusion was supported by Phiri (1975) who indicated that the problem was not indigenous faith as missionaries alleged, but, rather, the agents of the new faith who adopted a stern and uncompromising attitude towards certain Chewa rituals, as they took long to understand the value of such rituals. In simple, yet clear terms, missionaries had no knowledge of the importance of traditional practices and values on matrilineal family system (Kapwepwe, 1994). While the intention of missionaries was to introduce Christianity to the Chewa people for purposes of converting them to the new religion, unintended or un-recognised (latent) dysfunctions became more prominent and had a negative effect on the Chewa society (Brinkerhoff, 2011).

Looking at the interaction between Christianity and indigenous Chewa culture, the findings give no evidence that a scheme was engineered to cause animosity within the later. However, it is apparent in this study that the agents of Christianity wanted to win people's souls for salvation just as Jesus commanded them to do shortly before he left the earth, as recorded in Matthews 28 verse 19: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of people of all nations..." (Lamba, 1985; Stuart, 1990). Overzealous as they were, missionaries could not foresee possible negative impacts their work would cause on the indigenous Chewa family system. It is worth, then, to use Merton's (1936) manifest and latent theory to state that negative outcomes that landed on the Chewa people, which were as a result of the good works by Christian missionaries, were altogether dysfunctions of Christianity among the Chewa matrilineal society (Brinkerhoff, 2011).

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study looked at “Christianity and Matrimonial Consequences on Women in Zambia: A Case of the Chewa People of Katete District”. Guided by Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) and Robert Merton's(1936) manifest and latent functions theory, the findings showed that the Chewa people received education from the missionaries (manifest function). However, there were socio-economic changes in the women whose brothers became Christians. Socially, there was a change in the relationship between the uncles, nieces and nephews. Economically, the woman’s husband suffered the burden of caring for his biological children who were traditionally supposed to be cared for by the maternal uncles. It is worth noting that these changes might have risen from other emerging activities. Mizinga (2009) asserted that the emergence of urban centres during colonial rule led to intermarriages which brought about the disintegration of cultural barriers as certain marriage procedures and practices were no longer observed. As such, the study recommends that, although Christianity has been introduced among the Chewa people, uncles who are still living and abiding by the Chewa culture should not forsake the responsibility of caring for their sisters’ children. Otherwise, it would be better to accept the changing times and live according to one’s means as the matrilineal system is slowly dying out.

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