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A Theological Perspective of Domestic Violence in Kenya

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This paper acknowledges the fact that there is escalation of domestic violence in Kenya despite efforts of the church. Theologically in both Christianity and African religion violence is not accepted and taking away life is not condoned. It recognises how in the traditional African society domestic violence was limited unlike during this era of Christianity. This paper seeks to unveil how the Nandi Addressed domestic violence in the past and how the church can borrow from this in order to incorporate some of the traditional methods of resolving this form of violence. The study adopted a qualitative research design where the perceptions of the respondents were used to gather in-depth information about the field of study. The findings were analysed and presented descriptively. The main sources of domestic violence include drug abuse, poor foundation of children, unclear marital roles and economic problems among others. The major findings of the study are that domestic violence leads to character defamation and even death of persons. Lack of economic resources underpins women's vulnerability to violence and their inability to disentangle themselves from abusive relationships. This paper recommends that there is need to revisit teachings from traditional institutions of marriage and initiations and incorporate positive forms of teaching with teachings in Christianity for harmony in the society. This paper concludes that the society is no longer knit together due to the brake up of the traditional family and the society in general. Domestic violence in Kenya indicates the laxity and failure of the religious institutions in checking family relationships. It further recommends that there is need to go back to our traditional family settings to reflect on what is expected of the family and to derive the worth of an individual and meaning of life.

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INTRODUCTION

"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Gen 3:8).¹ Human beings had fallen into sin and they hid their faces from God. This initial sin gave birth to all other sins that man has committed under the sun, some to the extent of self-destruction. "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was filled with violence" (Gen 6:11). Ever since man fell into sin in the Garden of Eden, he has been involved in a circle of violence. This shows how man has drifted away from God's perfect will, the family, which is supposed to be a safe place for all is not the case today.

Domestic violence is a common occurrence in Africa as in other parts of the world. In Kenya, the media report various forms of domestic violence daily. Whereas women and children are the more vulnerable, it has become apparent that even men are victims of domestic violence.² These forms of violence are threatening the family that is the basic unit of the society. This form of violence continues to exist despite majority of Kenyans being Christians. Christianity teaches that humans are created in God's image; in the image of God, He created them (Gen 1:27). Christianity does not tolerate any form of violence and values the family as the basic unit of the society.

Despite the effort of the Church to address and prevent issues of violence, the problem of domestic violence seems to escalate. This raises questions, on why domestic violence among human beings persists. One wonders; has the sense of humanity been eroded? Are there any other practices that we can borrow from our traditional societies that can help us promote peace in our families and prevent domestic violence? It is good to note that, before the coming of Christianity, the traditional African society had the fear of God (the Supreme Being) who is believed to be the giver and sustainer of all life. In the traditional African worldview, the centre of traditional African morality is human life; Africans have a sacred reference to life and did everything possible to preserve it. Before the introduction of Christianity to Africa, each community had ways of handling marital issues for the stability of families.³ With the coming of Christianity, these institutions were broken down and other practices considered evil. For instance, the Nandi of Kenya had institutions set up to handle marital issues through initiation and marriage rites of passage.⁴ This paper investigates how they checked domestic violence and their view on the worth of human life. This paper unveils how the Nandi addressed domestic violence in the past and how the church can borrow from this in order to incorporate some of the traditional methods of resolving domestic violence. This paper starts by discussing the various types of violence in society.

¹ All the quotations are taken from the New International Bible (N.I.V).

² www.the-star.co.ke

³ Mbiti J.S. African religion and philosophy. Nairobi, 1969, p.146

⁴ Langley Myrtle S, The Nandi of Kenya, Life crisis rituals in a period of change. New York 1979 p14

TYPES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN SOCIETY

Violence is a broad term that encompasses physical and psychological forms. Physical violence is that which causes harm to one's body, mind, or spirit while psychological violence leads to the destruction of one's peace of mind. The English dictionary defines violence as the use of extreme force or action intended to cause destruction, pain, or suffering. Ann Ganley highlights four types of violence. These include physical, psychological, sexual violence, and destruction of property.⁵ The psychological violence "includes depriving a person of freedom of movement, and undermining a person's self-worth".⁶ Sexual violence is forcing one into sexual relations. Some have long-term consequences while others are visible and immediate effects.

Domestic violence ranges from sexual assault against women, men, and children (boys and girls), physical abuse and psychological among others. According to the *Innocent Digest*, domestic violence includes violence perpetrated by intimate partners against each other and manifested through physical abuse such as rape, slapping, beating, arm twisting, stabbing, strangling, burning, choking, kicking, threats with an object or weapon, and murder.⁷ The consequences of domestic violence may lead to permanent disability or death of the inflicted persons. It also includes traditional practices harmful to women such as female genital mutilation and wife inheritance a practice of passing a widow and her property, to her dead husband's brother.⁸ A family is made up of father, mother, and children. In the modern setting, this includes the single parent with his/her children. The family is the central unit of society. In Christianity, the family, which is made up of the father and mother, represents the image of Christ for the church. A good relationship between husband and wife represents the well-being of the body of Christ. Paul in Ephesians states the role of the father "for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head

of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour" (Eph. 5:23). Hence, the role ordained by God to the husband is to head the family. In the traditional African setting before the coming of Christianity, Islam and other religions in Kenya, the family unit was checked by both the nuclear and the extended family. The shift from the extended family to nuclear family setting and the emergence of the single parent family are some of the new developments in the modern society. Today the family unit seems to have lost its ordained place and has instead become the source of violence.

Today there are changes in family roles. Neither parents nor children seem to understand their roles as was ordained by God. In most cases, the minors are left mostly with house helps hence reducing their contact with parents who are supposed to guide them up in line with the teachings of the Bible. This is a role ordained by God as He commands Abraham in the book of Genesis, "For I chose him so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the lord by doing what is right and just" (Gen 18:19). God has ordained roles for parents but the violence experienced indicates that parenting from the head of the family has failed. Paul in the book of Colossians writes "and he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (Col 1: 18). The husband has been ordained as the head of the family just as Christ is the head of the Church. Headship of the man is misunderstood to be domination instead of sacrificial giving and servant leadership as Christ displays in (Eph 5:2).

The family seems to be the potential source of all other conflicts in society including political and religious violence. The safer our families are, the safer the rest of the society becomes. Angela Raven Roberts of UNICEF summarizes the plight of young people calling them "the fodder for conflicts of the future: they have been marginalized, thrown out of culture and thrown out of history".⁹ A Christian perspective to this recalls the role of parenting as

⁵ Ann Ganley. Understanding Domestic violence: preparatory reading for participants. Unpublished PhD, Diss, 1995

⁶ Amoah Elizabeth (ed.) Where God Reigns: Reflections of women in God's world. Accra, 1997, p.74

⁷ UNICEF, Domestic Violence against women and girls. Innocent digest no.6, 2000, p.30.

⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁹ Smock d. (ed), Religious contribution to peacemaking: when religion brings peace not war. USIP: Peace works no. 55 2006. p.5.

key to church groups. Research has shown that emotional stability of children is best guaranteed by peace within the family.

Forms of Domestic Violence in Kenya

In Kenya Domestic violence is varied and complex. The examples of domestic violence include physical abuse, rape, battery, sexual abuse, psychological violence that includes silence by one partner and denial of marital rights among others. Domestic violence not only lowers quality of life but also leads to physical harm, emotional and psychological torture leading to character defamation and even death of the persons concerned. Children and women are vulnerable to violence especially the girl child, hence emotional, social, and spiritual development is hampered if violence continues in society.

In the recent past examples of domestic violence are horrific. In Western Kenya women have been forced to remarry their in-laws after death of their husbands without considering their HIV and AIDS status. This in itself is a form of sexual violence, on the other hand sexual cleansing is a more recent phenomena resulting from and contributing to the spread of HIV and AIDS in Kenya. It seems there are no laws to address this practice in Kenya.¹⁰

In Kenya other examples of sexual violence is whereby an infected man involve himself in sexual relations with a virgin with an allegation to cure for the disease. In Bungoma Kenya, an aunty is accused to have had sexual relations with an underaged orphan for three months. In another incident, a girl accused her uncle who had raped her several times leading to her expectancy of a child.¹¹ This could be another side of panacea for HIV and AIDS by an infected person.

Cases of physical abuse are more rampant and reported almost daily by the media. At Khorof Harar village in Wajir County, Kenya, a man ended up in jail after stabbing his wife with a knife on the cheek that cut across her lower jaws, striking a bone and

got stuck. This led to a major operation to remove the knife at Kenyatta National Hospital.¹² The media daily reports women and children who face assault by their husbands and fathers to the extent of killing the entire family. The cases could be vice versa women against men.

There are cases where women turn against and are violent to men. Most recently, men are brutally battered by women; the media in Kenya has highlighted cases where men are battered by their wives. An example is the case of the Nyeri man who had several knife cuts on his face. Another case is that of a man who was burnt with boiling water by the wife on his back. These incidences have caused a backlash in society. The men's group named "*maendeleo ya wanaume*" (progress for men) announced an initiative to protest against female perpetrated domestic abuse in the country by deciding to boycott meals prepared by their wives as a sign of solidarity with the battered men.¹³ In most cases most of these cases are not reported at all.

Findings on Kenyan violence against children survey (KVACS) by UNICEF from 2010 national survey shows prevalence of sexual, physical, and emotional violence leading to health and behavioural consequences of violence experienced in childhood. The fact that domestic violence is on the rise, crime committed in the very areas where one feels safest makes this major problem in every society.¹⁴ Given that the main victims of domestic violence are women and children, then it is a social problem with far reaching consequences in the family and social relationships.

Experiences during childhood such as witnessing domestic violence and experiencing physical and sexual abuse have been identified as factors that put children at risk. The children also experience post trauma health related problems. Studies have shown that 30% of the boys exposed to inter-parental violence will become violent themselves. With the horrifying exposure to violence, 70% of children who experience violence will turn to the circle of

¹⁰ UNICEF, Domestic Violence against women and girls. Innocent digest no. 6, 2000, p.11.

¹¹ Reported by Ismael Noor on 10/01/2016 in Kenya Television Network.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Femnet, Mobilizing African women to participate and effect change, annual report, 2012

¹⁴ UNICEF. Child protection from violence exploitation and abuse statistical snap short statistics and monitoring section, 2011

violence when they grow up.¹⁵ Violence may be learnt as a means of resolving conflict and asserting authority of men over their wives by children who have witnessed such patterns of conflict in their families.

Statistics show that domestic violence is on the rise in Kenya. In one survey, 39% of the women reported that a husband or partner (GOK, 2008) abused them while the Federation of Women lawyers (FIDA) report indicates that almost 75% of women surveyed report being beaten.¹⁶ The paper highlights the plight of women and children in Kenya as being at a high rate, the need to investigate reasons behind domestic violence and the role of religious institutions an area to be surveyed in order to stop this violence.

Reasons for Domestic Violence

Gender issues are one of the reasons for domestic violence. Anderson Shelly, coordinator of International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR), points out that a complete understanding of the root causes of violence, and the corresponding attempt to build a culture or cultures of peace, can never be complete without an analysis of the politics of gender, or the power relationship between men and women. There is need to develop an integrated gender approach so that all sectors of the society are catered for. ‘Notions of “masculinity” are a powerful tool in this process of making men into soldiers.’¹⁷ Among the Nandi men had a very strong sense of their masculinity and some misdirected this to women and children after their graduation from manhood.

Alcohol, and drug abuse is a major contributor of domestic violence. Excessive drinking by a male or female partner can lead to infidelity and this can exacerbate domestic violence. Strong links have been found between alcoholism and occurrences of intimate partner violence in many countries. Evidence suggests that alcohol used by male partners increases the occurrence and severity of

domestic violence.¹⁸ Men who drink alcohol have very little control over their families. There are strong opinions that alcohol consumption and drug abuse are resulting to men not providing to their families financially and to fulfil their conjugal obligations. These are the possible causes and reasons behind domestic violence against men.¹⁹ Women get agitated and turn to physical abuse and violence against their husbands who are too drunk to defend themselves.

Lack of economic resources underpins women’s vulnerability to violence and their apparent inability to disentangle themselves from violent relationships. The link between violence and lack of economic resources and dependence is circular. The threat and fear of violence keep women from seeking employment and compel them to accept low –paid home based exploitative labour.²⁰ Most men on the other hand spend their earnings on alcohol instead of providing for their families. This leads to strained relationships and possibilities of domestic violence. Fighting in front of children and pushing them to take sides is an indication of family breakdown. There are high chances that such children will have tendencies of violence in their future marriages. Domestic violence has its roots in a poor foundation in childcare that ill prepares them for marriage, which graduates to violence later in marriage. Hence a major source of psychological and physical violence against other members of the family.

Unclear marital roles are another source of domestic violence. For example, husbands who do not provide for their families financially or the wife not assisting the husband in taking care of the children is a major source of domestic violence. Putting the burden and pressure on one spouse during conflict later generates into violence.²¹ These unclear roles result in other members of the family intervening to assist the family and later results into conflict.

Genetic problems such as infertility or giving birth to same sex children can generate conflicts in the

¹⁵ Margolin and Gordis, “The effects of family and community violence on children”. Annual review of psychology. p. 73. 2000

¹⁶ FIDA. gender based violence in Kenya, 2007

¹⁷ Jacklyn, Cock. *Women and war in South Africa*. London: Open letters, 1992

¹⁸ Dienye, 2009: 34 quoted in Ambati 2012:9

¹⁹ Kubai, J. Causes and consequences of domestic violence against men in Mukurue-ini constituency. Kenya N69/79591/2012, p.1.(unpublished thesis), 2012

²⁰UNICEF. Domestic violence against women and girls. Innocent digest no .6 May 2000, p. 7-8.

²¹ <http://www.concernusa.org>story5mar2019>

family. In most African communities, men tend to blame women for infertility and in defence of the same cause violence to lift the blame from them. Infertility is considered a woman's problem. Giving birth to girls only leads to violence and a man would rather marry another wife than have girls only.

Kenyan women who are violated fight back leading to domestic violence. This fight can be both physical and psychological. Statistics indicate that two counties of Nairobi and Nyeri have reported an increase in cases of violence against men. Many women have responded defensively to the new and alarming statistics. They say the increase in domestic violence reflects deep-seated frustrations with husbands. The chair of "*Maendeleo ya wanawake*" publicly declared that men who do not provide for their families should be beaten; the results of which are deformed faces, broken legs, burnt bodies and chopped private parts.²²

Kubai, (2002), and Ganely, (1995), point out that while many studies have looked at female as victims of domestic violence, little has been done concerning domestic violence committed by women against men. There appears to be many reasons for this. First, there is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes domestic violence against men. Culturally it is believed that men fight against women and not vice versa.

Domestic violence continues in the society but no consensus has been reached on how to avert this. The media reports without an end hence a clear indication that there is need to reduce domestic violence before the family unit breaks down. Religious organizations especially the church has not reduced nor found lasting solutions to this violence. This calls for a theological reflection that goes back to God's original plan for humankind through the family in order so as to save humanity.

A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN KENYA

Violence has long-term consequences for the stability of the family and the society. Religious organizations are the custodians of morality in society but they have not lived to this expectation. In the Bible, Jesus condemns violence of any kind

"and one of them stuck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear but Jesus answered "No more of this" and he touched the man's ear and healed him (Luke 22:51). This also implies that Christianity condemns violence of any nature and its consequences that can lead to family separation.

Similarly, Jesus did not allow Divorce and Paul is of the same opinion "a wife must not separate from her husband but if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband and her husband must not divorce" (I Cor. 7:10-11). Paul implies that the Christian perspective concerning the family is that it has to remain intact. The Bible is clear on the roles of each member of the family. The husband is expected to be the head of the family, to love their wives as their own bodies "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (I Cor. 14:10-11). Headship also means embracing the family as his own hence providing for the family, protecting, and guiding its members on what God expects of them. It does not mean domination and fighting to maintain a position. Husbands are not to inflict their wives with pain be it physical or psychological. Paul in the epistles puts this clearly "Husbands in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner ...so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Peter 3:7). Husbands who want to serve and inherit the kingdom of God should keep away from domestic violence. The church today has allowed violent "men of God" to lead the church.

Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands in everything as in (1 Peter 3:7). Today there is a clear indication that most married women are not submissive to their husbands and instead take up their roles as the head of their families not by choice but because the husbands have neglected their roles. When forced to return to their submissive position they retaliate through violence.

To minimize violence in society it must start with the family. Violence against children is even more severe for a child's emotional, moral, and spiritual development can be compromised if they are constantly subjected to violent scenarios in the home. When one's spiritual development is

²² Top News/special/2012/06/08.

checked, the social issues will be solved without much difficulty. According to Ayanga *et al* (2002), the foundation of any efforts of reconciliation should be a theological one “thus there is need for reconciliation between God and human beings, and between human beings and nature,”²³ hence the need for cosmic harmony for all to be in a harmonious relationship.

Concerning children, the Bible expects fathers to bring their children in the training and instructions of the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-3). The fathers are no longer the priests of the family as was ordained by God and rarely have time for the children. On the other hand, children are expected to obey their parents in the Lord and God has promised them to live long on earth (Ephesians 6:1-3). These were the teachings that were imparted to the children at an early age in Sunday school but this rarely happens today. This is because most parents no longer go to church and would rather let their children study than go to church.

The church in Kenya needs to revisit the Bible’s original teachings on God’s plan for the family. The Church has failed as the custodian of the morals in society and has lost control of the family as a unit that is expected to represent Christ and the Church. The teachings that were enforced from an early age at Sunday school are no longer done seriously in most Churches instead the pastors concentrate on the elderly flock who can give offerings more than the children. A few churches like the Seventh Day Adventist have family life programmes to cater for the married couples. Other churches have children’s programmes and youth programmes but needs to be enhanced in order to reduce the impacts of violence in the family and the society in general.

The society is no longer knit together due to break up of traditional family set up hence the need to go back to our traditional family setting to reflect on what is expected of a family, to derive the worth of an individual and meaning of life. Our family backgrounds play a significant role in determining

who we are, where we came from and our actions in general.

Traditional Means of Conflict Management among the Nandi of Kenya

Among Africans, the awareness of God (the Supreme Being) is paramount and in preserving life. Forgiveness and reconciliation among people are Godly acts while anger and bitterness are sins against God. These are deep convictions and they permeate contemporary African Christianity. Although these convictions are Biblical, Shenk 1997, believes that these Biblical insights are practiced enthusiastically by African Christians because most of that has been received from their traditional heritage.²⁴ Reconciliation is an African concept and revisiting traditional resources of conflict resolution could resolve issues related to domestic violence.

The Nandi as a people is conservative and reserved, new ideas were accepted only after a long consideration. Divergences from customary practices are frowned upon. The family is the central unit and the husband heads it. In the past the wife and children were all under the instruction of the man. Women were expected to be submissive to men. With the entrance of modernity, this has changed drastically.²⁵

The Nandi society is patriarchal; men dominate decision-making processes while the women remain silent. Women were not to talk as their husbands addressed a group of people instead, they waited at home hence the men would say “*kaip kalipka ipkorwoch mui*,” (*transl.* “let me go home and share with my spouse”) after consulting their wives then present the decision the next day.²⁶ Traditionally, role of women in the community was advisory and decisions taken by men. Women played an educational role among the Nandi, for example, the mothers, grandparents, and aunties played a significant role in passing on traditional knowledge through trickster, monster stories, wise sayings, proverbs, and riddles. They checked on the dos and

²³ Ayanga et al (eds). *Conflicts in Africa: A woman’s Response*. Nairobi: Ruaraka printing press. 2002, p.111.

²⁴ Shenk, D. W. *Justice Peace & Reconciliation in Africa*. Nairobi, Uzima press. 1997, p.9.

²⁵ Rono, M.C. *The role of Nandi women in peace and reconciliation in Kesses Uasin Gishu county. Kenya*. Unpublished thesis, 2014p.115.

²⁶ *Ibid* p.95-96

don'ts (taboos) of society that would lead to unprecedented curses (*ngogi*). The upbringing of children in the Nandi community was the concern of the whole community especially close relatives like grandmothers and aunts who corrected the behaviour of a child from an early age taboo was instilled and dos and don'ts of the society.²⁷ These close relatives were also central in checking and managing conflict in the society, like any other woman in Africa as Shenk (1997) points out, "women are traditionally peacemakers because they give birth and raise children."²⁸

Among the Nandi, cases of domestic violence were checked. This does not imply that such cases did not exist. In the community, there were instances that some women would resort to silencing their husbands by use of charms known as *kwambisik* given to the husband hence causing him to be docile and senile denying him freedom. The man is the victim of violence in this case as his freedom derailed. The community would condemn this act by cursing praying that undesirable consequences face the wife who is believed to be the victim of the circumstance.²⁹

The Nandi believes that the way a woman behaves in marriage depends on her family background and upbringing. The elders investigated the family background of the girl to check if they have such charms (*kwambisik*) before initiating marriage negotiations in order to check marrying girls from families where mothers could transfer these charms to their new families after marriage.

In the past, a Nandi woman would not physically fight with her husband because the customary law did not allow that. The community would curse any woman who attempted to do this. Therefore, the safest way was for the wife to flee to her parents or relatives in case of conflict in the family.³⁰ At initiation and during seclusion period violence was not allowed. In the past violence was anticipated in marriage hence during female circumcision a ritual known as *Kamuiset* was performed a few weeks

before graduation to instil and to test the courage of the initiate if she will later withstand the husband's aggressiveness and challenge the world's cruelty. The event was repeated three times.³¹

For one to be given any position in the society for example specialist or tutor (*motiriot*) one must be of good standing (*libwob*) hence a clean record and people took care not to misbehave. Any wrong doer was punished by the society including beating your wife excessively. Forms of punishment for cases of rape could include throwing stones (*kelach*) at the rapist. Other offences had their means of punishing. A man who raped his age mate's daughter or his own daughter faced (*injokek*) action. This was a kind of action involving women who undressed themselves to sending a strong message of shame to the perpetrator. They also violently slaughtered his cow while still alive to discourage the unbecoming behaviour. Therefore, domestic violence was strongly condemned.³²

The women's roles are primary in regard to the unity of the family. This included the expected women's subordination to their husbands for example; according to the Nandi, conflict had both tangible and intangible consequences. The Nandi feared any repercussions caused by a bad omen (*ngogi*), hence could not inflict harm, which could affect the whole family through a curse. This checked cases of physical harm through domestic violence that could even lead to death. Lack of individual and community equilibrium was seen as the major consequences of conflict. This could result in either disease or unprecedented evil. Traditionally, the Nandi community had mechanisms of consolidating harmony and unity among its members and with the immediate neighbourhoods. It is important to note that, the nuclear family was the central unit of social control and source of moral values, followed by the extended family members who were regarded as close relatives. The clan was also consulted in case of major issues and finally the *pororiet*, in regard to different situations of conflict.³³

²⁷ Ibid, p109

²⁸ Ibid., p.16.

²⁹ Oral interview Tapkurgoi 16th Nov 2016 quoted in Rono M.C 2014, p123.

³⁰ Kiprop, K. The history and culture of the Nandi community: *chepnaandinndet ap keny*, Eldoret. Utafiti foundation, 2015, p.28.

³¹ Ibid., p.6.

³² Rono M.C..2014,p. 99

³³ Kiprop, K. The history and culture of the Nandi community: *chepnaandinndet ap keny*, Eldoret. Utafiti foundation, 2015, p.140.

At the family level, the women played critical roles in reconciling warring members. From findings it became evident that an elderly woman mostly a close relative of the parties in conflict played a key role of reconciling a conflict between the husband and wife.

An elderly woman notes: -

If a man mistreated his wife, for example, the older women would go to visit the couple with the aim of bringing about reconciliation. She could listen to the reasons behind the conflicts from either the woman or the man, the woman did not want to judge and separate the two, but rather bring back harmony in the family, as according to them, the whole community would be shocked in the event of divorce.³⁴

If the conflict was intense and led to fighting between the two parties an old woman and an elder could intervene to resolve the conflict. It was pointed out that “an old woman unties the birth belt (*legetiet*) while an old man removes his hide of honour (*sambut*) and they both shout saying” (*aiyo wee lagochu omete boriet oraniambut, orani legetiet*).³⁵ (Transl. “our children we plead that you must stop the conflict we give you *sambut* and *legetyo*). If this was not done and physical harm or death occurred then a curse followed.

In the event of a beating by one’s husband, one respondent reported “I would not defend myself because of holding the stick (*kigitekerikei*) to avoid touching my body. I had to scream and likely, a grandmother would come and lay down her birth belt and shouted mentioning his name “kip so and so don’t cross over (*kibanum mesir yu*)” and he would not cross over. This marked the end of the fighting, if one was not rescued, she would be killed and there was no case especially if one was involved in adultery. Conflicts at the family level were common but they were always resolved since divorce (*kebet lol*) was not a solution hence had to be avoided.

As such, Nandi women were always active promoters of harmony in the community, which can be referred to as a culture of peace. The songs,

stories, proverbs, and wise sayings carried simple but clear messages, moral teachings and warnings as regards behaviour and harmonious living which aimed at reducing conflict.

CONCLUSION

Living harmoniously within a family is therefore a moral obligation ordained by God for the promotion of life. This is not the case today; most families are dominated by violence. Homes are no longer a safe space for members of the family as was intended in the Garden of Eden. The escalating cases of Domestic Violence in Kenya indicate the laxity and failure of religious institutions in checking family relationships.

The Christian idea of marriage as a covenant for life, as a sacrament and as an enduring relationship of love and fidelity is becoming more difficult to uphold, instead what is witnessed is infidelity and hence violence at an increasing rate.

The trend in modern African marriages reflects the view that the traditional cultural and especially moral influence of the family on its members has been severely weakened. The frequent cases of domestic violence show that young couples have very little knowledge on what society expects from them in regard to marriage. This poor foundation can later lead to violence in the family. The institutions that had been set by traditional communities like the Nandi are no longer in place and have been replaced by modern formal learning that takes a lot of time.

Parents no longer have time to impart morals to the young children they are either full time workers or the children spending much time in school studying. The breakdown of these systems of instruction leads to domestic violence. The violence brewed at the family level becomes the genesis of all violence the escalating physical sexual and psychological violence between husband and wife shows that they do not understand their marital vows and out of these rivalries, the siblings are also affected in one way or another.

³⁴Oral Interview Tabletkoi 6th Nov 2016 quoted in Rono m.c. 2014, p.121.

³⁵ Ibid., 122.

The religious institutions especially the Church needs to step up its efforts in building family relationships by making sure that pre-marital counselling is done to married couples. A follow up program should be set up for newly married couples to check marital issues early. The church should consider borrowing traditional methods of conflict management and resolution like those used by the Nandi to check domestic violence.

God's original purpose for man and value of life should not be compromised by the influx of other influences of modernity and secularization. There is need to return to the original purpose for life as was ordained by God.