

**A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN PROVERBS ABOUT
WOMEN: WITH REFERENCE TO PROVERBS FROM GIKUYU
PEOPLE OF CENTRAL KENYA.**

By

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DEDICATION

English text: This thesis is dedicated to my parents Kariuki and Wambui Muihia whose constant encouragement has been a major source of inspiration in my academic ambitions.

Swahili text: Hii thesis imeandikwa kwa wazazi wangu Kariuki na Wambui Muihia ambao kwa umuhimu wa kwanza walikuwa wakulima wa kwanza wa Kenya. Wao walikuwa wakulima wa kwanza wa Kenya.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Kariuki and Wambui Muihia whose constant encouragement has been a major source of inspiration in my academic ambitions.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation on, “*A theological analysis of African proverbs about Women with reference to proverbs from Gikûyû people,*” is set on the premise that there is a need for a new cultural hermeneutics that will move towards the deconstruction of the wrong attitudes against African women; that are experienced through some (African) proverbs; that have continued to misinform and misdirect the society. Seen from this perspective, the study boldly proposes that there is need to move towards conscientizing the society on the necessity for a change of attitude in order to redeem it from the typecasts that do harm to the society – which, ironically, includes the church of Jesus Christ in Africa. If the idea of the change of attitude is put into reality, then the society, the study urges, will have to uphold, create positive proverbs and dismantle the old ones, which are designed to distort a woman's image. This section therefore introduces the above contention.

In conclusion the study recommends that African women scholars and theologians, together with the “concerned” men should publish books that will put to public domain the “newly” published and reconstituted proverbs and reach out to those who cannot read or write in seminars and in their respective communities. Otherwise, it would be defeatist to say that we are upholding some proverbs, creating new proverbs or dismantling some proverbs without engaging ourselves in publications that are geared towards re-doing the damage that is already there.

In addition, the study urges that we should, make it a habit to severally quote the “new” proverbs in our speeches and in our publications - in our endeavour to bring a new community of men and women where the lion and the goat will sit together at a *Kamukunji*¹ of interaction and genuine friendliness – and where none will be harmed or made to fear. In so doing, there would be no categorisation of goats versus lions - as all will be one people of God - reflecting the new humanity that will be created by the new cultural hermeneutics.

¹ *Kamukunji* is a place where the Gikuyu elders met o discuss issues pertaining their society.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Cultural hermeneutics- In this study, this phrase refers to the stand by which African cultural practices need to be re-interpreted. That is, analysing African practices, attitudes and world-view from a feminist and gender perspective.

Feminism- In this study, it is the application of standards that consider the status and rights of women in society and the church. Feminism reminds society that women are human beings like their male counterparts and they should equally participate in building of society and the church.

Gender analysis- gender analysis is “a technique of feminist intervention designed to increase awareness of the differential societal expectations for women and men from diverse social groups. Gender analysis includes strategies for negation of personal and social change” (Worell and Johnson 2001: 425). In this study, we collect many Gikuyu proverbs that portray a negative image to women. Then we analyse them from a gender perspective.

Gikuyu- The term is derived from Mukuyu (fig tree) (Keyatta 1938: 257). The term Mugikuyu (Agikuyu –Plural) refers to the people, Gikuyu refers to their country and Gigikuyu refers to their language. Since the Europeans found it difficult to pronounce G (Gikuyu), they rendered K (Kikuyu) instead. In this study, the original term (Gikuyu) will be used. Since the Agikuyu occupying different districts differ slightly in their accent, the gigikuyu to be used in this study is the Central Kenya accent.

Image- In this study, “image” refers to the “self” which has developed gradually from infancy as a result of socialisation. In this case, it refers to the image of a Gikuyu woman as defined by the society. It incorporated belief about how she ought to think, act and feel by virtue of her being female. It also includes learnt ideals of her feminine behaviour, privileges and emotions, thus affecting her self-confidence, self-esteem, the goals she will seek and also the means of achieving them.

Matriarchy- Here it refers to the rule by women in a society. The Gikuyu community once practised matriarchal system.

Patriarchy- It refers to the rule by men in a society. Here it implies the Gikuyu men later came to power in the community whereby they held positions in all important institutions; in the family, political, economic and social realms of the community. On the other hand, women are kept away from holding such positions. Patriarchy is also an ideology and cultural system, which draws both men and women to its service.

Proverbs- these are short sayings with a lot of meanings that summarise a cultural context, event, a happening or an experience. Proverbs teach, warn, and advice individuals or the entire community.

Sexism- this refers to unequal treatment of either women or men because of their sex. However, in this study, it will specifically be applied to women.

Social awareness- it is bringing alertness to people of a particular area about an issue they are not mindful of. Here it refers to alerting Gikuyu community about proverbs about women that create a negative image to them. Thus, discouraging the community from using them.

ABBREVIATIONS

AACC- All Africa Conference of Churches.

CBS- Central Bureau of Statistics

NR- Not Recorded. Some proverbs are not recorded in any book therefore they are noted (NR) in this thesis.

B-Barra (1998). Proverbs recorded by Barra are noted as (B 10, 19, 32 etc.).

S- Schipper (1991). Proverbs recorded by Schipper are noted as (S 80: 7, which refers to page 80, proverbs number 7 etc).

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction.

The task of this chapter is to introduce the whole study that was undertaken. That means it will shed light on how the research has been conducted, what it was intended to unveil, and what it is likely to come up with. It will also open the field for further studies. To accomplish the objective, the chapter has given the background to and the motivation for the research, the problem statement that shapes the discussion at hand, the literature review that locates the study within the existing literature, the theoretical framework, the hypothesis of the study, the research design and the research methodology, the data analysis, the limitations and the research ethics that have guided this study.

1.1 Background to and motivation for the research.

The background and motivation for this research is rooted in my experience as a woman brought up in a Gikuyu society where proverbs are used in daily socialisation of the people. I learnt many proverbs right from my childhood days; and among them two proverbs have greatly called for my attention for quite a long time – as they have always caused some displeasure in my mind. The first proverb says that, “A woman and an invalid man are the same thing,” while the second one says that, “He who steals in the company of a woman will live in fear until she dies.”

In analysing the two proverbs, it was realised that the first one originates from a Gikuyu legend, which says that God, the one who apportions – *Mũgai* - gave women some animals for domestic purposes but they could not manage them. Due to the poor stewardship, the legend goes on to say that the animals sneaked away from women, and they went to live in the forest. Seen from this “justification,” Women are said to be too weak to manage the domestic domain. Interestingly, it has been “observed” that even animals - such as antelopes do not fear women because they “know” that they are too weak; they are the same as sick men. Consequently, society views women as the weaker

sex, hence their situation “dictates” that they undertake lighter duties while men do most of the heavy and dangerous work (Kenyatta 1938).

The second proverb means that women are not sensitive enough to be able keep secrets. In other words, they are not able to distinguish between sensitive information and ordinary information. Seen from that light, they can easily cause conflicts in the neighbourhood, as they do not differentiate between various information – some of which can cause disunity and tensions when dispensed. That connotes foolishness on the part of women – a view that is clearly institutionalised in the patriarchal Gikuyu society. Worse still, by wishing them death, it means that their lack of wisdom, their insensitivity to issues or their foolishness for that matter is viewed with a lot of comprehensivity such that, like in Biblical marriage which is intact, only death can separate them from their vice!

A similar proverb says, “He who steals in the company of a boy will live in fear until the boy is circumcised.” A woman is placed in the same category as the immature boy; and like in many other African communities, a boy in the Gikuyu community is said to be irresponsible and immature person. The proverb, thus, says that the thief who steals is relieved after the boy is circumcised (in other words he has matured into adulthood). In examining the proverb critically, it is realised that the community would rather protect a thief’s image rather than the woman’s image (assuming that the thief is a man). Otherwise it does not make sense as to why the thief should be relieved of his or her vice. Shouldn’t conventional wisdom dictate that a thief be exposed, punished or be made to account for his or her misdeeds? Ironically, it is the same community that says, “A thief has no owner.” This literally means that a thief is a disgrace to the society; and therefore has no brother, nor sister, nor relative, nor mother, nor father or friend - as no one can dare defend a person who is already caught in the stealing act – for fear of being classed together. Nevertheless one (still) wonders: does a thief get his or her owner when a woman discovers him? Does he become innocent just because a woman has seen him and therefore should not be reported or “gossiped” about? Is the death of a woman any different from that of a man or boy for that matter?

Subsequently, I continued to be provoked by some other modern expressions that tend to demean women as *Imago Dei* (images of God) just as their male counterparts. They include, “women are like maize cobs, you eat maize and throw away the maize cob,” “women are like *matatu* (public vehicles), you miss one, you get another one.” “No woman is ugly after 2:30 a.m.” and “Men! Beware, Wangu¹ is back.” Some of these are not necessarily Gikuyu proverbs but are sayings and coinages that promote the old patriarchal project of demeaning women thereby embarrassing them in all areas. They are thus exposed in public places thereby doing a lot of damage to humanity in general. But after these coinages or slogans against the woman personality are repeated, they evolve to modern day proverbs and in the final analysis get acceptance as the Gospel truth.²

Sadly, an interaction with some other African communities (such as Kamba, Kisii, Meru, Zulu, Xhosa, Veda etc) showed that other African communities have similar or related attitudes to women. As implied above, I have been asking myself whether such proverbs build the image of women positively or negatively. Does it help in bringing harmony to the society? Does subordinating women through African proverbs do any good to the society?

This bad portrayal on women affects me, as a woman, whenever and wherever it is done, and especially in my presence. From this negative experience of womanhood, I was convinced that women are weak and they do not keep secrets and it is an inherent nature and therefore part of the order that God established as part of God’s divine economy. This perception was challenged when I studied feminist theology in 1999 and learnt that what I had held in my mind, for a long time, was defective and unorthodox. Such stories and proverbs appear to have been used to deny women leadership and other rights within the Gikuyu community.

¹ Wangu was a chief of Weithaga between 1901 – 1908 in colonial Kenya, see Nyakwea (1994). This story is repeated severally, in every generation, to prove that when a woman is in power, she is too brutal – as Wangu. From that experience, a woman therefore, should “never be entrusted with the instruments of power” – as the “moral” of that story teaches.

² These are the findings of this research.

Even though I had not studied a lot of feminist theology, I realised that such proverbs are harmful especially to the image of women and they need to be challenged by women and the entire society; for indeed, the image of women is distorted in both the society and in the Church. This is partly the reason why women have also been silenced in the Church for a long time. In any case, injustice to women is injustice to humanity.

When I got an opportunity to study African theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, I found it apposite to research on this topic in order to assess the way forward with regard to this patriarchal challenge that negatively sustains the above retrogressive assumptions.

However, it was after studying the works of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter the Circle) that my interest in this topic blossomed. The Circle's theology has been described as "a new leaf, which is boldly and courageously sprouting from African theology" (Njoroge 1997:77). This theology is currently "a branch with fruits" since a lot of publications have resulted since 1989 when the Circle was formed. Apart from studying their impressive work, I joined the Circle (Pietermaritzburg Chapter) in year 2003; therefore I became more enlightened on the issues that affect women in the society and in the Church. This has led me to articulate my research topic basing it on the contributions of both women and male African theologians like Oduyoye, Phiri, Njoroge, Dube, Kanyoro, Maluleke and Nthamburi, et al. I therefore, join hands with African theologians "who are yearning for a just-oriented theology which will take into account all the things that keep women economically and sexually exploited, culturally dominated and politically alienated" (Njoroge 1997: 83).

1.2 Research discussion

This study seeks to create a social awareness of dehumanising elements against women in some of the African proverbs. It also seeks to focus on a new understanding and an informed, balanced usage of proverbs regarding women's identity, status and role in society and the Church. Therefore, the statement of the problem is

Should women and society at large continue to uphold such negative proverbs and continue to use them in the modern era without challenging them?

To answer this question, the study will address the following questions

1. What are some of the empowering ways of looking at African proverbs as one of the sources of African women's theology?
2. How can African proverbs be read and used from an African woman's perspective?
3. How can the African Church utilise its cultural heritage in a way that does not dehumanise women?
4. Are there ways that can make African proverbs a tool of liberation for African women?

1.3 Literature review.

The literature that I have so far consulted does not deal directly with this topic of research. This means, therefore, that the study will not transfer materials from other works. However, the study will use the existing materials on proverbs in general, the contributions of the Circle of the Concerned African Women Theologians and the literature on African theology. In this study, a variety of sources have been selected from the library to explain the three broad areas of the study. They are as follows:

1.3.1 Literature Review on African theology.

1.3.1.1 Definition of African theology.

African theology is the study of the Christian theology in Africa by African Christians as they relate the Gospel with the rich African heritage that we inherited from our fore parents while at the same time, taking into consideration the dynamic changes that are taking place in the society – but with caution as some of it is gender biased and therefore in need of constant revision. More on the definition will be discussed in chapter two.

In his article "*What is African Theology*" (1997:9-22), Sawyer points out that the task of African theology is to present Christianity in such a way that it will find roots in the

African soil. He argues that the Christianity that was brought to Africa by the missionaries during the colonial era was clothed in the Western culture. Hence it did not have much impact on the lives of the Africans. Muzorewa (1985:99), Idowu (1965), Kurewa (1975:36) and Setiloane agree with Sawyerr that African theology is concerned “about its self-identity in the postcolonial era” (Muzorewa 1985:1).

Nthamburi (1995) and Oduyoye (1986) trace the root of African theology to the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) that was first held in 1963 in Kampala, Uganda. It was this meeting that gave rise to the quest for African theology. The impact of discussions on African theology in AACC meetings was seen in the publication of African theological book entitled, *Biblical and African Beliefs* edited by Dickson and Ellingworth. Later, other publications came up. They include the *Concepts of God in Africa* and the *African Religions and Philosophy* by John Mbiti. These books will be used in this study.

Tshibangu in his article “*The Task and Method of Theology in Africa*” (1997: 29-35), says that one of the main tasks of African theology is to relate Christian values to the central values of African religions (see also Pobee 1997 and Shorter 1977). Tshibangu and Parratt (1995: 137-152) argue that African theology must take into account the people’s struggles, be they social, economic, political or theological.

The term ‘African theology’ has been received with some criticism especially in Europe and North America where it has been seen as anti-Christian because, to some, it implies a divergence from Biblical theology. Fortunately, Mugambi (1989) has dealt with this issue in his book “*African Christian Theology: An Introduction* and resolves this misunderstanding by our counterparts – the North Atlantic theologians. He has argued that African theology amounts to Christian theological discourse by African Christians in their bid to make the Gospel authentic to the relevant adherents in African context. It is not a break or diversion from the God of Christianity. If anything, it is to confirm that the God in Jesus Christ is manifested in our culture - as it is God who authored it. For Mugambi and other African theologians (noted above), to acknowledge that culture has its positive contribution in the articulation of the Gospel is to confirm that the God of

Christianity rules all over the world. For as the Psalmist says, the earth is the Lord's and that is in it, the world, and those who live in it entire there is in it (24:1 New Revised Standard Version).

In his article, "Black Theology and African Theology- Soul mates or Antagonists?" (1997: 36-44), Tutu shows the relationship between African theology and Black theology. He points out that Black theology arises from a context of racism, suffering and exploitation of the Black peoples of South Africa while African Theology relates the Christian faith to African culture. He also says that both African Theology and Black theology stress the real value of African heritage in opposition to its degradation by Europeans. Others who support the notion that African Theology and Black Theology are related are Buthelezi (1995), Muzorewa (1985), Maimela (1998) and Parratt (1995).

A major concern raised by African women theologians is the absence of feminism in African theology. Oduyoye (1986:120-135), Phiri (1977: 45-56) and Landman (1998: 137-140) argue that African theology should defend justice and transform the unjust structures, which tend to dehumanise and oppress men and women in our communities.

1.3.1.2 Proverbs as a source of African theology.

John Pobee (1997) discusses some of the major sources of African theology, which are the Bible, African traditional religion and Church tradition. As far as African traditional religion is concerned, he says, "the urgent task is the collection of myths, proverbs, invocations, prayers, incantations rituals, songs, dreams etc" (p. 26). Others who have argued along this line are Setiloane (1986: 1-2), Mbiti (1998: 149-157) Muzorewa (1985:80) and Oduyoye (1986).

In his article "Death in African Proverbs as an Area of Inter-religious Dialogue" Mbiti has collected 30,000 African proverbs from different languages of Africa, which address a vast range of themes and out of them he has selected a small section that speaks about death (2002: 107-125).

Kinoti (1998) has clearly discussed proverbs in African Spirituality. Like Mbiti, she has placed proverbs in their religio-socio-cultural context and has also discussed the role of proverbs (in Getui 1988: 55-78). Healey and Sybertz (1996) have collected a number of African proverbs, stories and wisdom sayings. The work on Sukuma proverbs in Tanzania (43-54) is vital in this study; Healey and Sybertz see the need to understand African proverbs and use them in their social and cultural contexts.

Ayanga (1996) has argued that proverbs about women portray a picture of what women are. Besides, they depict what women should be and how they should be treated in society (in Wamue and Getui, 1996: 15-20).

Schipper (1991) has collected several proverbs and sayings on women in almost eighty African languages. She states that many proverbs dictate a woman's role and behaviour and this gives an image of what "society" expects from her and that many of these proverbs criticise, belittle and humiliate women (Schipper 1991: 1-16).

Oduyoye has made a major contribution to the study of proverbs that gives a lot of input to this study. Oduyoye (1995) discusses African myths, folktales, proverbs and storytelling, particularly among the Akan community in Ghana, with reference to their impact in the lives of women and attempts "to answer the question, 'what is woman?'" (p.20). She discusses her points within the context of the major themes of African theology like "Human dignity." She appreciates proverbs that assert the dignity of all human beings and then she wonders, "Why should women not feel free to dismantle those proverbs that are sexist, oppressive or limiting to the full growth of their humanity and the just orderliness of society?" (p.57). She calls on women to create new proverbs (p.75) to reclaim their dignity.

The above literature on proverbs provides relevant information about proverbs but it does not have any information about women in relation to African's women theology, which is the aim of this study.

1.3.2 Literature on Gikúyû Proverbs.

1.3.2.1 Historical background of Gikuyu community.

Some proverbs originate in a historical event and others from the traditions and customs of the people. Kenyatta (1938) provides comprehensive information about the tribal life of the Gikuyu. This includes its origin and kinship (p.6), its economic life (p.54), its industry (p.70) and system of education (p.99), initiation of boys and girls (p.123), system of government, religion (p.188) and ancestor worship and magical practices (p.307). Kenyatta's works will be helpful to this study as it provides an authentic background for Gikuyu proverbs on women. It also reveals the place of women in the Gikuyu society.

1.3.2.2 World-view of Gikuyu Proverbs.

Kabîra and Mûtahi (1998) have looked at the different genres of Gikuyu Oral literature, which include narratives, songs and dances, poetry, proverbs and riddles. They have also analysed some literary texts in order to show their relevance and functions in society. They argue that proverbs summarise a cultural context, event, happening or an experience (p.37).

Barra (1998) has collected 1000 Gikuyu proverbs and most of the proverbs that will be used in this study will be drawn from his work. Other proverbs will be added from Schipper (1991). In addition some proverbs will be drawn from Wanjohi (1997). He has not only collected Gikuyu proverbs but has classified them according to their purposes. However, his main interest is to find out if there is an African philosophy and he uses proverbs to answer his question.

The above literature on Gikuyu is enriching to this study but it does not evaluate the impact of proverbial language on women's identity. Therefore the study will follow Oduyoye's (1995) line of thought in her discussion on the language of proverbs and their impact on the lives of women.

1.3.3 The theology of the humanity of women.

Oduyoye (2001:66-77) discusses the issue of an anthropology that seeks to define woman as created in the image and likeness of God. She further says that African women theologians are calling for a new anthropology that includes and appreciates both men and women as equal human beings who need justice in all aspects of life. The women theologians see the need to revisit both Christian anthropology and African anthropology because they define women as lesser beings who are not equal with men.

Rakoczy (2004) discusses what it means to be human. She argues that women have been treated as inferior human beings throughout history in society and in church. She calls for a relational anthropology, which does justice to the dignity of women and men (p.45-48). Likewise Rosemary Ruether (1983: 93-115) points out that all humans possess a full and equivalent human nature and personhood as male and female. She continues to say that women want to tear down the walls that separate the self and society into "male" and "female" spheres. Ackermann (1991) sees the need for women to define their own humanity "because it has always been done for us." She says that men have by and large defined the humanity of women, their experience, perceptions, thoughts and beliefs for them. As a result, women's humanity has been deformed. So she asserts that women need to salvage their humanity. De Gruchy (1996: 252 -262, points out that

Being human means being who I am...the woman does not have to become a man in order to be saved... Being human means being on a journey... it is about growing and developing, shaping and being shaped, changing and maturing...Being human means being in community...we are only human in so far as we are enabled to become human by other people.

He discusses humanity within the doctrine of creation and fall and the doctrine of redemption.

The above literature review has located this research within the already existing literature; and thereby provides a platform through which the research has been conducted. As noted in the introduction of this sub-section, the study does not carbon copy what the above scholars have already done. Rather, it develops from where they have reached and attempts to go beyond them thereby making its own unique contribution in African theology.

1.4 Hypothesis.

African (Gikuyu) proverbs about women reveal the people's attitude towards them. In addition these proverbs have an impact on the understanding of an African woman's image in the church and society. Some proverbs are constructive in that they build a positive image of a woman. However, some are negative because they distort the image of a woman. Therefore proverbs are a major source of African feminist theology because they reveal who women are in a particular African society.

1.5 Theoretical framework.

The theories that were used for this research were African theology, feminism and cultural anthropology in answering the question "what is woman?" This study was particularly informed and shaped by African theology from the perspective of African theologians like Mbiti (1999:66) who says that proverbs are common ways of expressing religious ideas and feelings. Muzorewa (1985:80) and Pobee (1997:26) also see African proverbs and prayers, among others, as loaded with theological insights.

This study was further shaped by the theology of African women. Njoroge (1997:81) says that, "women are concerned that uncritical cultural retrieval and glorification of African religions and cultures will continue to erode women's dignity and wholeness. Hence they call for cultural hermeneutics in dialogue with the scriptures, especially the gospels, in the development of African theology". Njoroge further says, "Hand-in-hand with this critical analysis is the study and examination of how myth, proverbs, folk tales and symbols operate in the socialisation of women, working to preserve the norms of the community.

Oduyoye (1995 - Chapters 1 - 3) has dealt with the language that is used in story telling, myths, tales and proverbs, which are real in shaping the life of a society. African theology from the perspective of women theologians is a theology that brings into balance the wholeness of the community as made up of males and females (Oduyoye 1986:121). Nthamburi (1991:18) and Parrat (1995:50-51) say that for many years, feminism has been absent in African theology.

Moreover, Phiri (1997: 45-55) succinctly says that male theologians largely dominated the earlier stages of African theology. She further argues that the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians was set up to encourage the work of women in African theology and to advocate a greater emphasis on women's experiences.

Phiri (1997) emphasises that African theology, from women's perspective, addresses the issues that have put women in oppressive situations. These are pregnancy, birthing and naming rituals. Likewise, they contemplate the initiation of girls, marriages, widowhood and property inheritance. Other issues include African women and religious leadership and women in the church. These issues have contributed to the distortion of the image of women thus denying a life of full humanity as intended by God. However, both man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God (see also Okure 1993:76 - 83).

The sources of African women's theology are the Bible, Women's experiences in the Bible, Christian tradition, African religion and African culture. African theology from women's perspective maintains things that uphold women and men's humanity and challenges whatever does not promote humanity of both women and men (Phiri 1997:70-71).

1.6.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study followed the works of Mouton (2001) and Blanche, M.T. and Kelly K. (1999) in their discussion on research, design and methodology. They give detailed information on how to carry out the in-depth interviews, which provided important primary information for my research.

My research was located in cultural hermeneutics and oral theology in the light of African women's theology. Hermeneutically, I engaged in dialogue with the local communities among Gikuyu-my people. From a contextual point of view, I was concerned with what came out of that particular context. My focus was on Gikũyũ proverbs about women and how they impact the understanding of an African woman's image in the church and society. My method was to conduct interviews among the local people in Kinangop Division, Nyandarua District in Central Province (see map 1 and map 2 in the appendix page 106-7).

Place of study

This study was conducted in 4 locations of Central Kenya. In Kinangop division, the four locations that were visited are Njabini, Munyaka, Magumu and Engineer (see map 2 of Nyandarua District showing the four centres in Kinangop Division in the appendix page 106). I was located at Njabini location, near my home to conduct research in both Njabini and Magumu locations. Njabini is more urbanised and most of the people engage in various businesses to earn their living. Magumu location is near Nairobi city and has a large market which attracts people from Thika, Murang'a and Kiambu districts that are part of the Central province of Kenya. While conducting research at Munyaka and Engineer, I was based at St. Paul's church in Central Kinangop parish. These two locations are in rural areas and most of the people are farmers. The inhabitants of this division are predominantly Gikúyú. They make use of proverbs in their daily socialisation. I selected Kinangop Division firstly because it is densely populated by Gikúyú people from Murang'a, Thika, Nyeri Maragua and Kiambu which form Central Province of Kenya. Secondly, this is my home area and I am familiar with the people, both old and young, in their mother tongue. This facilitated in-depth interviews, which provided important primary information for my research.

Study population

All the participants in this study were Gikuyu people. The total number of respondents was eighty. This number was enough to give the interviewer the necessary information required for this study. I requested the parish ministers in collaboration with lay leaders to identify for me the people who could give me the information I wanted, because they knew them as neighbors. Twenty people, between 21 - 80 years of age, were interviewed in each location (that is Magumu, Njabini, Munyaka and Engineer). Ten women, (five of them above forty years and five below forty years) and ten men were interviewed, (five above forty years and five below forty years). The purpose of this selection was to discover how people of both genders and different ages, living in urban and rural areas, understand proverbs about women (see map 3 on Nyandarua district population distribution 1999 and table 2 showing population by age and sex in the appendix page 107 and 108 respectively).

Study personnel

I conducted this study with the help of 4 assistants. My assistants were Ministers of the Anglican Church who serve in these centres. I know them personally as my fellow church workers. Their role was to help me identify the research subjects who were targeted in these centres and to make arrangements to meet them; Kelly (1999:383) calls this process “snowballing” or “the friend of a friend approach”. This means that the ministers did not interview people but they gave me a guide to take me to the respondents’ homes for they had informed them earlier of my visit and the purpose.

I talked to the ministers before the actual dates of the interview in order to explain to them the number of participants required in this research, their age and gender. Consequently, the participants were informed about the interview. Evangelists occasionally visit people in these locations from different denominations and pastors who give them pastoral care and so it was not strange to hear about my visit. However, the ministers made sure they understood my purpose.

Research measurement

This study used eight open-ended (semi-structured) questions that were written down in advance to collect information from the informants (see the attached questionnaire in the appendix page 98-99). I used these questions to interview all my informants in the four locations. Additionally, a tape-recorder was always made ready before the interview session. I recorded the information as people were being interviewed. They gave me permission to record their. Sometimes, I interviewed individual and at times I interviewed a focus group. This method enabled the subjects to talk to the researcher in some depth. Their feelings and experiences that relate to various proverbs about women were highly considered, noted and recorded. information and they were very excited as I reversed the tape for them to hear briefly. After everyday interview, I reversed the taped radio cassettes to hear the information again and then I could write down the information, which I missed to write at the time of interview.

Interview process

The research was conducted in July 2004 at Engineer, Magumu, Munyaka and Njabini, respectively (see attached list of key informants in appendix page 96-7). One week was spent in each centre. The ministers to whom I had explained the kind of respondents I wanted were able to talk to and inform them to expect to be interviewed on a particular day. Thus I found them ready for the interview. However, in Munyaka location, one woman wanted me to pray with her, instead, and therefore, I did not get the information I wanted. Fortunately, I found two women who were ready to be interviewed in the next house. The main respondent had invited her friend to join her during the interview. This replaced the woman whom I was unable to interview.

In some cases, I interviewed individuals and at other times I interviewed focus groups composed of between 6 and 8 people (Kelly 1999:389). As recommended by Blanche, I spent about 30 minutes (Blanche and Kelly 1999: 130-133) with each individual and about fifty minutes with each group. In Njabini and Engineer locations, I had requested the church ministers to organise young people in groups seven or eight people and meet in the church premises for interview. I used both focus group and an individual because both gave me a lot of information that I wanted. The focus groups comprised mainly of young men and women (below 40 years) because it was an in-depth interview. Individuals, who were mostly old men and women of above 40 years, gave me detailed information on the background of the proverbs they provided me. One of the weaknesses with the method is that participants wanted to talk too much but I was time-conscious. I interrupted when they spoke what I thought was out of topic (see proverbs collected from informants in the appendix page 101-4). I also engaged in dialogue with the local communities of the Gikuyu of Kinangop Division, Nyandarua District in the Central Province of Kenya.

1.6.2 Data Analysis

Under data analysis, graph and tables were used to:

- Assess the number of proverbs portraying a positive image of women and those which portray a negative image from the respondents' perspective.

- Assess people's awareness of the impact of proverbs about women in the communities.
- Analyse the proverbs about women that could make African Christianity in the 21st Century and in all communities more gender-sensitive.

1:7 Limitations

The study was only concerned with African proverbs about women. This means that other genres of African wisdom literature were excluded. The focus of study was proverbs about women among the Gikuyu community of Central Kenya. This means that other communities of Kenya and Africa were not covered by this study.

There were constraints on the respondents' side especially women because they were preoccupied by many responsibilities in their homes. However, I adjusted my schedule to fit into theirs. The schedule of some Ministers could not accommodate my requests on the days of interview. As a result they boosted my work by choosing some church elders to assist me.

Lack of adequate resources for the research, especially with regard to finances, was another limiting factor. In addition, the distance between the area of research and the library and my Supervisor's Office was strenuous. Nevertheless, I made use of the available resources. Additionally, I visited libraries in Kenya and communicated with my Supervisor both physically and through the e-mail. The time frame and lack of enough books, which directly address this study, was another limitation, since many proverbs on women are not written. However, I was able to collect the unwritten proverbs from the participants in the research.

1:8 Research ethics

This study upheld the ethics of research as required by the University of Kwazulu-Natal in line with the guidelines by Mouton (2001:238:248). The research was conducted with honesty and integrity. The works of other people were acknowledged accordingly so as to avoid plagiarism. Accountability to those who have been interviewed has been kept.

As a researcher, I was consciously sensitive to the possible impacts of the research on the society through information dissemination, publication and/or otherwise. I also upheld the ethical responsibility to the people with whom I worked.

Thus the researcher appreciated that the people had a right to privacy including the right to refuse to participate in her interviews. The people had a right not to be harassed in any way, be it physically, emotionally, psychologically or in other ways. Likewise the personal identities of participants were concealed: only summarised or anonymous quotations have been published. This research was of benefit to the participants and the society at large because it created awareness of the impact of the proverbs on gender relations. This is a way of empowering women in that society and church.

1.9 Conclusion

Having set out the introduction of this research, the study will present the sources of African theology in the next chapter; and in so doing, it will be able to demonstrate that these sources are gender insensitive hence a need for Theo-cultural hermeneutics that will be inclusive. The chapter's unique contribution of introducing proverbs as another source of African theology does not however help matters - as they are equally gender biased – just like the other sources of African theology - as discussed by scholars like Muzorewa and Nthamburi, among others. The next chapter will therefore pay special attention to proverbs - particularly those that relate to women- and analyse them from the perspective of the current trends in African women's theology where gender inclusiveness is given prominence.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINITION AND SOURCES OF AFRICAN THEOLGY

2:0 Introduction

Since the framework of this study falls under African theology, this chapter will look at the definition and sources of African theology. Most of the early writers of African theology have defined it from a male's perspective (Mbiti, Tutu, Buthelezi, Setileone and Parratt among others). Thus the earlier writers of African theology, and who happen to be men, have left out issues on women. By their silence on issues that relate to the dignity of women, they communicate a message that they have no problem with the status quo. This therefore shows that even in silence, we do communicate. In any case, silence, as the English proverb goes, means consent.

Indeed, various types of subjugations such as racism, colonialism and poverty have been addressed by male theologians of the 20th century but they have omitted sexism as practised in the society and in the church. Consequently African women theologians have come up to address the domineering issues that do not promote the dignity of both men and women (see Oduyoye, Phiri, Njoroge, Kanyoro, Nasimiyu and Okure among others).

The chapter will also consider the sources of African theology particularly in African traditional culture because the area of research in this document concentrates on examining proverbs that relate to women. Hence much will be shown on why cultural hermeneutics need to be employed while considering the sources of African theology.

2:1 The meaning of African theology

Different African theologians have presented various ways of defining African theology. Some of these definitions will be presented in this section. Kurewa defines African theology as:

'The study that seeks to reflect and express the Christian faith in African thought forms and idioms as it is experienced in African Christian communities and always in dialogue with the rest of (the) Christendom (1995:36)

Nthamburi relates African religion with Christianity. He appreciates African beliefs as an important aspect of understanding Christianity. He says:

African theology means the theology of African traditional religion. It would mean that from the traditional reflection on existence of African peoples and their beliefs. Since those who are engaged in this reflection are Christians, however, the title is now understood to mean a theology that is African as well as Christian ... (1991:3).

The above definitions help the study to come up with its own definition of the phrase African theology:

African theology is thus a study that attempts to offer some solutions to the contemporary problems that the Africans face and at the same time it is a theology that challenges some African practices and beliefs, which are not compatible with the Gospel. It therefore must use the African thought forms and expressions in order to be effective to the Africans' lives.

With regard to the tasks of theology in Africa, Sawyer points out that the task of African Theology is

...to present Christianity in a manner that will find roots in the lives of Africans. African theologians have generally noted that missionaries brought Christianity clothed in western culture (1997:9-22).

This means that early missionaries of the 19th century condemned almost every practice and beliefs of Africans, by seeing them as heathen, primitive and evil. On the contrary, they viewed western Christianity as civilised and good. They made a wrong judgement on African culture (Muzorewa 1985: 99), Idowu (1965), Kurewa (1975:36).

Similarly, Setiloane says that the

Purpose of this theology is to make the gospel and Christianity meaningful in the life and thought of (the) African people. To do so, theology must evolve from the lives of the people themselves (1989:45).

Setiloane, like Mugambi, argues that African theology must be born out of the experiences of Africans. Their experiences after interacting with colonisers, exploiters and their culture must therefore bring forth a theology that is relevant to the Africans.

Mugambi goes on to say that:

Foreign missionaries and theologians cannot articulate African theology... Africans are the only people who can in the end define and articulate their priorities and experiences with regard to the gospel of Jesus and to other aspects of life (1989:11).

Africa has gone through experiences of conquest, of political domination, of slavery and of racism. Therefore the most dominant concept in African theology is that of liberation.

Many African theologians agree with Nthamburi when he states that,

African theology is a theology of liberation from all that dehumanises Africans such as hunger, insecurity, political oppression, poverty, disease and broken relationships. Its aim is "to make the gospel and Christianity meaningful in the life and thought of African people" (Nthamburi 1989: 4). Thus it is both material and spiritual liberation (holistic). It heals by changing life for better (1991:11).

Although African theologians emphasise that African theology must be deeply rooted in the African soil, it must also have some elements that make it a universal theology.

Magesa asserts that,

A strong and meaningful theology of necessity should be deeply rooted in culture. Paradoxically, it must preserve its universal traits whilst inculcating its particular qualities. It must make sure that the church in Africa is catholic and yet truly African (Magesa in Okure and Paul T 1990:112).

African theology from Women's perspective is a theology that "brings into balance the wholeness of the community as made up of males and females" (Oduyoye 1986:121). Thus, African women are calling for a cultural hermeneutics that is in dialogue with the scriptures - especially the gospels- in the development of African theology (Njoroge 1997:81).

Phiri (1997:45-55) asserts that African women's theology:

... is a theology that addresses the issues that have put women in oppressive situations... Such situations are experienced in the lives of women during pregnancy, birthing and naming rituals. Other situations include initiation of girls, marriages, widowhood and property inheritance where women are deprived of their humanity.

Other theologies related to African theology (but not synonymous) include Latin American Liberation theology, Black theology in USA and Black theology in South Africa (see Buthelezi (1995), Muzorewa (1985), Maimela (1998) and Parratt (1995) Tutu (1997) and Nthamburi (1991: 9 - 17). They are all theologies of liberation but liberation from different aspects and in different contexts (Pobee 1979:34-41).

Having seen how the various African theologians have defined African theology, the sub-section has prepared us to see why African women theologians are not contented with African theology even though they are also Africans. As a matter of fact, and as noted in our introductory chapter, African theology is defined and articulated mainly from the male perspective and women are expected to follow and obey it like sheep under the hands of a good shepherd. Thus, it is no surprise that after the birth of African theology in the 1960s, African Women's theology had to be born in 1989. This was done to, mainly, address the imbalances and thereby fill the gaps that African theology failed to cover. Thus, the sub-section has also prepared us to look at the sources of African theology – to which we now turn.

2:2 Sources of African theology

African theologians have assessed various sources of African theology, which will be discussed in this section. By sources, I am referring to anything that can be of benefit to make African theology a theology that improves the lives of the Africans as it speaks to them and who in turn embraces it. It is a theology that affects all spheres of life of Africa by bringing healing and promoting the harmonious life of the society. Such sources include the Bible, Christian tradition, African culture and African Traditional Religion.

2.2.1 The Bible

The Bible is the primary source of African theology. God speaks to human beings through general and special revelation. The Bible enables humanity to know God in a special way. However, this does not mean that God never spoke to Africans before the Bible came to them. God used general revelation to speak to our ancestors. The mountains and other physical features expressed the attributes and nature of God. Hence Pobee (1997) calls for a phenomenological approach to African religion so as to understand Africans' beliefs and practices that pertain to their relationship with God and the rest of creation.

Additionally, Pobee like other African theologians cautions the literal approach of reading and applying the biblical principles. They recommend that biblical criticism be

taken seriously rather than literally. For example, they emphasise the application of the historical critical method, which draws the meaning out of the text rather than doing iesogenesis. Oduyoye (1986:66) observes that the Africans view the scripture from the Euro-American perspective. She therefore suggests that in order to avoid this, a new question needs to be raised concerning the Bible. That is, 'what is the intrinsic value in telling and retelling these stories?' She also calls all Africans, who know the original biblical languages, to be involved in the publication of translations and commentaries of the Bible.

African women theologians see the need to approach the Bible from a woman's perspective (Okure 1988:55). Additionally, Okure like other women theologians says that:

The Bible is a patriarchal book written and interpreted almost exclusively by men yet the human race is composed of male and female, each with its own distinctive way of perceiving reality... There is an urgent need to correct the imbalance and impoverishment of scripture caused by this one-sided interpretation by bringing to bear a feminine perspective in the interpretation of scripture (Okure in Fabella and Oduyoye (eds.) 1988:56).

African women theologians have also observed that the language used in the Bible is androcentric. Therefore they seek for a new interpretation of scriptures particularly from a woman's perspective, which brings a different understanding of Bible passages. Thus:

Reading of the Bible is a basic procedure of theological reflection for women e.g. systematic study of the figure of Eve can provide liberative insights for women's self-perception (Fabella and Oduyoye (eds.) 1988: xiii).

The Bible is an important source of Africa theology because it bears some themes that are basic to African theology. Biblical themes such as liberation (Nthamburi 1991:34), created and redeemed, God, Jesus, Covenant, and community and anthropology (Oduyoye 1986:81-137) enable Africans to identify themselves with the people in the Bible who underwent the same situations. Thus the Bible becomes a living book for Africans.

2.2.2 Christian Tradition and the African History.

(i) African history.

African theology deals partly with Africa's own history. Africa's history of the impacts of slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism contributed to the interpretation and application of the traditional themes of God, creation, sin and redemption as found in the Bible. Colonialism and Christianity of the time, for example, led to the birth of African instituted churches in the 19th and the 20th century (Mwaura 2002: 57 -60). With the coming of foreigners especially during the slave trade and colonialism, social institutions were interfered with. Thus Africa became economically poor due to its exploitation by the foreigners and it lost its political independence. Additionally, people's beliefs and cultural practices such as rites of passages were no longer the same. Therefore, African history and its experiences become a major source of African theology (Oduyoye 1986:52, Nthamburi 1991:34-35).

(ii) Christian tradition.

Christian tradition includes the way the Christian beliefs and doctrines have been handed down by the early church, the church fathers and the scholars. Such doctrines have shaped the church. Likewise, the way Christianity was introduced by the 19th century missionaries in Africa contributes to the effects of Christianity in Africa today. The wrong attitude by the missionaries towards Africa's religion and their cultural practices developed a shallow depth of Christianity in the lives of Africans. However, eastern Christianity has a positive outcome in that it trained some Africans as catechists and priests like Samuel Crowther and built social amenities, which were essential to the lives of the Africans. Thus African theology analyses the church traditions to make the gospel find deep roots in the African soil.

2.2.3 African culture and religion.

(i) African Culture.

African culture(s) is one of the sources of African theology. It is rich in cultural ritual practices such as rites of passage and genres like riddles, poetry, folktales, proverbs and songs, which inform African theology. Setileone argues that even if African primal

communities were illiterate this does not mean that Africans were ignorant in any way. He cites memory and story telling as vital qualities, which were in the lives of the Africans. He says, "in fact literacy has destroyed certain forms of qualities" (Setiloane 1986:1). African genres and rituals were medium of education to different age groups in African communities. Thus moral teachings promoted a harmonious life in every society. African culture like other cultures has been eroded from time to time due to its interaction with various cultures in the world. African theology finds some cultural aspects that are compatible with the gospel as a necessary tool for enriching Christianity in Africa. African theologians like Mbiti (1998 in Maimela, page 144-148) note that it is difficult to separate African culture and religion because religion permeates all areas of their being

(ii) **African religion.**

African religion includes mainly the beliefs of African people. African religion is continental in the sense that all African people believe in God the creator of the universe. God is manifested through nature hence God's attributes and nature are known through general revelation. This common belief unites all African peoples despite their different cultures. Pobee observes that although Africans did not have written scriptures like the Bible, they had approximation of scriptures. These include myths, proverbs, invocations, prayers, incantations, rituals, songs dreams etc., (Pobee 1997: 27) ~ which are indeed sources of African theology. Pobee sees the urgent task of collecting them for they reveal Africans' belief in God, spirits, ancestors, cultic person, cultic objects and generally cultic culture of African peoples.

Likewise Nthamburi (1991: 26-27) says:

African traditional religion is pregnant with symbols and rituals. These may be manifested in sacrificial rites, rites of passage, dances, sacred objects, songs and poems. ...African traditional religion and culture gives an African theological framework within which it can develop.

African symbol and rituals manifest African's way of thinking which makes them distinct from other peoples. Thus the enormous materials of the sources of African traditional religion are relevant sources of African theology because they are effective vessels for communicating the gospel to the Africans.

From the African women's perspective, not all African rituals, symbols, beliefs and practices are liberative to human beings – and especially women. Consequently, such components do not ensure effective communication of the gospel and are oppressive and contradict one of the aims of African theology: to bring liberation to every African person. In relation to this, women call for the application of cultural hermeneutics so as to discard African elements, which are oppressive to humanity. Thus as Njoroge sums it up:

Women are concerned that uncritical cultural retrieval and glorification of African religions and culture will continue to erode women's dignity and wholeness. Women also call for the study and examination of how myth, proverbs, folk tales and symbols operate in the socialisation of women working to preserve the norms of the community (Njoroge 1997:81).

2.2.4 Proverbs.

As in the case of Oduyoye's works (1995 chapters 1-3), the study will give special attention to the African proverbs and analyse some of them from a woman's perspective in order to see if they promote the dignity of humankind. Proverbs, like myths, folktales and prayers, is one of the sources of African theology. However, not all proverbs bring a theology of liberation and reconciliation - especially proverbs that speak about women, as we shall see in this section.

2.2.4.1 Meaning of proverbs.

Akiriga defines proverbs "as a short saying of wisdom in general use... Proverbs are a collection of the experiences of people, some of which have been learned the hard way" (2003:110).

According to Miruka, a proverb is a brief statement full of hidden meaning, accepted and used by a community as an expression of truth or wisdom. He further says that:

Proverbs are a summary of a people's philosophy of life... developed over generations of fluctuation from the occurrences and recurrences empirical conclusions (that) are coined on the nature of life. These are expressed in proverbs as tested truth transferring the past via the present into the future. Proverbs are statements of past truths and as they apply today (1994: 44 - 45).

Kabira and Mutahi claim that proverbs can be defined as "metaphorical statements that summarise a cultural context, event, a happening or an experience" (1988: 21).

It is therefore clear that proverbs are short statements, which are pregnant with meanings that can only be well understood by the people who create them. Hence, they arise from a particular culture.

2.2.4.2 Nature of proverbs.

Akivaga asserts that proverbs communicate an idea more deeply than ordinary language and that they draw their material and images from a particular environment or society. "Hence proverbs from the Maasai will differ in their use of images from those of the Luhya even though they may be communicating the same message"(2003:110).

Chesaina observes that economy of language is most conspicuous in proverbs. She says that:

Some proverbs consist of two or three words in the original language. Hence word economy facilitates quick communication and emphasises the immediacy of the advice conveyed through the proverb. Proverbs commonly employ imagery in the form of metaphors, similes, symbols and personification for clarity. The comparison may appear far-fetched but the cultural attitudes towards the object of comparison give logical dues to the implications of the proverbs at deeper level (1997: 35 - 6).

Chesaina also notes that:

Proverbs employ positive or negative statements to communicate their message. The negative form adds to the effectiveness of these proverbs by giving them a categorical tone and hence making them more persuasive (1997: 35 -6).

This observation is very important in this study because most of the proverbs about women are negative statements. Therefore they convey a negative message that leaves a bad impression about the image, status and roles of women in the particular society. Proverbs are forever in use because they are poetic and therefore are, sometimes, short statements - which are easily remembered.

Miruka notes that:

Proverbs belong to the realm of language. Language itself is part of the social culture. Oral language is used to effect communication ... proverbs are flavoured with authority and axiom as they are stated as objective truths seeking to guide human conduct...They are communicated by word of mouth. They have survived yesterday, apply today and guide the pathway of tomorrow (1994:44).

Although Miruka says that proverbs have survived yesterday, apply today and guide the pathway of tomorrow, the current research shows that more proverbs are being created due to people's different experiences in life. Additionally culture is neither static nor archival.

Miruka continues to say that "a proverb can be multi-contextual in application e.g. an advisory proverb can also be used to caution as well as to warn or admonish" (1994:46). This therefore means that in order for one to understand the meaning of a proverb s/he must study the life of that community. Hence "proverbs emerge from specific settings within a given community. They function as a means of warning, advising, informing, educating etc" (Kabira and Mutahi 1998: 37).

(c). Users of proverbs.

Miruka notes that elders use more proverbs in their speech because they are more adept at the language and have longer experience in life. Current research supports this idea but even the young people use proverbs most of which are created in their generation. Miruka adds that:

Men use proverbs with greater abandonment because men dominate public life and administration and therefore are more regularly in circumstances which demand speech making. But in interpersonal conversation women may be just as adept or even more so at using proverbs men use (1994: 50-1).

In view of what Miruka says (above), it is clear that men still hold the key positions in leadership and therefore they use proverbs in public to entertain, to teach, to warn, or to encourage the community. However, when men use negative proverbs about women they damage women's image and cripple their capabilities. Consequently, women's active participation in society becomes docile. Hence Kabira and Mutahi assert that, "proverbs require one's ability to use them appropriately so (that) one has to have a wide range of proverbs in order to be able to use them in his/her everyday speech" (1998: 37).

(d) Purposes of proverbs.

Akiriga (2003), Miruka (1994), Kabira and Mutahi (1998) and Kinoti (1998) summarise the purposes of proverbs as follows:

A proverb entertains, teaches, cautions, warns or advises us about something and is transmitted from one generation to another (Akivaga: 2003:110). Proverbs give an “insightful sense of probabilities... They act as mirrors through which we glance at the society, its attitudes and thought process... Proverbs are used to warn, caution, lampoon, console, and encourage” (Miruka 1994: 60).

In case of warning or advice, proverbs are usually used for their clarity and depth. When an elder uses a proverb while talking to a young person, it serves the purpose of issuing a very strong warning. For the young it would be imprudent to ignore such a statement from an elder (Kabira W. and Mutahi K. 1998: 37-8).

Proverbs are usually used for serious businesses such as discussions on land, marriage, contracts, legal proceedings etc. In such situations nobody interprets the proverbs (Kabira W. and Mutahi K. 1998: 37-8). They aid people to “appreciate nature... instruct in wisdom... teach morality... serve to promote healing in individuals and communities... A proverb clinches an argument... Proverbs aid people to appreciate the supernatural” (Kinoti 1998: 55 - 70).

The above purposes of proverbs show that proverbs play a very important role in the lives of people. They are part of social life of the people; and are thus used daily for different purposes. At least every person learnt some proverbs as she\he grew up. As Cagnolo (1933: 213) says of the Gikuyu:

...they possess a rich inheritance of common-sense which is handed down on oral traditions from father to son, by grandfathers to the young people... in the form of endless proverbs, parables and stories.”

Cagnolo uses gender exclusive language and this is a problem because one is not sure whether Cagnolo includes women (daughters, mothers and grandmothers) in his statement. However, his view speaks for the Gikuyu community in particular and the African society in general.

2.3 Conclusion.

African religion and culture as a source of African theology may not be fully appreciated to be of value to the African women theologians unless new cultural hermeneutics is applied to address the imbalances - as noted above. This is important in the quest for African women's identity (Oduyoye 1995 chapters 1-3). This brings us to the next chapter on, "The Theology of the humanity of women," which will look at issues such as humanity, rites of passage, dowry and theology and anthropology with reference to the plight of women. The chapter will therefore shed light on the theology of the humanity of women amidst the societal biasness that have characterised the society despite the two centuries of the Christian presence in Africa.

CHAPTER THREE

THE THEOLOGY OF THE HUMANITY OF WOMEN

3.0 Introduction.

The idea of humanity as discussed within the issue of anthropology has been viewed in various ways. This chapter will show the Christian traditional understanding of humanity, African understanding of humanity and the call of African Women Theologians for a new interpretation of anthropology. It will also make suggestions on how this new understanding of a "relational anthropology" needs to be implemented in the lives of Church and in the entire society of men and women.

3.1 Definition of humanity.

Scholars have defined the term "humanity" in various ways. Buthelezi defines it poetically when he says that, "to be human is to have power to be really human." Speaking for blacks in South Africa, who were by then experiencing injustices of apartheid, Buthelezi asserts that the blacks are denied the right to have dominion over even their own lives. They are denied their God-given humanity by conditions that others have created through the exploitation of the others' own power of dominion (see Buthelezi in Parratt 1995: 166).

In his article "*Human Being in Christ: Resources for an Inclusive Anthropology*" (1996: 252 -262, de Gruchy points out that

Being human means being who I am...the woman does not need to become a man in order to be saved... Being human means being on a journey... it is about growing and developing, shaping and being shaped, changing and maturing...Being human means being in community...we are only human in so far as we are enabled to become human by other people.

According to Oduyoye, to be human is to appreciate the full humanity of others as designed by God. She says:

Happy and responsible in my being human and female, I shall be able to live a life of doxology in the human community, glorifying God for the gifts I receive in others and for the possibility I have of giving myself freely for the well being of the community whilst remaining responsible and responsive to God. It is only thus that I can say I am fully human. When we are all willing to see the humanity of the other, then we can begin the task of understanding a Christian anthropology (1986: 137) .

In her article, *"Being woman, Being Human"* (1991: 98), Ackermann asserts that: "humanity is woman and man together in the image of God." This means that both woman and man are made in the image of God and therefore they are equally human beings. Likewise, Ruether (1983: 93 -115) points out that all humans' possess a full and equivalent human nature and personhood as male and female. She continues to say that women want to tear down the walls that separate the self and society into "male" and "female" spheres.

The above definitions help us to define the word "humanity." From my own understanding as a woman Christian, humanity is being God's image bearer. It is clear that human beings are different from all creatures on earth. Human beings are created in God's image and likeness and this means that they have the ability to think, to choose and to relate with other people and God. To treat some people with low opinion as if they do not have the above qualities is to dehumanise them, as we have seen from Buthelezi's (1995) argument above. Likewise, to treat other people as though they are "semi gods" is inhuman, for we are all equal before God. Hence all human beings are the same. In most African homes the husband is the final decision-maker. This makes it difficult for the wife to realise her potential, thereby making her to suppress her creativity. Her ability to rationalise is thus deprived from her - as she is not provided with a level playing ground with her male counterpart especially in leadership.

Every human being has the ability not only to think but also to choose. A free will is the right of every human being. However, it is common among some African communities like Gikũyũ that a woman has no right even over her own body. This is probably the reason why a husband, in the past, had the right to give his wife to his friends for sexual intercourse as a sign of generosity (Kenyatta 1938: 181). Indeed, every human being is, also, able to relate with others. He/she is created a social being; he/she is born and brought up within a certain community. One is a neighbour to the other, expected to practice love and justice to one another (Ackermann 1991: 100). He/she therefore works and lives within a certain community. In addition to that, he/she has the ability to relate

with God. That is why God would visit both Adam and Eve (Gen. 2) because they had something in common with God that no other living creature on earth had.

In our context, we are focussing on the relationship between men and women. The patriarchal system has treated men as superior to women. Women are actually reduced to a level of being children and sometimes as property. The gendered roles and beliefs, which are taught through folk tales, myths, proverbs and other genres subject women to a low position while they elevate men. This denies women from enjoying their full humanity as created by God (see Kenyatta 1938, cf. Mbiti 1969). However, true humanity means accepting one another, respecting the ideas and ways of other people's lives and treating each other with integrity. It also means having no superior or inferior attitudes towards one another. Additionally, it means building a community made up of blacks and whites, women and men, rich and poor that sees the image of God in every person. It therefore means to appreciate oneself as designed by God.

3.2 African understanding of women.

As noted in the above discussion, an African woman is seen as a different creature from her male counterpart. In most cases, a woman is treated as an inferior creation compared to a man. It is clear and acceptable that a man is physically different from a woman. However, their differences in physical make up do not make one gender superior to the other. The theory of complementarity is emphasised among various communities of Africa. Oduyoye (2002: 94) observes that a man chooses what he can do and leaves the rest for the woman to do in the name of complementarity.

From the ongoing discussion, it is clear that each human being has his or her own potentials that can be exploited for the good of the entire society of men and women. These potentials should be discovered and utilised without much ado. Otherwise, the society would be doing itself harm by wasting generations in denying women to exercise their potential. In any case, one can be said to be a complete being only in the context of a harmonious relationship with others.

One needs to be allowed to make use of his or her God given gifts and talents irrespective of gender considerations. The fact remains that both are fully human beings that are created in the image of God. Unfortunately, people's beliefs and attitudes as reflected in their customs, rules and regulations that guide both men and women in every society, have created gender differences. The next session will look at who a woman is through the practices and beliefs of the African societies.

3.2.1 Women in the rites of passage.

Pregnancy, birthing and naming.

Every expectant mother is treated with respect in order to preserve the life that is growing in her womb. Most communities have special diets for the expectant mother. She does not work hard, and there are also rules and regulations that she observes. So life yet unborn is important irrespective of the sex to be born .

During the time of birth, most African communities differentiate between boys and girls. As my field researches have shown me about the Gikũyũ community, four ululations are said for a girl but five for a boy. This means that the boy is more valuable than the girl. Indeed, this is true especially in most of the patriarchal societies - as my interaction with a cross-section of Kenyan societies showed (see Kenyatta 1938, cf. Mbiti 1969 and Oduyoye in Oduyoye and Kanyoro 1992). The family with girls only is not appreciated – as we will see in the study of the classification of proverbs. Sometimes the husband is forced to marry another woman “to give birth to boys” in order to maintain the family lineage. One is made to wonder: can't girls also maintain the family lineage? Girls, however, are valuable when they are marrying because of the issue of dowry. From the early stage of development of a child's life, the society treats male and female as different from each other (see Kenyatta 1938, cf. Mbiti 1969). The place of a girl child is, thus, less valuable compared to that of the boy child particularly among the patriarchal societies.

Initiation

Between birth and initiation period, the child is trained to be who he/she is. The society creates and perpetuates work and roles for both men and women. Men do “hard jobs” because the society believed that men are strong (see Kenyatta 1938, cf. Mbiti 1969). Women on the other hand do “simple work” because they are believed to be weak. As the girl child grows up, she is trained to do those feminine jobs. Similarly, boys are trained to do men’s jobs. It is a taboo for a man to do a woman’s job, like cooking (see Mbiti 1969). A woman cannot also do any job designed for men. There are set rules, roles and expectations that are feminine for women and masculine for men (see Kenyatta 1938, cf. Mbiti 1969). Such gendered jobs hindered one from discovering his/her potentialities as given by God. For example some men are good in jobs designed for women like cooking and nursing siblings while some women are good at leading and making decisions for the society.

During the initiation period sex education and other teachings for adulthood are taught to the candidates in different places. Girls are taught how to become good wives and mothers. All are expected to marry after circumcision period is over. The same case applies to boys; they are prepared to become heads of their families and good husbands. The different roles are imbalanced in that they are master-servant roles. The wife is submissive while the husband is the master. One practice that was discriminative in the initiation ceremony was circumcision. Mbiti has this to say about the Nandi (Kenya) female initiation rites:

The girls are taken by their teachers into the operation house, where women sting their clitorises with the stinging nettles...The operator holds the clitoris with the left hand and with her right hand she quickly snaps away the clitoris (1969: 128 - 129).

Today the general term for circumcision is Female Genital Mutilation.³ The main purpose of this practice is to reduce the sexual pleasure in women (M’Passou in Cox 1998: 22). Cutting off the clitoris is similar to removing the tip (the head) of the male penis. This inhibits the enjoyment of sex for women and is therefore discriminative, thus denying them their human rights. The practise is still carried by some African communities. In

³ Note that Female Genital Mutilation is a crime in the Children’s Act (2001) for children under 18 years.

Kenya the government and some women and men are fighting against it. However, there is a lot to be done before the war against the Female Genital Mutilation is won in Africa.

The main purpose of circumcision is to initiate both girls and boys into adulthood. Mbiti says that initiation rites introduce the candidates to adult life:

They are now allowed to share in the full privileges and duties of the community. They enter into the state of responsibility: they inherit new rights and new obligations are expected of them by society (1969: 121).

This is true for the boys but not for the girls. The man is entrusted with responsibilities in the home and in the society. However, a woman holds no such responsibilities; and this is why she is inherited after the death of her husband; and her husband's relatives take her property if he happens to die before her. As noted in our previous discussion, circumcision is meant to reduce a woman's sexual urge rather than making her become mature as in the case of man. This then beats the logic for its existence.

Marriage

In African societies, the main purpose of marriage is procreation. In his *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*, Mugambi (1989:100) gives a clear picture on what the true marriage was all about. He says,

Procreation was very important in the African concept of marriage. A marriage in which children were not born was considered to be problematic, and sometimes a bride might be returned to her parents for such a reason. Polygamy was potentially allowed by custom, especially if earlier marriage did not produce children, or if the children born in earlier marriage were only girls. The birth of boys was considered to be very important, both for inheritance and for the defence of the community. It was also important as the means to perpetuate and expand family and clan (See also Mbiti 1969:142-3, Maillu 1987).

In the African traditional society and partly in the more liberal world of our time, a woman is highly valued when she becomes a mother. Motherhood is the source of a family, clan and society. However, if one is barren she is seen as an outcast in society. Some communities like Abaluyia of Kenya urge all unmarried individuals and those who had no children to keep away from the corpse of a barren woman so as to protect them from being possessed by her spirit thus causing them lack of children (Mbiti 1969: 154). Some communities divorced the barren woman while others married another woman to bring completeness of marriage marrying another one who will supposedly bring forth

children. Thus, if a woman gives birth to girls only she is not well received in the family. These findings further confirm our hypothesis that we need a new cultural hermeneutics, which will be all inclusive, if Africa is to make any leap forward.

The issue of dowry does harm to the image of a woman. According to Dlamini, *iLobolo* in Zulu (a patriarchal society) has no English equivalent; it is almost untranslatable. Bride price, exchange, guarantee of stability, thanksgiving, ante nuptial contract, compensation, reproductivity or child price are some possible equivalents (Dlamini 1994: 3-20). Different theories that define what *ilobolo* is have been formulated. Unfortunately none gives the original meaning and functions of *ilobolo*. I will briefly explain the theories as discussed by Dlamini (1994). I will discuss *ilobolo* from a woman's perspective and show its impact on the married woman.

(a) **Dowry theory:** The original meaning and practice of dowry comes from the Roman and German law whereby dowry is the property or money that is brought by the woman on marriage. However the meaning has changed, for it is used to avoid the notion of the purchase and sale of a woman. Even though it has changed in interpretation, it does not convey the original meaning and functions of *ilobolo* (see Dlamini 1994: 3-20)..

(b) **The bride price theory:** The woman is purchased and bought. This idea came with the colonisers who thought that the woman was bought in the same way slaves were bought during the era of the slave trade. Dlamini (1994) argues that women are not slaves because they have rights when they marry unlike the slaves. However some Gikúyú proverbs show that a bride was bought. For example: "The buying of a wife begins from a little thing," "The child is not given away without a price," "The youth who has enough to buy his girl need not beseech her" (Barra 1998). The wordings themselves in the Gikúyú community demean the dignity of women. It refers to it as *kûgûra mâka*, which literally means, "buying a wife" just as you go to the market place to purchase an item. Though in reality, the Gikuyu marriage is not buying, the words tilt towards that meaning.

(c) **The exchange theory:** Cattle received for sisters were later used in obtaining a wife for the brother. This does not explain the function of *ilobolo* (see Dlamini 1994: 3-20).

(d) **The guarantee or stability theory:** If marriage dissolves through the husband's fault, he loses his cattle and wife. This does not affect the husband because it is his father who loses the cattle. On the other hand, if marriage dissolves through the wife's fault, the woman's father returns the *ilobolo*. Therefore, women frequently tolerate marriage even when ill-treated by their husbands (see Dlamini 1994: 3-20).

(e) **Thanksgiving theory:** A token of appreciation or gratitude to the parents of the bride for their care in bringing her up. If it is a thanksgiving gift, then there is no bargain and one brings only what one can afford. The fact is that *ilobolo* involves bargaining and the giving is obligatory. Therefore, as Oduyoye (1995: 133) indicates, to see it as *aseda*, a thanks offering, is unsatisfactory.

(f) **An ante nuptial contract:** The animals given by the groom's family to the bride's family are aimed at catering for the woman and her children in case she becomes a widow. This does not portray *ilobolo* because the husband's relatives inherit wives. Her father has no responsibility for the widow (see Dlamini 1994: 3-20).

(g) **Compensation theory:** The woman's father received cattle from the groom's father for the loss of his daughter, her services and her reproductive and productive capacity. This is not convincing because girls were born to be brought up and given in marriage. Marriage was part and parcel of every woman's expectation. Moreover, *ilobolo* could not meet all the expenses the father incurred in bringing her up (see Dlamini 1994: 3-20).

(h) **The reproductivity or child price theory:** *Ilobolo* transfers the status of the children from the mother's group to the father's group. This is not the case especially in patriarchal, patrilineal systems. With or without *ilobolo* the husband is entitled to the procreation of children. Besides, procreation is the main purpose in African marriage (see Dlamini 1994: 3-20).

(i) **The most probable theory:** It is not easy to establish a theory that explains the original meaning and functions of *ilobolo*. However, each theory has a relevant point. When all are considered together they indicate a closer meaning of what *ilobolo* was meant for. *Ilobolo* was a social and spiritual symbol of a bond between the two families. It brings about the marriage relationship; it is the only means to establish a marriage. It distinguishes a marriage from an illicit union. It gives man the right to guard the woman who was earlier guarded by her father.

From a woman's perspective, it is the man who benefits from the bride price. It marks the creation of the husband's marital power over the wife; for he, now, has power to restrict his wife from committing adultery and has claim on her services in the home and in the field. Women become dependent on their husbands in all aspects of life (Oduyoye, 1995: 137). Additionally, bride price gives the husband parental power over the children born of his wife, especially in patrilineal societies.

The practice of polygamy as seen in patriarchal societies is problematic to women. It is clear from a woman's perspective that polygamy leads to the loss of women's dignity. It was believed that a woman needed a man's security and guidance because she was weak, vulnerable and defenceless (see Nasimiyu 1992: 106; Kanyoro 2001:173; Oduyoye 1995: 137). If one of the women in a polygamous family is HIV positive, she will infect her husband and the husband will infect the rest of his wives thus, women are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because of the way they are undervalued in the society. Additionally, polygamy places women in a situation of sadness. However some men may want to assume that they love their many wives equally but it is not humanly possible (Kenyatta 1938: 179). It is more likely that a husband will love one woman and will therefore not meet the sexual and other needs of the remaining wives. Consequently jealousy is experienced among the wives (Nasimiyu 1992:7). Wives project their bitterness onto their fellow wives, leading to quarrels and hatred.

Death

Widowhood and property inheritance reveals what a woman is in African society. Among the Abaluyia community of Kenya, Shisanya (1996: 192) notes that men, being led by the

clan leader, distribute the dead man's wealth among themselves. The idea is to keep the deceased's spirit among them. Shisanya continues to say that many widows today lament from time to time that their brothers-in-law have grabbed their most valuable assets such as cars and land. In this way, the widow and her children are left with little or with nothing from the deceased.

Wife inheritance is a common practice among many African communities. Shisanya (1996: 192) notes that today some brothers-in-law strive to inherit the widow because of the economic benefits that they expect to acquire. Women as rational and volitional beings are denied the right to make a choice on their second marriage. This exposes them to health hazards such as HIV/AIDS. Additionally "wife cleansing" as practiced by some communities is degrading (Kabonde 1996: 195 - 203).

From the above discussion, we can conclude that a woman in African society is a source of life. She brings forth and nurtures human life. She is therefore a valuable being only if she is able to produce children. In view of this, a woman is seen as an inferior being when compared to her male counterpart. Man is the head of the family while she is to submit to her husband whether he leads the family well or ruthlessly, and has to obey his orders. She is excluded from the decision-making councils of the society; and, since it is men who give the definitions, a woman can be bad or good from the perspective of men and not from the combined perspective of men and women in the society. They are therefore able to determine the qualities of a virtuous woman. A woman has no right to inherit any property instead, she is inherited like any other property.

Having seen how women's humanity is misrepresented, by the patriarchal Gikuyu society, we shall in the coming sub-section address Christianity's traditional perception on women. In other words, does it also flow from the discussion that began with the negative portrayal of women by African proverbs? Is Christianity a patriarchalised religion?

3.3 Traditional perceptions of women in Christianity.

The traditional perception of women in Christianity finds its roots from the scriptures, which have both Jewish and Greek cultures in the Old Testament and the New Testament respectively. This section will show what a woman is from the Church traditional understanding. Church fathers had a great influence over the church's attitude towards women and also the place of women in the Ministry of the church as seen below.

Josephus, a Jewish writer said, "the woman is inferior to the man in every way" (Stott J. 1984:255). Women in the Talmud are portrayed as inferior beings that are placed in the same class with slaves. According to the Jewish form of Morning Prayer, a Jewish man every morning gave thanks that God had not made him 'a Gentile, a slave or a woman.' Barclay (1999: 8) notes that in the Jewish law, a woman was not a person but a thing. She had no legal rights whatsoever; she was absolutely her husband's possession; and he could do with her as he willed.

Tertullian (3rd Century) said:

"Women should dress in mourning to expiate the sin of Eve and should wear veils to avoid tempting men... You are the gate of hell; you guided that which broke the seals of the forbidden tree. You violated the divine law. You are the one who corrupted him whom the devil did not dare to corrupt. You finally were the reason that Jesus Christ had to die" (Muthei 1999:108).

Augustine (4th Century) on the topic of Eve's creation, marriage and sexuality, said:

Man and woman are unequal. Only man is made in the image of God for He only expresses in his body the power and superiority of God. On the contrary, the female body expresses passivity and inferiority (Muthei 1999:108).

Augustine continues to argue that men only are God's image bearers but women must marry to bear God's image. Augustine (4th Century), still on marriage and sexuality wrote: "The union of male and female should be procreation. A woman's role and only purpose is to help man in the work of procreation otherwise in all other matters a male friend is a more efficient helper than a woman" (Muthei 1999:109).

Augustine teaches that only males have God's image. He says that women only have God's image when married therefore, women become unsettled when unmarried. To find fullness of life, they need to marry thus have husbands and children (Clark 1983:28).

Augustine was also against the ordination of women to priesthood. He said: "Women are to be excluded from priesthood because of their being in the state of subjection. They therefore cannot exercise the functions of leadership involved in the work of a priest. Even if a woman was to undergo an ordination ceremony, it would be to no avail. Her subjection to the male prevents her from receiving Holy Orders" (Muthei 1999:108, Clark 1983: 65).

Thomas Aquinas (13th Century) who was greatly influenced by the works of Aristotle and Augustine had this to say about women: A woman is a misbegotten male and nothing misbegotten or defective should have been in the first production of things. Therefore, the woman should not have been made at first production of things (Muthei 1999:108).

Martin Luther, a Protestant, does not differ from the Church fathers who were Roman Catholics. He has this to say about women, "For the whole of the female body was created for the purpose of nurturing children ... in everything else they are inferior and incompetent. They cannot perform the functions of men, teach, and rule...." (Muthei 1999:110).

The above statements portray woman's sexuality as evil, as something that pollutes particularly men and as impure. Both African and Christian understanding of women portrays a negative picture of a woman. This was perpetuated when African traditional religion met with Western Christianity, which had similar ideas that embraced one another and reinforced the other in defining the nature and work of a woman in social, religious and political life. Consequently, African women theologians are calling for a new interpretation of anthropology in order to be just to both men and women.

3.4 African Women Theologians and an Inclusive Anthropology

African women theologians have challenged both African and Christian traditional understanding of women within the doctrine of humanity. This section will look at what women theologians in Africa are calling for in relation to a new understanding of the humanity of women. The reason for challenging both African Religion and Western

Christianity of the 19th century is because both have some similarities in their perception of women and men. 19th century western Christianity reinforced those beliefs as found in African religion. Additionally it introduced new lifestyle of women who were now either housewives or working women thus bringing a social classification between housewives and the employed; illiterate and literate (Oduyoye 2002; 90).

African women theologians are seeking an anthropology “that de-emphasises our search for immortality through procreation and locates it in our diligence in living up to who we are, being in the image of God, for ‘as God lives so we shall live’” (Oduyoye 2001: 70). Procreation is the most important attribute that is associated with women in Africa. Society reinforces this by providing a number of taboos and rituals to direct the life of a woman and to set her apart for procreation (Oduyoye 1992: 17). Additionally, women theologians reject the notion that what is described as feminine and masculine is God-ordained. They argue that such description is rather ‘culture-coded’ and should be changed. Therefore society should appreciate the other roles of a woman apart from procreation. Women have both feminine and masculine behavioural patterns and so they ought to nourish their humanity, develop a new language that is inclusive in home, church and in the community and demand to live as independent persons (Oduyoye 1995: 204).

Women seek “to pursue an anthropology that makes women and men co-responsible for the well-being of the whole community, especially the family” (Oduyoye 2001: 72). Women theologians argue that a woman is a complete being by herself unlike the notion that a woman is made complete being when she marries. It therefore shows that women are not regarded as human beings. To move towards new cultural hermeneutics, an inclusive language will need to be employed. For example: the doctrine of man should change to the doctrine of humanity. In addition, androcentric anthropology should be replaced by an inclusive anthropology, which recognises both man and woman as equal human beings; for each being reflects the image of God and total humanness. This however sends us wondering: Who in this case will bell the proverbial cat and usher in an all-inclusive anthropology that will also usher in new cultural hermeneutics in Africa?

African women theologians are thus seeking for an anthropology that appreciates both human sexuality and human spirituality as sacred. They call for the oneness of the above rather than separating them. They are calling for a re-examination of human sexuality and spirituality that should be discussed within the doctrine of creation. Oduyoye asserts that

Any discussion of impurity and righteousness, pollution and purification, or the link between polluter and the polluted raises the question of the relationship between misfortune and sexuality that links women with evil and makes men innocent victims of women's sexuality (Oduyoye 1992:19).

From this statement, it is clear that human sexuality (particularly for women) is viewed by some, as evil and so it is antithetical to spirituality, that is viewed as sacred. It is only when this issue of human sexuality is revisited that both men and women can appreciate true humanity thus appreciating the identity and dignity of one another. Women's anthropology therefore "incorporates all undertakings that enhance our humanity for they reveal who we really are meant to be. African women's spirituality should therefore be seen as a way of uncovering and advocating our humanity" (Oduyoye 2001:73).

African women theologians are seeking for an anthropology that will open the eyes of all women to see the negative image that is imposed on them by the society. As a result, they will arise and say no to all injustices that have affected them as a result of the African Religion and Christian traditional anthropologies. It is an anthropology that aims at seeking "a quality of life that can be truly and fully human not only for themselves (women) but also for men". (Oduyoye 2001:75).

Women theologians are seeking to sensitise every woman to come out of her present situation and create an environment that regards her as a full human being. It is clear that the society treats women in the same way as they treat nature. Just as the society has robbed the beauty of nature through, say, environmental degradation, it has equally robbed women of their self-esteem, self-respect and their very humanity (see Oduyoye 2001:73). Therefore every woman has a responsibility to reclaim and restore her image as created and designed by God.

African women theologians are seeking an anthropology that makes both men and women to be more accountable to God's creation. This means to care, to share, to practice justice and compassion to one another and to the rest of creation; which human beings are destined to tend, rather than to damage or destroy. Both men and women are thus supposed to be responsible beings that are answerable to God for any injustices and lack of compassion to the creation entrusted to them. From a broader sense, this anthropology will enable human beings "to benefit from the diversity of gender, race, language and nationality" (Oduyoye 2001:77). It will also enable us to rewrite or recreate new proverbs and sayings that will be popularised in our societies and thereby change the people's negative perceptions on one another. In so doing, a relational anthropology that will promote harmonious living and appreciation of one another irrespective of gender will emerge. This, therefore, means that a new anthropology that will not only restore good relationships between human beings and the rest of creation but also restore a relationship between creation and its creator will be the way forward.

3.5 Conclusion

Having seen the theology of the humanity of women, this chapter has innovatively showed that a new community will be born out of our emphasis on relational anthropology that will look at the content of every person rather than on the gender of the particular person. This relational anthropology will require of every person to play his or her part to liberate the society from the stereotypes that have for years promoted gender imbalances. This chapter has prepared the theoretical framework for the interpretation of data that was collected in Kinangop division of Central Kenya. In so doing, the study will be able to assess what ought to be improved upon – as it unveils the problem statement that is guiding the discussion. That is the role of chapter five. Of immediate importance is an examination in detail of some Gĩkũyũ proverbs about women where these imbalances will be explored.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NATURE AND CLASSIFICATION OF GIKUYU PROVERBS

4.0 Introduction

So far, we have looked at the sources of African Theology, and given a particular attention to proverbs as one of its sources. We have seen that it is necessary for one to know the proverbs of the particular community - as they are the vehicles of cultural regeneration or degeneration. Indeed, they are the best way of assessing the socio-religious life of the particular community. In particular, they refer to the day-to-day experiences of the individual community – that is, their fears, their joys, their economy, their religion, their political inclination and their history. Thus, they are the sum total of the communal life. Through them, we can be able know the culture of the particular community. In view of these findings, we shall, in this chapter, explore the origin and the history of the Gikuyu people, their present geographical location, the world-view and the classification of Gikuyu proverbs and then examine the Gikuyu proverbs that talks about women - from a woman's perspective.

4.1 The Origin and the History of the Gikûyû.

The name Gikuyu is derived from the word Mîkûyû (singular - Mûkûyû) that means a fig tree. Therefore, the Agîkûyû are known as the people of the fig trees (Wachege 1992: 6). Three traditions have been used to explain where the Gikuyu tribe came from. One way is the mythical description while the other one is geographical description and the third one is Jewish ancestry.

The earliest pre-historic version of the Gîkûyû community's first marriage, which was basically monogamous, is told in form of a myth. It says that God created a man called Gikuyu and his wife called Mûmbi (Wa Thiong'o 1955: 17). They were blessed with nine daughters and with a fertile land, but no sons. When the father (Gikuyu) realised that his daughters were of marriageable age, he prayed to God for men to marry them. This confirms the Gikuyu community's religiosity whereby prayer was the answer to

delicate and fundamental issues such as the need for a husband for a woman of marriageable age.

Interestingly, God answered Gikuyu's prayer and subsequently brought nine men who married their (nine) daughters - a phenomenon, which strengthened the institution of a monogamous marriage. It implies that the offshoot of the polygamous marriage was a digression from the original path. It also shows that among the members of the Gikuyu community, every person was expected to get a spouse who was ideally one spouse for one person. How this would be achieved that girl- children were equal to boy children is another thing altogether.

When they settled as "*Nyumba*" (each composed of father, mother and children) Gikuyu (the father) divided land to them to cultivate and grow crops for their families. Out of these nine families, the Gikuyu clan was born and each clan bore the name of the nine daughters (Wanjohi 1997: 25 – 28 and Muriuki 1974).

Consequently, each of the nine clan names today that are found among the Gikuyu community are said to trace their origins from the names of each of the nine Gikuyu and Mũmbi daughters. As a result, the Acheera clan got their name from Wachera. Similarly, the Agacikũ clan was named after Gikuyu (and his wife called Mũmbi's daughter Wanjikũ). In the same way Airimũ clan was named after daughter Wairimũ while the Ambũi clan got their name from daughter Wambũi. Others are Angarĩ from Wangarĩ; Anjirũ from Wanjirũ; Angũi from Wangũi; Ethaga from Mwithaga and Aitherandũ from daughter Waithĩra (Kenyatta 1938: 4-5). This shows that the Gikuyu were originally a matriarchal society- whereby women were heads of their families- before they changed to the present patriarchy , where men call the tune.

The Gikuyu myth continues to say that the women became domineering and ruthless fighters and they also practised polyandry – where they were free to keep more than one spouse – obviously a digression from the ideal family hood that the first parents had set as an example for the community to follow. Or could it have been mere propaganda by

men – like in the case of Chief Wangũ wa Makeri⁴ – just to discredit women as unreliable or as people who cannot keep their side of the bargain?

Consequently, men decided to overthrow their government. They agreed to impregnate all the women especially their leaders and they planned a date to resist women's leadership while they were still in the expectant condition. This is interpreted that women were physically weak, as a result of pregnancy, to fight against men (Kenyatta 1938:4). As soon as men came to power, the matriarchal system was replaced by the patriarchal system. As a consequence, men took over in the leadership of the family and the community at large. They also became the owners of property and the protectors of their families. Women, thus, lost power in leadership and were now owned by men as fathers for the unmarried and as husbands after marriage (Kenyatta 1938:3)

Another information says that Wangũ wa Makeri was a chief of Weithaga in 1901 –1908 in colonial Kenya (see Nyakwea 1994). Wangũ was allegedly a ruthless ruler and again, men organised another coup d'état against her “tyrannical” government. They decided that all people including women should sing men's dance called “*kibata*.” It was sung while men were naked. When it came to women's turn they also removed their clothes and sang *kibata* while naked in the presence of men. From then on, men refused to be ruled by a Chief who sang naked in the presence of men.

A number of people, today, tend to subscribe to this retrogressive myth and continue to hold strongly to other related beliefs. One is the story of *Wangũ wa Makeri*. Some respondents⁵ are convinced that *Wangũ's* story was true. They even stated where she used to stay. However, they did not indicate the time in history when it happened - though it is believed that it is as late as the 19th century. Secondly, the site where it is believed to be the first home of *Gikuyu* and his wife *Mũmbi* (that is - *Mũkũrũwe-ini wa Nyagathanga*) is now a historic site, which is reserved, and people pay visits to this place. Thirdly, the nine clans, which derived their names from the nine daughters of mother

⁴ Chief Wangũ wa Makeri's case will be considered later.

⁵ On July 2004, I interviewed some elderly people about the origin of Gikũyũ and they gave me the mythical origin of Gikuyu. They strongly hold to the above myth.

Mũmbi, still exist. In spite of the fact that the socio-cultural life of the traditional Gikuyu society has changed – as a result of the so-called modernity and the effects of globalisation, the Gikuyu women bear these names and the clans are still recognised, especially in Central Kenya where most members of the Gikuyu community live.

The second story about the origin and the history of the Gikũyũ people is told from a historical point of view. Like other communities, Gikũyũ migrated from Igembe and Tigania areas of Meru from where they moved south to Thagicu or Tharaka area around the 15th Century; but due to the prevailing drought, the Gikũyũ advanced South and settled at Ithanga, which is between Tande and Thika rivers. They did not rest in Ithanga but they migrated to a place called Mũkũrũwe-ini wa Gathanga in Murang'a District, Central Province.

This historical origin does not tell us where Gikuyu community came from except that they are one of the descendants of Endigiri. Additionally it only explains further that out of the nine Gikũyũ clans, two of them – the *Agacikũ* and the *Aceera* (also referred as Acheera) descended from the Kamba community⁶ (Wanjohi, 1997:24-25).

The third tradition, which is well documented by Wachege (1992), is on the Jewish ancestry whereby the Gikũyũ trace their origin among the Israelites. This tradition says that Gikuyu came from Abacii in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) that belonged to the tribe of Judah, which originated from Ethiopia. They then migrated through Meru and settled in Murang'a in Mũkũrũwe wa Gathanga. It is there that they increased in number and dispersed to various parts of central Kenya – as they are today. This tradition is, however, unpopular. Some agree with Wachege's view that it is likely that the informants of this story were influenced by the story of Christianity. Some of them were elders of the Anglican Church (Wachege 1992: 8 - 9).

In conclusion, the mythical origin seems clear and convincing but like any other myth, it lacks the historical dates and relationships of Gikuyu with other communities. On the

⁶ Today, the Kamba ethnic group borders the Gikuyu ethnic community.

other hand, the historical origin gives some historical dates and discusses the migration and interaction of this community with others. However, it does not give adequate information probably because the historians carried their research relatively recently and met few informants who could remember when the migration patterns took place.

The study of the origin and the history of the Gikuyu community has showed us that the belief in myths is a common practice amongst the members of the Gikuyu community. This is both good and bad. In particular, it is good because myths, in general, help to explain some pre-historic issues – which would otherwise remain unanswered, if a myth were not available. On the other hand, it is bad because, in a community which is characterised by stereotypes against women, a myth (especially the one on despotism amongst women leadership) will continue to haunt the society until the society is able to come to terms with the dynamism of modernity. This, however, problematizes our argument: for when will that be? Still, it has prepared us to look at the Gikuyu people today. Are they prepared to play the ball by the rules of our time? Are they still under the *Múkûrûwe-inî wa Nyagathanga* in Murang'a in Central Province of Kenya or have they dispersed further? Are they found outside Kenya –the way the Chewa is found in Malawi and Zambia or as the Luo and the Maasai are both found in Kenya and Tanzania? Did the colonial selfishness and the twin patterns of the scramble and the partitioning of Africa into various segments dissect them?

4.2 The Gikuyu people today.

The Gikuyu live in Kenya and they have dominated the Central province of Kenya. The province is at present made up of seven districts: Kiambu, Maragua, Thika, Murang'a, Nyeri, Kirinyaga and Nyandarua. These places are situated on the Southern and Eastern slopes of Mount Kenya bordering, on the South, Maasai plains, in the East the Athi plains and Ulu hills, occupied by the Maasai and the Kamba respectively, and the Tana River; on the west, the Aberdare Range, Kinangop and Setima; on the northeast, Njabini Range (Wachege 1992: 6). Some Gikuyu people have migrated to other parts of Kenya e.g., the Rift Valley province and have settled in Nakuru and Laikipia Districts. (Wanjohi 1997: 19).

Having seen the myths of the Gikuyu origin, their first family hood and their current location, we are no longer strangers to the people to whom the proverbs that dehumanise women are researched. In other words, we are now guided to see why the proverbs are gender biased. In particular, they come from a community that is already bombarded with myths that show the failure of women in the past – though they have no proof. In view of this, isn't it obvious that the philosophy (through proverbs) of the Gikuyu community was crafted in relation to their "historical experiences"? The above sub-section has therefore provided us with a good background, which will help us to study the worldview of the Gikuyu proverbs – to which we now turn.

4.3 The worldview of the Gikūyū proverbs.

In order to understand the meaning of the Gikuyu proverbs, we need to know how they view the world in which they live in. In so doing, we are able to trace the reason why men and women in the Gikuyu society composed various proverbs. Some of the proverbs that were collected from the people are not documented in published works. This shows that proverbs are always evolving through successive generations.

According to the Gikuyu community, they had both supernatural and natural realities. Supernatural realities include God and spirits; they were unperceivable realities and they had a lot of influence in the world they lived in. The natural realities were seen as the earth, the sun, the moon, stars, rain, wind, trees, animals, social and political matters. The natural realities were perceivable. Whatever was perceivable and clearly understood, for example the ethics and laws of the society, were taught and upheld – failure to which a punishment was administered. Indeed, Wanjohi rightly observes that most of the proverbs arise from social realities (1997: 40).

Gikuyu proverbs involve sense and intellect. They also talk about knowledge and ignorance, right and wrong, rights and duties, justice and injustice, industriousness and laziness, generosity and meanness, violence and non-violence, co-operation and self-reliance, individualism and socialism, lawmaking and lawbreaking, rewards and punishments (Wanjohi 1997: 40). It is from this background that Gikuyu myths,

proverbs, riddles, songs, poems and folktales arise. As noted in our introductory chapter, their fundamental aim is to teach, warn, rebuke, entertain, counsel, caution and correct the individual or the entire community on issues with regard to the supernatural and the natural realities.

4.4 The classification of the Gikuyu proverbs.

Generally, proverbs arise from a cultural context. Some are created after an event has taken place. Some proverbs also originate from the traditions and customs of the people. This therefore means that proverbs touch every aspect of life of the people who create them. In traditional understanding, men and not women define reality; therefore proverbs are created under the influence of the understanding of reality. Thus there are proverbs on political, social, educational, religious and economic issues.

Wanjohi asserts that Gikúyú proverbs can be divided into two: Some are literal while others are symbolic. Literal proverbs state their truth plainly and directly so they do not need any interpretation as shown below.

Mûtumia eciragia na ageka hakuhi ota mwana.

A woman nearly thinks and acts like a child (NR).

Mûtumia níkihúmo kía maúru no wega a muoyo wa mûndú ûngimûhonokia kuma kûri we.

A woman is source of evil; only the goodness of human soul saves us from her (NR 151).

Marakara ma arûme matikaraga ta ma atumia.

Men's anger does not last like women's. (S 76:56).

The symbolic proverbs do not state their truth directly and plainly, they need some interpretation. One can easily lose the meaning of symbolic proverbs while hard to lose meaning of literal proverbs such as:

Atumia na igûrû matimenyagîrwo.

Women and the sky cannot be understood (S 24:4).

Mûtumia na mûndû mûrûme mûrûaru ni kîndû kîmwe.

A woman and an invalid man are the same thing (B 587).

Ng'ombe îciaraga ûru ona mwene amîroreire.

The cow has a bad delivery though her owner is present (B 159).

Hiti ndîrfaga mwana wayo na we nîlî ûrîa î ngoroku.

The hyena does not eat its baby, and you know how insatiable it is (B 154).

Wanjohi contends that Gikuyu proverbs are either wisdom or philosophical. Wisdom proverbs are either literal or symbolic and they state the universal truth or give practical counsel or advice.

Nyûkwa waku ona angikorwo ena gîko atîa nîwe nyûkwa.

However dirty your mother may be, she is better than your neighbour's mother (NR 80).

Mûndûrûme nî agîmaraga no mûtumîa ndagîmaraga.

The man comes out of childhood; the woman stays in childhood (S 86:49).

Mûndû mûrûme ûgûthama ahana ta mûtumîa akîhîka.

A man changing his abode is like a woman marrying (S 30:28).

Philosophical proverbs may also be literal or symbolic. These require a further and deeper analysis.

Itunyagwo mbûî îguciara.

A plant loses its blossom as soon as it bears fruit (B 185).

Mûtumîa nî abatiî kûgîa na mûthuriwe.

The bell needs its tongue (the woman needs a man) (S 63:18).

Thenge îngîremwo nî kûgarûraniarî, mûgoma nîgwo ûngîhota?

If a he-goat does not overturn, would a she-goat manage? (NR)

Mûici na mûndû mûka atigaga kfeha akua.

He who steals in company of a woman will live in fear until she dies (B 469).

Philosophical proverbs state how things are. "They are more interested in theoretical or speculative than in practical and technical considerations" (Wanjohi 1997:44). Wanjohi's classification of Gikuyu proverbs when applied in the current study, makes one to question if wisdom proverbs about women "reveal a universal truth or give a practical counsel or advice" about women. Likewise we can ask if philosophical proverbs state how women are; as they "concentrate on stating how things are" (Wanjohi 1997:44). As far as proverbs about African women are concerned, they do not fall in Wanjohi's classification of proverbs because they do not reveal the true identity of a woman. Consequently the above classification will only promote and enhance proverbs about women that need to be discarded.

4.5 The perception of women as portrayed in the Gikuyu proverbs.

The main focus in this section is to analyse various Gikuyu proverbs about women and discuss Gikuyu society's attitude towards women. We will look at Gikuyu proverbs about women as mothers, the initiation of girls, women in marriage, widows, women and leadership and generally the nature and attributes of a woman.

4.5.1 Women as mothers.

Giving birth is valued:

Mûtumia ûria ûhithaga ûtumia wake ndaciaraga.

Whoever hides her womanhood never gives birth (NR 29).

The community knows that pregnancy and giving birth is painful but it is a commendable job as expressed below.

Mûtumia úciarite ahana mûramba wina irigû ikûrû.

The woman who gives birth is like a banana tree, it breaks under the weight of its fruits (S 67:22). This means that maternity means pain to the mother and loss of beauty.

Ng'ombe íciaraga úru ona mwene amíroreire.

The cow has a bad delivery though her owner is present (B 159). This means that giving birth is not only painful, but is sometime complicated.

Ndúrí na gikindírío ta ihu ríkienda kuma.

You are restless as a pregnancy, which is being miscarried (NR).

Gúciara máno kúrehaga ikuú nyingí.

Many births bring many burials. (S 69:37).

Yumaga máici na múrogi.

A womb can give birth to a thief and a prisoner. (S 68:31).

Itunyagwo mbúú ní gúciara.

A plant loses its blossom as soon as it bears fruit (B 185) (A woman loses her beauty after giving birth).

Mother cares for her children

Mwana úregaga kuonga nyina ndakúraga.

The baby that refuses (its) mothers' breasts will never be fully-grown (S 38:12).

Mwana wa kúrerwo ní cúwe ní múnanu.

The baby who is nurtured by his/her grandmother can never be corrected (S 48:4).

Mwana úhúnií athakagíra úríí wa nyina

The fed baby plays on its mother's bed (NR).

Hiti ndíríaga mwana wayo na níúí úríá í ngoroku.

The hyena does not eat its baby and you know how insatiable it is (B 154)

Múnumia ona e kígúta ndagaga kúhúnia ciana ciake.

Even a lazy woman does not put her children to bed hungry.

A mother is valued

Mwana úrĩa múkĩgu nĩwe úthũire nyina.

It is only a foolish child who despises his mother (NR).

Ndũkamene nyũkwa ona angĩkũra kana atarũkĩrwo.

Even if your mother is very old or dressed in rags, you won't deny her (NR).

Kũngũ maitũ nahunyũ wake.

Hail mother, though dirty or dishevelled (NR).

Nyũkwa waku ona angĩkorwo ena gĩko atĩa nĩwe nyũkwa.

However dirty your mother maybe, she is better than your neighbour's mother (NR).

A home with daughters only is sad (NR).

Mũciĩ úciarĩtwo airĩtu atheri wĩ ihoru.

Mũtumia úyũ we wĩna kĩaha, hĩndĩ imwe nĩũrĩciara kahĩĩ.

You unfortunate woman, you will one day get a boy (NR).

A woman who does not give birth is despised

Mũgũnda mũhĩnju ndwĩkĩrĩrwo mũno.

A poor field is not carefully thought about. (NR).

Mũtumia úria úkuithĩie ariũ ake akĩrĩte mũtumia thata.

The woman whose sons have died is richer than a barren woman (S 71:9).

Nũ úgũtahĩra thata maai?

Who will draw water for the childless woman? (S 71:15)

A mother is not supposed to teach a son

Mûndû mûrûme ûria wathagwo na agatarwo nî nyina ahana ta mûndu ûria wathagwo nî nda.

A person who is advised and controlled by his mother is like the one who is controlled by his stomach (NR).

Mûndû mûrûme ûria wathagwo nî nyina nî kîrimû.

Whoever is controlled by his mother is a fool (NR).

Utathiaga oigaga no nyina ûû kûruga wega.

The child who does not move from place to place thinks that his mother is the best cook (NR).

So a mother was important because she brought forth children, nurtured and cared for them (Kenya 1938:6). As a result every child was supposed to respect its mother irrespective of whom she was. However, if a mother gave birth to daughters only, she was not accepted (Kenya 1938: 8). The man ended up marrying another woman to bear him boys. Hence in Gikuyu customs, men maintained the lineage of the family. Girls were mainly important because of the dowry that parents received when they married. However they left their parents alone and joined their husband's families.

If a woman remained childless, she was despised and was of little value in society. Gikuyu traditions allowed a man to marry another wife to bear children. Procreation was the main purpose of marriage in Gikuyu like in most of the African communities (Kenya 1938: 164). Moreover, for a woman to teach a grown up son was a disgrace among the Gikuyu community. After infancy, the father took charge of the boy's education while the mother took responsibility for the girl's. When the boy grew up and was circumcised, he was not supposed to be in company of his mother or women in general. There is a proverb that says "clear out of 'thakîrio' (B 35) which means kitchen or women's hut." Male adults were to keep out of the kitchen. A woman from men's perspective was not knowledgeable enough to teach men. It is disheartening to note that these stereotypes are still enforced today amongst some communities. They continue to injure the community - for injustice to one gender or one person, for that matter, in

African society is an injustice to all – though this is not faithfully observed in the case of the plight of women.

4.5.2 Women and the rite of initiation

Girls were customarily circumcised as a rite of passage. Circumcision was a gateway to marriage as no uncircumcised girl was supposed to marry (Kenyatta 1938: 105 - 110). The proverb that says, *wendo ūtakinyantire ūthūkagia kairītu* (that is, “Illicit love spoils the uncircumcised girl”) (S 59:12) implies that sexual relations between an uncircumcised girl and a circumcised young man was considered unmentionable depravity by the Gikuyu. The proverb also warns against the practice of premarital sex.

Another proverb says, *Mūici na kihī atigaga kīha kīaru no muici na mūtumia atigaga kīha akua*, “he who steals in company with a boy will live in fear until the boy is circumcised but he who steals in company with a woman will live in fear until she dies” (B 468 & 469). In this context the proverb shows that a boy matures after circumcision and is entrusted with responsibility but a woman even after circumcision remains immature and cannot be responsible and sensitive enough. This is why she cannot be trusted by men to keep a secret. Which begs the question: “what then is the purpose of girls’ circumcision if it is not for maturity as is the case with the boys?” M’Passou (in Cox (ed.) 1998: 22) asserts that among the Swazi (of Swaziland) female circumcision was meant to reduce the sexual urge in women, thus controlling her to remain with one man. It is probable that this was also the major reason behind Gikuyu female circumcision. Denying a woman’s ability to fully enjoy her sexual right is a denial of her human rights.

This also gives the reason why men practised polygamy and had a belief that a man could not remain faithful to one woman. The belief gave room for men to move from one woman to the other and denied the wife this freedom. In this era of HIV and AIDS such a conviction has to be condemned for the sake of the woman’s wellbeing, a healthy marriage and for religious purposes as in the case of Christianity (Exodus 20: 14 condemns the practice of adultery).

4.5.3 Women in marriage

A wife is bought by her husband

Mwana ndaheanagwo

The child is not given away without a price (B 607).

Mwanake wîna indo ndoihanaga.

The youth who has enough to buy his girl needs not beseech her (B 619).

Mwarî mwega ahîtûkagîra thome wa ngîa.

A fair girl does not stop at a poor youth's (for he could not buy her) (B 621).

Cira mûnene nî wa ûthoni ûgîkua.

The breaking up of a betrothal is not a small matter (B 30).

Utarî mbûri ndarî mûka.

Missing goats is missing a wife (NR).

Cia ûthoni ciambaga nguhi.

The buying of a wife begins from a little thing (B: 26).

The main purpose of a woman in marriage is to bear children to her husband.

Mûtumia ndagaga kûgîa mwana,

A woman never fails to get a child (S 64:30).

The proverb refers to married women, who after failing to have children from their husbands, go around looking for other men.

Mûtumia ûria ûkuithîtie ariû ake akîrite mûtumia thata.

The woman whose sons have died is richer than a barren woman (S 71:9)

Marriage is compulsory

Mûtumia nî abatiî kûugîa na mûthuriwe.

The bell needs its tongue (the woman needs a man) (S 63:18)

Mûtumia mûhiku akîrîte útarî mûhiku.

The woman who has married is better than a girl (NR).

Gikuyu marriage is patriarchal.

Mûndûrûme ûgûthama ahana ta mûtumia akîhika.

A man changing his abode is like a woman marrying (a woman marrying adopts the customs of the family she enters) (S 30:28).

Wives are important at home

Aka na ng'ombe itirî ndûgû.

Wives and oxen have no friends (S 29:18).

This means that (both women and oxen are very important to a man so that he cannot show kindness to the extent of giving them away.

Ehera thakîrio!

Clear out of 'thakîrio' (hut for women also called kitchen), (B 35).

Men are not supposed to stay in their mothers' huts as soon as they get circumcised.

Mûthuri nîwe kîongo kîa mûciî no mûtumia nîwe mwene mucî.

The man may be the head of the home, the wife is the heart. (S 29:11).

This means that the woman is in charge of her hut as far as managing is concerned. However, the man heads it even if he is an absentee husband.

No divorce in marriage unless there is a good reason

Gûtirî ûkenjerwo mbuî kwa nyîna

No wife will have her white hair shaved at her mother's (S 51:29).

It is polygamous marriage

Mûka mûkûrû nîacokagîrîrwo mûka mûnyinyi akua.

When the young wife dies, one returns to the old. (S 52:24).

Mûthuri wîna atumia aingî no ahûte

A man who married many wives can stay hungry (S 35:30).

Mũthuri wĩna mũka ũmwe nĩta mũndũ wĩ ritho rĩmwe.

A man with one wife is like a man with one eye (NR).

Problems of a beautiful woman.

Uthaka wa mũtumia ũrehaga thĩna mũcif.

Beauty of a woman brings trouble (NR).

Mũtumia mũthaka nĩ thĩna harĩ mũthuriwe

A beautiful woman is dangerous to her husband (NR).

Qualities of a Ngatha (good) wife.

Mũtumia ngatha nĩ thũmbĩ ya mũthuriwe no nyagacũ nĩ ta mũrimũ wa kirona kĩa ndĩra wĩmahĩndĩ-ini ma mũthuriwe.

A good wife is her husband's pride and joy but a wife who brings shame to her husband is like cancer in his bones (NR).

Mũtumia etagwo mũtumia nĩ gũtumĩria maũndũ (NR).

A woman is called woman (*mutumia*) in order to keep secrets.⁷

Mũtumia mũũgĩ nĩ gwaka akaga nyũmba yake no mũtumia kĩrimũ nĩ gũtharia a tharagia na moko make.

Homes are made by the wisdom of a woman but are destroyed by her own foolishness (NR).

Qualities of (nyagacu) a bad wife

Mũtumia ũrĩ inegene agambaga ta maaĩ magũĩĩka.

A nagging wife is like water going drip! drip! (NR).

Irio cia mũka mũkarĩ iriagwao hĩndĩ ya mambura.

Food for a mean wife is eaten only at *mambura*⁸(NR).

⁷ The root word for woman (*mũtumia*) is derived from the word *gũtumia*, which literally means to keep quiet. A woman is expected to remain silent/keep secrets even after being mistreated by her husband.

Mûtumia kîgûta nî mûrigo harî mûthuriwe.

A lazy woman is a burden to her husband (NR).

Nîkaba gûikara mabati-ini gûkîra gûikarania na mûtumia wî inegene.

Better to live on the roof than share the house with a nagging wife (NR).

According to Gikuyu marriage, the bride leaves her family to join the husband's family. In such marriage, Oduyoye observes that the marriage ceremony signifies the transfer of a woman from the spiritual power of the father to that of the husband (1992: 13). Furthermore, a woman is bought in the sense that dowry as a process for marriage is paid to the girl's family. This and other customs surrounding marriage show that a woman is actually bought. The proverb; "missing goats is missing a wife" (NR) illustrates the importance of dowry in marriage. The idea of dowry has a negative impact on the self-worth of the bride in the sense that she submits totally to her husband because he paid dowry for her. This demeans the dignity of a woman.

Marriage is compulsory.

Among the Gikuyu, every woman or man is expected to marry after circumcision. Sex education is taught to both girls and boys. They are also taught how to handle their homes. A girl in this case is trained to be a good wife to her husband and a good mother to her children (Kenyatta 1938: 110-111). Indoctrinating the youth with marriage issue only denies them to use their talents in other fields. Some women may not become good mothers because their talents contradict those of motherhood. So when she marries, she will not meet the expectations of the society. Thus she is regarded as a bad wife who is lazy, mean, and nagging. It should be noted, however, that these categorizations are done from a patriarchal perspective and they may need revision.

⁸ *Mambura* is ceremonies or rituals. The proverb means that a woman's resources or food are at everyone's disposal at rituals for she has no choice.

The main purpose of marriage is procreation.

In assessing the above proverbs, we find that some women who are termed as barren are despised. In such circumstances, the husband is encouraged to marry another wife. If he is too poor to afford dowry for another wife, he may adopt children. In the case of impotence, the husband allows his brother or a close friend to seed-lender his wife and the children born belong to the husband. This literally means that there is no impotent man in the Gikuyu community (Kenyatta 1938: 164); but obviously, there are barren women among the Gikuyu as there are no reciprocal arrangements as in the case of the barren men. This helps in strengthening the stigmatisation of barren women as opposed to the barren men. Thus, barrenness stigmatises a woman who does not bear children but society fails to appreciate other “fruits” that a woman can bear for her family and society. In view of this, Oduyoye (1999: 119) calls for

a theology and eschatology that will speak to both those who reproduce themselves biologically and those who do not, a theology that embraces forms of fruitfulness, biological and beyond.

Apart from procreation, a woman is married to work in the field of her husband. The husband owns the home - land, property, wives and children but the wife owns her hut, that is, her own children and the piece of land she is given to run by her husband. She is supposed to grow crops to sustain her children and husband. A woman is therefore a property of her husband. She does not enjoy equal status and dignity with her husband.

The common marriage among the Gikúyú.

The Marriage that is commonly practised in Gikuyu community is polygamy. Indeed, it is full of problems as the proverbs say, “two women are two pots of poison” (B 5) and “hatred that exists between two wives is like a hunchback on the human body. It stays in the family forever” (NR). These proverbs clearly show that there are a lot of problems in the polygamous family especially on the side of women though there are no counter proverbs that show why polygamous marriage should be abolished. The main reason is because the husband fails to treat them equally. Although scholars like Kenyatta (1938: 179) say that a man is able to love his wives equally, this is not true according to these

proverbs. Therefore the one who causes women to live unhappily in marriage, it appears, is the man. Ironically, he is the one who determines who a good wife and a bad wife is.

In addition to the above, women who are viewed as good wives (*Ngatha*), from men's perspective; oppress the bad wives (*Nyagacû*). The proverb, "*Ciakorire wacû mûgûnda*" "food found Wacû in the garden" arises from a historical context. Wacû had daughters and was despised by her husband. During negotiations of her daughter's marriage, Wacû was exempted from participating. Instead, she was sent to work in the field. The good wife participated in the marriage negotiations of Wacû's daughters. One day an Eagle snatched meat (*Ngerima*) from the cooking area and dropped it in the garden where Wacû was working. She ate it as a good luck because the members were feasting at home. But even then, eating meat that was brought unhygienically by a bird is also demeaning to the dignity of a woman. As a male constructed proverb, it shows that a woman can not get genuine favour outside a man; for a bird (an Eagle) can only snatch a mere bone or the bad meat that is unfit for human consumption and then, drop to the despised woman, like Wacû, unintentionally.

As implied above, the qualities of a good and a bad wife may be accepted if they are drawn from a man's perspective as the society is "poisoned" to think so after many years of negative interiorisation. A good wife from a woman's perspective does not fully correspond with that of a man. I suppose that women should be let to draw the qualities of a good and a bad wife. From a man's perspective a good wife is hard working in the field, cooks and cares for her husband and children, generous to her husband's friends, submissive to her husband and does not speak out on the affairs of the home even if she is oppressed (Kenyatta 1938: 180- 181). From my perspective as a woman, I disagree with the quality that a woman should always be silent - "*gûtumiria maûndû*" - even when she is being oppressed. Today a woman should speak out against all the oppressive practices and injustices done to her by her husband or by the society in general – for only then shall the society be genuinely redeemed. She should demand her rights and therefore assert her human dignity as a woman who is a human being too.

4.5.4 Women and Widowhood

Ciana cia mûtumia wa ndigwa itirî maithori.

The widow's children have no tears (B 22).

It means that the widow's children have been accustomed to suffer. A widow is liable to sufferings because the traditional society does not allow her to own property. If her husband dies, the family of her husband divides the property among themselves. They live the widow with little or nothing; hence she has no authority over property. Alternatively, the Gikuyu custom allowed the widow to be inherited for care and protection by one of her late husband's brothers. This shows that a woman is more or less a property to be inherited rather than a true human being, who is capable enough to steward (own), her property in the absence of her husband. This is a negative practice, which is clearly dehumanising and, therefore, must be eliminated in order to reclaim the true identity of a woman.

4.5.5 Women and Leadership/Power.

In this, we realise that every man is qualified to be a leader because he matures at a certain age while women "never mature"- even after circumcision (presently called female genital mutilation - FGM). The following proverbs will drive the point home:

Mûthuri niagimaraga no mûtumia ndatigaga wana.

The man comes out of childhood, the woman remains in childhood (S 86:49).

This proverb can best be understood from the background that after circumcision, girls are not entitled to new rights like men (save for permission to accept the marriage offer).

It is similar to that which says that, "A woman nearly thinks and acts like a child" (NR).

Matumbî ma njamba matitûrîkanagia.

It means that, "The eggs of males do not hatch each other" (B 377). This proverb is used to emphasize the unique position that a man stands over a woman.

Mûthuri kîongo kîa mucîî no mûtumia nî ngoro.

The man may be the head of the home; the wife is the heart (S 29:11).

The above proverbs show that there is no time a woman matures; she is not entrusted with leadership responsibilities (Wachege 1992: 17 - 45). The notion that a woman nearly thinks like a child is emphasised by Kenyatta (1938: 225) who says that women were not

considered fit mentally and bodily to stand the oath which involved not only the individual going through it but the whole family group. From my research of July 2004, I discovered that this is not necessarily true. One of the respondents who happened to be a woman and an ex- freedom fighter informed me that the first person to break the *Mau Mau* (Kenya's freedom fighters of the 1940s, 50s and 60s) oath was a man. She confessed that no woman colleague broke the oath. She had a lot of confidence that women keep secrets. They are sensitive and responsible, and thus, they do not deserve the kind of image that society portrays them. An illustration on this negative portrayal is given below:

A woman is not supposed to do men's jobs

Mûtumia ndaatûraga mûtwe na ndangïikia ndahi nyanja-inf

A woman does not split the head (of the slaughtered goat) nor dip the cup into the beer (because both are men's jobs) (S 588).

Thenge ingiremworu mugoma niguo unghota.

If a he-goat does not overturn, would a she-goat manage? (NR).

The above proverbs demean the dignity of a woman, reducing her to a lower status and uplifting man to a higher status. Assuming that women do not have the ability to think and make decisions is denying her identity as an equal companion in life times. Indeed, many modern women have higher education and hold senior positions than men and they manage them well in contrast to the societal stereotypes.

In popularising the negative image of women leadership, men have, in essence, abused the issue of leadership while women suffer under their corrupt leadership. One wonders: If African women were given a chance to rule Africa as Presidents or as Prime Ministers, would the corruption indexes which are very high today be in the same level or would they have dropped downwards? Seen from the few experiences that are evident today, one would clearly say that women would do better.⁹ Indeed, it is disheartening to note

⁹ Two of the respondents who both work in Njabini location as sub-chiefs have excelled in their work as compared to some of their male counterparts. One of them said that she does not mind who confronts her but she makes sure that justice is maintained between two people in conflict. As a result her community has built trust in her. She (Grace Macharia) is a member of the church where I worship so I know her well.

that even among the families, man dictates and gives commands to be obeyed by his wife (or wives) and children. That is why women are beaten and are commanded to keep quiet.

Cases, as my research found out, have been noted where some decisions a man made have failed to work. If only he had paid attention to his wife's idea, things would have worked out better. That is why the proverb that, *gĩa atumia gĩtikagio kiarara*, "a woman's idea or advice is believed the day after" (NR) is held by men and some women believe in it. Men do not want to hear women's suggestions. However, some of my informants told me that the church and society is today changing and gradually accommodating women's ideas.¹⁰ Nevertheless, two of the informants who¹¹ were women sub-chiefs informed me that their fellow male sub-chiefs, chiefs and other administrators do not take their words seriously and sometimes they deny them opportunities to speak in public simply because they are women.

As noted in the introductory chapter, gendered roles in society have defined the work of men and women. A woman's job is considered light since there is a belief that women are weak. Men are introduced to what are perceived hard jobs at a tender age because they are believed to be strong and hardy. Each sex is discouraged to do any work associated with the opposite sex. This denies women and men opportunities to explore their talents and other potentialities due to limitations imposed by the gendered roles.

If the society is to make a leap forward, men will need to be liberated from their belief in superiority over women as God in Jesus Christ has made us equal. Likewise, women will need to prove by their actions and attitudes that God has given them equal abilities and thus disprove society's negative image of them. In any case, and as the English saying goes, "Action speaks louder than words."

4.5.6 General Characteristics of a woman.

A woman is quarrelsome.

Mûtumia ûrî thirî nî mûtumiaû ûrî haro

¹⁰ Those who mainly noted this are in leadership positions both in the Church and in the rest of the society.

¹¹ Mugure Koogi 34yrs old and Grace Macharia 46yrs old, both interviewed on 27th July 2004 at Njabini center

A woman with debts is a quarrelsome woman - her debts make her quarrelsome (S 76:4).

Mûtumia ndatûmagwo agîre thîrî

A woman is not sent to collect debts (B 508).

Haro cia atumia inîthiraga.

Women's quarrels never end (S 76:5a).

Haro ya atumia ndrûtagwo mbûri.

Women's strife will cost no sheep (S 78:21).

Uûgî wa arûme ûhanata rûhiu.

Men's skills cut like knives (words are for women; actions for men), (B 88:8).

Women possess anger that lasts

Marakara ma arûme matikaraga ta ma atumia.

Men's anger does not last like women's (women are prone to revenge injuries as men are to forgive them) (S 76:56).

Women are not trustworthy and generally unreliable.

Gia atumia gûîkagio kîarara.

Believe a woman's word the day after - do not trust a woman's word until you have reviewed it overnight (S 80:8).

Ndeto ciaatumia irekwendeka nî athuri ihana ta rwenji rûkîrega.

To force a woman to do something she does not like is like forcing a blunt shaving knife to shave. (B 285)

Mfario ya atumia ti mîrûngîrû.

Women have only crooked words. Women keep no secrets and seldom tell the truth (S 80:10)

Women are unpredictable - moody

Atumia na iguru matimenyagîrwo.

Women and sky cannot be understood (S 24:4).

Kîringîri kîa aka nî rwenji rûkîrega.

To force a woman to do something she does not want is like forcing a blunt shaving

knife to shave (B 288).

Women are not principled

Atumia mahana kinya gítarí itina.

Women are like gourds: they cannot balance (S 25:13).

Women do not keep secrets

Mûici na mûtumia athiraga kîeha akua.

He who robbed in company with a woman will live in fear until she dies (for a woman cannot keep a secret). (B 469).

Women are physically weak

Mutumia na kionje ni ûndû ûmwe.

A woman and an invalid man are the same thing (B 587).

Ukûrû ní ta wonje.

Old age is like being lame - the proverb is told by or to old women (B 904)

Women are the source of evil

Atumia ní kîhumo kîa maûru mothe no muoyo wa mûndû ûngîmûhonokia kûrî we.

A woman is a source of evil; only the goodness of human soul saves us from her (NR 151).

Women are mentally immature

Mûtumia eciragia na ageka hakuhf ota mwana.

A woman nearly thinks and acts like a child (NR 71).

Woman's life is precious

Mûtumia ndoragagwo.

A woman must not be killed (B 507).

In analysing the characteristics of women as shown by the Gikuyu proverbs, it was realised that the kind of picture of the Gikuyu women as portrayed by the above proverbs is negative, degrading and less human. In view of this, women's characteristics were taken as quarrelsome (that's why she is not sent to collect debts because she will cause trouble rather than peace); unforgiving (she does not easily forgive her offenders and will aim at revenging against them); insensitive in information dissemination; (that's why she

cannot be entrusted with any secret, she does “not qualify to be a leader” in the society for she “will reveal the secrets” that are discussed in the counsel (compare Kenyatta 1938).

Another characteristic dimension that has come up from the above is that a woman is like the sky that changes rather like the weather, which may be sunny in the morning, misty in the afternoon and rainy in the evening. In other words, she is tricky like the weather that is characterised by unpredictability. One informant explained the proverb, “*atumia na igûrû matimenyagirwo.*” That is, “women and sky cannot be understood” in a deeper way (S 24:4). The informant said that a woman couldn't predict when she was to start her monthly menstruation period and so if she is participating in the altar and all of a sudden she begins to menstruate, she will defile the altar¹². This gives the reason why women below menopause are not allowed to participate in religious leadership in the traditional society. Other informants both men and women above sixty years had the same belief and strongly oppose the idea of women who are menstruating to do any activity in the church because they are unclean and they will defile the altar and Holy Communion elements¹³. That is, bread and wine. In addition to that, they see menstruation as a hindrance to women's ordination to priesthood.

Women are also seen as both physically and mentally weak. The gendered roles of a woman, however, contradict this belief; for a woman is indeed active; she wakes up early in the morning, does housework and then goes to work in the field. In the evening, she comes with water and firewood and begins to prepare meals for her family. She goes and sleeps late after working and carrying babies and other burdens on her back (Kenyatta 1938: 99 - 123).

Mûtumia ndoragagwo. That is, “A woman must not be killed” (NR). This is because she is there to maintain lineage of the family, clan and society by bearing children. Without

¹² Mwaura Kiburu, 75 years old, interviewed on 27th July 2004 at Njabini location

¹³ Tabitha Wanjiku, 69 years old, interviewed on 20th July 2004 at Engineer location, Miriam Chege 56 years old, interviewed on 28th July at Njabini, and Josephat M. Kariuki, 35 years old, interviewed on 7th July at Magumu location,

her, it would mean the end of the society. One of the informants bluntly said, “Women are important so long as they give birth”. She is the mother of a family, clan, tribe and nation - she is valuable for that reason because she is obviously not valuable on other ways, e.g., leadership.

Today, the same trend continues among most of the Gikuyu families. Even when both husband and wife are working in offices, the husband comes home and doesn't give enough assistance to the family. The woman ends up employing a domestic worker to assist her. However, one of the informants said that her son-in-law assists his wife in the housework¹⁴. But other informants declared that when the husband assists his wife, the community would conclude that his wife has dominated him. That is, “*Ni athirwo ni mûka.*” Men need to be encouraged to assist their wives since the society has to wrestle with the dynamisms of our time.

Today, both husband and wife are turning out to be breadwinners and sometimes the wife is the only breadwinner unlike in the past when the husband was seen as the sole provider. They need to help each other and eschew the master-servant relationships in the house; for indeed, both man and woman needs rest, as they are all human beings who are created in God's perfect image. The issue of one dominating the other should therefore not arise; rather mutual support and co-operation should replace any form of domineering.

4.6 Conclusion

The chapter has shown that most of the proverbs, if not all, depict a negative image about women. Proverbs are easy to learn and they indoctrinate what is untrue about women in the minds of both men and women. It is from that background that the African women theologians are calling for “the study and examination of how myths, proverbs, folk tales and symbols operate in the socialisation of women working to preserve the norms of the community” (Njoroge 1997:81).

¹⁴ Margaret Wanjiku above 70years old interviewed on 6th July 2004 at Magumu location.

The chapter has demonstrated that African theology has to contend with the twin issues of liberation and reconciliation to both men and women if it has to be relevant in the 21st century. It has demonstrated that the society has to redefine itself if it has to become relevant in our times. In turn, any element adopted by African theology has to be critically analysed so as to bring total liberation and reconciliation to both genders – as each need each other for sustenance and mutual purpose as God intended.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS

5.0 Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction to this study, data was collected in Kinangop Division, which is part of Central province, Kenya. It was also mentioned in the introductory chapter that the dominant ethnic group in Kinangop Division is Gikuyu, who settled there from all parts of Central Kenya. People of ages between 20 to 80 years were interviewed in four locations i.e. Magumu, Njabini, Munyaka and Engineer. 80 respondents consisting of men and women, young and old were interviewed. The main aim was to create awareness among the respondents about gender imbalance so as to dismantle the negative proverbs on women, create new ones and uphold the positive ones. The other aim was to collect proverbs and also to assess people's awareness of the impact of these proverbs on the image of women. Consequently, this chapter analyses the eight guiding questions that were used during the interview.

5.1 Knowledge about proverbs relating to women

When I asked respondents to tell me some of the proverbs that they knew about women, I noted that each person had at least one proverb that he/she knew (see appendix 4 page 101). Some of these proverbs, which were collected, are already recorded in various books while others are not recorded. Some modern proverbs are not Gikúyũ proverbs but the young people translate them into the Gikuyu language and they become part of their daily socialisations. Older people (40 – 80 years) had typical Gikúyũ proverbs. This shows that with the change of culture and the emergence of new generations – partly due to the impact of globalisation (see page 74), some old proverbs are dying while new ones are being created (see page 74). However, many old proverbs are still relevant even among the present generation (see chapter 6: 1). It was also noted that some proverbs used were originally from the Bible (see page 77) and are to a large extent similar to those of Gikuyu community: this is the impact of African Christianity to this community.

5.2. Use of proverbs about women in daily life.

I then requested each respondent to narrate to me an incident he/she knew that happened in which one of the proverbs was used. One of the respondents said, “It was during a Church’s occasion...one of the guests of honour was a woman. Guests were to be given some presents, one present was not presentable. One of the church officials suggested that the unworthy gift be given to the woman, justifying himself with the proverb that says ‘*Iguku ikuru ririagwo ni aka* - meaning that the hump of an old ox is eaten by women.’”¹⁵

Another respondent said, “It happens that there was a woman and a man (husband and wife). The man was employed far away from home and would come home after three months. The wife could not take care of the children in the absence of her husband. Any time the husband came back, he could find a disorganised home. This caused trouble among the two; thus justifying the proverb that says, ‘Women are like wheelbarrows that have to be pushed.’”¹⁶

The former proverb is an old one since oxen with humps were indigenous in the African society hence the introduction of the new breed that have no hump. Thus this is an example of old proverbs that are still in use. The latter is a recent proverb for the idea of wheelbarrows is a recent invention – as most of the homes among Gikuyu community have at least one wheelbarrow that carries loads. Those who narrated the proverbs appeared to give stories that portrayed a negative image about women as the example given above shows. It is important at this juncture to appreciate some of the dying proverb in the community. An illustration: “The boy holds discussions worth his father and the girl with her mother” today there are many families headed by single parents unlike in some years back. Such a proverb is not applicable to these families. Even where two parents are present, one of them may not have the talent to advice his/her children and it may be left entirely upon the other spouse. In addition, children in boarding

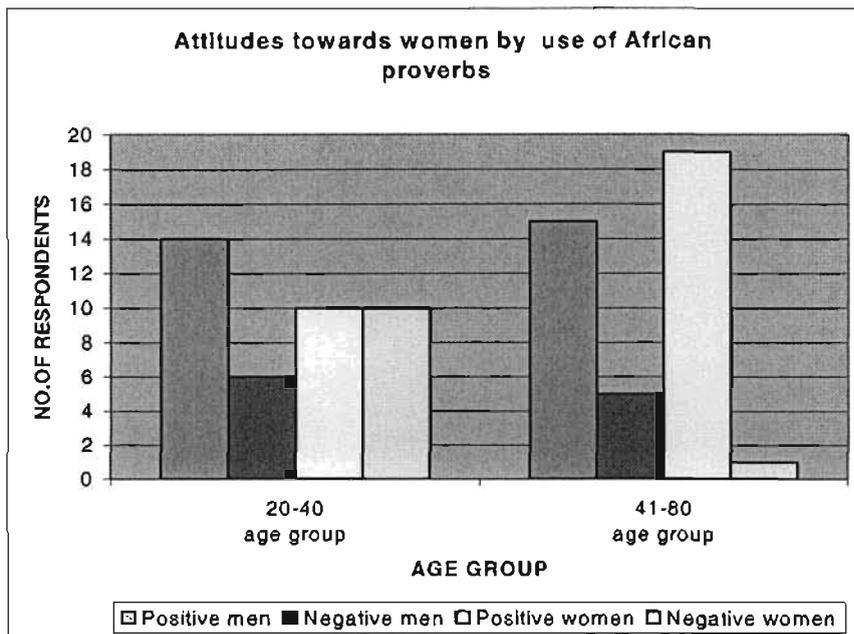
¹⁵ Anthony Wanjahi, 38 years old, from Munyaka location interviewed on 19th July 2004

¹⁶ Mary Wambui, 24 years old, from Magumu location, interviewed on 5th July 2004

schools have more time with their teachers than their parents and so parents may not have time for discussions with their children. Another proverb is, “when a man comes home with meat, the wife grinds flour happily”. This is dying because women are equally breadwinners in the current socio-cultural dispensation. Some have better jobs than their husbands do and they are greatly contributing towards the building of their homes. However, this does not mean that women were idly waiting for “bread” from their husbands but their work in the garden and in the entire domestic domain was not treated as one that effected the betterment of the family life.

5.3 Proverbs reflecting societal construction of women

As indicated in the graph below, the result of analysis shows that 20 women aged between 20-40 years from all centres gave 10 positive proverbs and 10 negative proverbs, from their perspective. Women aged between 41-80 years gave 19 positive proverbs and 1 negative proverb. Twenty men aged between 20-40 years gave 14 positive proverbs and 6 negative proverbs about women.



Twenty men aged between 41-80 gave 15 positive proverbs and 5 negative proverbs about women from the respondents' perspective. The analysis of women aged between 20-40 years shows that half of the young women believe that proverbs don't portray the positive image about women. One respondent¹⁷ who gave the proverb that "a woman's word may at times prevail over a man's word" supported this proverb. She said that her mother who is a leader in her village sometimes gives better ideas than her male counterparts. She added that her father died when they were young and therefore her mother successfully raised them up and is therefore proud of her competence.

Some women who ranged from 41-80 generally accepted that almost all proverbs about women reflect the right image of women. This means that this age group has internalised the stereotypes that have been expressed from time immemorial on women. One respondent¹⁸ who gave this proverb that "a woman is not given secrets by men" strongly admitted that women are weak and therefore cannot be entrusted to keep sensitive secrets. Being a Roman Catholic member, she supported the idea that the reason why women are not leaders in her church is because of their weak nature. In addition to that she believes that a woman must not administer the holy sacraments (wine and bread) especially when menstruating because she will defile them. This means that more time needs to be spent in sensitising the later age group in order to accept their true nature and to work towards fulfilling the God-intended purpose for each of them.

Men aged 20-40 gave more negative proverbs than positive ones. This shows that many men of this age group hold that women are weak while men are strong. One respondent¹⁹ supported this proverb: "women are like *matatus* (public transport vehicles), you miss one you get another" this according to him meant that a man can have intimate relationships with as many women as he wants. The implication is that women are weak and so men can win or tame them easily to do the wish of men. However some respondents gave examples of the Kenyan prominent women who are ministers such as

¹⁷ Helen Wanjiku, 29years old interviewed on 20th July 2004 at Munyaka location

¹⁸ Keziah Nyambura, 63yearsold interviewed on 12th July 2004 at Engineer location

¹⁹ Moses Ndungu, 26 years old interviewed on 27th July 2004 at Njabini location

Prof. Wangari Mathaai²⁰ - assistant minister for environment, Charity Ngilu, minister for health, and Beth Mugo, assistant minister for education. Others are powerful preachers like Bishop Wanjiru, Evangelist Teresia Wairimu and also local businesswomen, nurses, and sub-chiefs/chiefs who have excelled in their respective positions.

Likewise, men aged between 41 and 80 had more positive proverbs than the negative ones. One respondent²¹ gave this proverb, "He who steals in the company of a woman will live in fear until she dies." He strongly and erroneously blundered by saying that women never mature at any given point. He said this in the presence of his second wife who remained passive towards the comment. However, not all men held negative attitude towards women. One respondent²² who is a church elder in his church gave this proverb that: "a virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." This is a proverb borrowed from the Bible and has become part of people's lives, especially among the Christians. He stated that women are very important in the church and in every society. He further said that God is giving church leadership and other church responsibilities to women because men have abandoned God. He noted that in his church, women are more in number than men. This, according to him, indicated that women are more faithful and devoted to God than men. In addition to that, he said that most men in church leadership, like bishops, are full of material greed and power thirst. He also supported the idea of women ordination to priesthood. Likewise another respondent²³ gave this proverb, "Even if your mother is very old or dressed in rags, do not despise her" – and was proud of his mother who brought them (four children) up in their tender age when their father died.

The research shows therefore that most people who need to be sensitised about the negative impacts of proverbs on women are the older people in the society. However, the younger generation also needs to be sensitised so as to create new proverbs that will build positive images of women.

²⁰ Prof. Wangari Maathai is also the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

²¹ Bedan Mwangi, 75 years old interviewed in 20th July 2004 at Munyaka location

²² David Kimani, 72 years old interviewed on 7th July 2004 at Njabini location

²³ Kariuki Kimori, 42 years old, interviewed on 7th July 2004 at Magumu location

5.4 Knowledge of use of proverbs in the church

At that point, I asked them if they had ever heard some of those proverbs being used in the church and the person who used them. All respondents said “yes” and added that most of the proverbs used are the biblical ones and they are related to the Gikûyû proverbs. They quoted from the biblical book of Proverbs chapters 5, 7 and 31. 35 out of 80 respondents said that the people who use proverbs are mainly preachers. 45 out 80 respondents hear musicians using proverbs both from the Bible and from Gikuyu community. The response shows that as we challenge African proverbs about women, we also need to challenge biblical proverbs - for they have a lot of similarities. In fact, 37 out of 80 respondents could not differentiate between African (Gikuyu) proverbs and biblical proverbs - for they both fit in the culture of Gikuyu - particularly Proverbs 31 on “a virtuous woman.”

5.5 Personal views about these proverbs

Thereupon, I sought the views of both men and women about these proverbs. 58 out of 80 respondents did not see anything wrong with these proverbs. For them, proverbs warn, teach and encourage society on how to view and to relate with women. For example, they warn men not to share their secrets with women; they teach that women are dangerous to men etc. This strengthened my hypothesis that there is a big need to encourage the society to view these proverbs from a woman’s perspective. In other words, if men can put themselves in the shoes of the concerned women, they can definitely adopt the relational anthropology that the previous chapter has unveiled and in turn, the society would adopt a new cultural hermeneutics, which is all-inclusive in every facet of life.

5.6 Knowledge of proverbs that can be used to build a positive image of a woman

When I asked the respondents to tell me the proverbs, which they thought could be used to build a positive image of a woman, the result were as indicated in the table below.

Table 1. Positive and negative proverbs from both men and women of different ages

Men/Age	Positive proverbs	Negative proverbs	Total
20 – 40yrs	14	6	20
41 ~ 80yrs	15	5	20
Women/Age			
20-40yrs	10	10	20
41- 80yrs	19	1	20
Total	58	22	80

It was noted that since most of respondents did not view these proverbs from a woman's perspective, they narrated some proverbs that build a negative image on women. If people could learn to view these proverbs from a woman's perspective, they can reject many proverbs about women because they are harmful to a woman's image.

5.7 Creation of personal proverbs that are good for women

To find out more from the respondents, I asked them if they could create their own proverbs that would promote women's worth and status. By the time I reached this point, 40 out of 80 respondents had begun to rethink about those proverbs they had mentioned. The discussion appeared to have sensitised them on those proverbs, which portray a negative image on women. However, the question on creating new proverbs was a tall order for them. This may have been due to the time limitation and that most of them had never been interviewed before. Some of the few proverbs that were created²⁴ are; "a woman's words need to be taken seriously" this proverb replaces that which says that a woman's word is believed the following morning. Another new proverb is "every person, has his/her own weaknesses." This proverb replaces, "men mature but women never mature" - a misleading proverb that is used in daily socialisation.

5.8 Additional information

When the respondents were given the opportunity to give general contributions to the interview they admitted that there is need for people to change their attitude towards women. One of the focus group concluded “Women are not weak as society believes, they need to discover their potentialities and utilise them”²⁵

5.9 Conclusion

This exercise shows that creating new proverbs needs time and creativity. It also requires a change of one’s attitude towards women, which comes through sensitising a person and challenging wrong perceptions of women. When people start viewing women from a positive perspective, they will begin to create new and positive proverbs that will create a new dawn for all the people of Africa. Therefore, the challenge ahead is to find ways and means of creating awareness on the impact of proverbs about women to both men and women. This requires educating them about the true humanity of women that has hitherto been suppressed.

²⁴ The above proverbs were created by a focus group of 3 men and 4 women both below 40 years that were interviewed on 27th July 2004. Individual respondents found it hard to formulate new proverbs.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CONCLUSION & THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

6.0 Introduction

The study on, "A theological analysis of African proverbs about women: With reference to proverbs from Gikuyu people of Central Kenya," began with an introductory chapter. In this chapter, the background to and the motivation of the study were surveyed. It also looked at the research problem, the literature review, the definition of African theology, the literature of Gikuyu proverbs, the theory on the humanity of women, the hypothesis of the study, the theoretical framework, the research design and methodology, the research limitations and the research ethics. In so doing, the chapter set the mood and the nature of the study.

Chapter two gave the definition and the sources of African theology. The study makes its unique contribution in the study of African theology, by showing how proverbs are a major source of African theology though it has not been given enough attention by the African scholars. By setting chapter three on, "the nature and the classification of the Gikuyu proverbs," as a continuity of chapter two, the study shows how various proverbs can be used differently especially in the propagation of African Christianity as some African proverbs, though not given enough attention, are compatible with Biblical teachings. If African proverbs are given enough attention, the study showed, they would no doubt form part of the major sources of African theology just as the Bible, the African experiences of colonialism, slavery and neo-colonialism, the Exodus event, the African religion among others.

Having seen how the Gikuyu proverbs impact on humanity, chapter four entailed "the theology of the humanity of women," innovatively redefined *humanity in the light of gender balances* where it is seen as the appreciation of the full humanity of others as

²⁵ Focus group of 3men and 4women, both below 40 years who were interviewed on 27/07/2004 at Njabini location

designed by God regardless of the prejudices such as gender, area of origin, creed or parentage. It proposed an end to further definitions of a woman from both the male perspective and the female perspective but from a “new” human perspective where what counts is the content of the person and not the gender or the background of the person. The chapter, thus, helped in the understanding of the background of the composition of the African proverbs.

The fifth chapter is on the data analysis where the results of the interviews, on the Gikuyu proverbs, in Kinangop area of Central Kenya have been evaluated. This has been done successfully through graphics and other modes of data analysis like graphs and tables and maps. Consequently, the data in relation to my hypothesis shows that African (Gikuyu) proverbs about women reveal the people's attitude towards women. In addition these proverbs have an impact on the understanding of an African woman's image in the church and society. There are some proverbs, which are positive in that they build a positive image of a woman. However, some proverbs are negative because they distort the image of a woman. Therefore, proverbs are a major source of African theology because they reveal who women are in a particular African society.

This chapter thus leads us to the conclusion and the resolutions of the whole study where the need for a new cultural hermeneutics is proposed as a way of redeeming the society from the gender discriminative proverbs.

6.1 Some of the empowering ways of looking at African proverbs as one of the sources of African women's theology.

There are many African proverbs in oral and written form – as the research has demonstrated. The research has shown that proverbs are always in the making. While some of the old ones are still in use, others have died or are not actively used. For example “*Ngai ndariaga ngima*” or “*God does not eat cooked maize flour*” meaning that God cannot be corrupted is a new proverb, which began in the 20th century after the Europeans, introduced maize mills factories (to grind maize in the Gikuyuland). This proverb is more common than the former, “*Ngai wa muthini ndakomaga*” or “*The God*

of the poor does not go to sleep” That is, even if the poor has no one to “bribe” his or her way to success, God is ever there to protect the poor and to guarantee success.

An observation from a woman’s perspective will reveal that most of the proverbs that are related to women are created to suppress women’s ability, to falsely say who they are from a male’s perspective and to discourage them in promoting the welfare of the society – as the research has demonstrated. In the coming sub-section, we intend to demonstrate that there are relevant ways of looking at African proverbs with the view to influencing African women’s theology:

6.1 a. A woman is not supposed to do men’s jobs

Mútumia ndaatûraga mûtwe na ndangîkia ndahi nyanja-inf

A woman does not split the head (of the slaughtered goat) nor dip the cup into the beer (because both are men’s jobs) (S 588).

A similar proverb can be constructed as, “*Ngai ahete athuri na atumia mawira ngurani nigetha makurie umbi wake*” – that is, God has given men and women different talents to do different jobs to edify God’s creation.

Thenge ingiremworî mugoma niguo unghota.

If a he-goat does not overturn, would a she-goat manage?

Like in the former, a counter proverb can be constructed to read, “*Wira wa Thenge tiguo wa Mugoma*” meaning, “The work of a he-goat is not the work of a she-goat.” Like in the former, the new proverb would demonstrate that the African idea of the division of labour can also be seen positively; while at the same time, it shows that St. Paul’s emphasis on the different gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12 – 14) mean that men and women can undertake complimentary roles without raising any tension.

6.1 b. Leadership and power.

As noted in the third chapter of this study, various Gikuyu proverbs portray a woman as unqualified for leadership as women will “never mature”- even after circumcision.

However, these proverbs can be reconstructed relevantly in line with the changing circumstances on gender balancing. For example:

Mũthuri niagimaraga no mũtumia ndatigaga wana.

The man comes out of childhood, the woman remains in childhood (S 86:49).

This proverb can best be understood from the background that after “circumcision,” girls are not entitled to new rights like men - save for permission to accept the marriage offer.

It is similar to that which says that, “A woman nearly thinks and acts like a child” (NR).

This proverb can be culturally deconstructed and then reconstructed to read, “*Gutiri mundu utari kawana gake,*” meaning “every person has his or her little failings” that needs to be re-examined from time to time. This proverb will “remind” every one that, we are after all human beings unlike God who is perfect in leadership and the general life. Thus when a woman leader errs, no one will say, “after all she is a woman. What else could we have expected?”

Matumbi ma njamba matitũrkanagia.

It means that, “The eggs of males do not hatch each other” (B 377). This proverb is used to emphasize the unique position that a man stands over a woman. It can be repeated but given a different emphasis such as, ‘any gender needs the other for fulfilment and in accordance to God’s design.’

Mũthuri kiongo kĩa mucii no mũtumia ni ngoro.

It means, “The man may be the head of the home; the wife is the heart” (S 29:11). It can be deconstructed and then reconstructed to read, “*A man and woman are beyond the heart and the head.*” This new construction would conscientize every one that the body has more than merely the heart and the head. For, indeed, the body has legs, hands and the rest of the parts. If men and women are reduced to head and heart, it means they are both disqualified in leadership as even the heart and the head combined cannot lead successfully. For without soul, a human being is incomplete. In any case, leadership, whether at home or in the public domain, is something to do with individual talent or calling.

Thus Wachege's (1992: 17 - 45) contention that at no time was a woman entrusted with leadership responsibilities in the traditional Gikuyu community, can be reconstructed in the light of the prevailing realities of the present day. The notion that a woman nearly thinks like a child as emphasised by Kenyatta (1938: 225) - who further contends that women were not considered mentally and bodily fit to stand the oath which involved not only the individual going through it but the whole family group - will definitely become archaic.

6.2. How African proverbs can be read and used from an African woman's perspective.

One is to take account of women's experience; for both men and women must re-examine African culture and challenge those aspects that maintain the domestication of women. The existence of a woman is reduced to insignificance because she is repeatedly disregarded. The feminists call us to explore a new understanding of our human being and to affirm each one's mode of being human. .

Women's encounters must be taken into account before God in order to equalise our biased reading of the proverbs. Women's experience of life in society uncovers many shortcomings from sexism's tendency to shape the extent of our being creative, caring creatures, who, after the image of God, conquer chaos to bring out good out of a nebulous existence.

The attributes and roles of women as experienced in society are not necessarily related to their biological nature, rather they are demands of society and women learn to live with them. For example, men dictate the lifestyle of women by creating policies and structures that are gender biased in church and society and, yet, women accept them without any question (see chapter five on data analysis of proverbs that are mainly created and used by men in public). Thus gender differentiation controls what is acceptable for women to undertake and also prescribes what roles men should play. Men and women are taught what is suitable for them. Some traditional proverbs as well as some found in the Bible,

as it was observed in this research (see chapter five), are obstacles enjoining women not to attempt to reach the same levels as men.

In demonstrating how African proverbs can be read and used from an African Woman's perspective, a few examples will suffice:

Proverbs on qualities of a bad (nyagacu) wife

Mûtumia ûrî inegene agambaga ta maaî magîitika.

A nagging wife is like water going drip! drip! (NR).

Such a proverb can be reconstituted to read, "A nagging spouse is like water going drip! drip!" This will communicate the message that no gender should harass the other through pestering or by making impossible demands.

Irio cia mûka mûkarî irîagwao hîndî ya mambura.

Food for a mean wife is eaten only at *mambura*.²⁶ (NR).

This proverb can be read and used from an African woman's perspective by being made to read as follows, "ithunu itiui ati Ngai muheani." That is, "mean people fail to acknowledge that God is the provider." Seen from this perspective, the "new" proverb has demonstrated that meanness of great magnitude is bad to the society of both men and women. It goes against the tenets of African hospitality – which we inherited from our fore parents. Despite avoiding prodigality, the need to recognise that meanness is not just bad when it is done by a woman, but even by man, is necessary.

Mûtumia kîgûta nî mûrigo harî mûthuriwe.

A lazy woman is a burden to her family (NR).

This proverb can be reconstituted to read, "Mundu muguta ni murigo kwi bururi." That is, "A lazy person is a burden to his or her society." In so doing, the proverb will communicate the message of hard work as opposed to parasitism. This would guarantee a prosperous family and society that does not rely on foreigners for handouts. Additionally,

²⁶ *Mambura* is ceremonies or rituals. The proverb means that a means woman's resources or food are at everyone's disposal at rituals for she has no choice.

it will treat all genders as in need to eradicate laziness and embrace hard work, as our God is a hard worker – as evidenced by the act of creation.

Nikaba gũikara mabati-ini gũkĩra gũikarania na mũtumia wĩ inegene.

Better to live on the roof than share the house with a nagging wife.

This proverb can be reconstituted to read, “*Nikaba gutura mundu ewiki gũkĩra gutura na mundu wa inegene.*” That means, “*It is better to be a celibate rather than living with a nagging spouse.*” The “new” proverb therefore discourages nagging behaviour from any of the spouse as it can cause stress to any of the two. Nagging characters can also amount to poor parentage, especially where children ape it and embrace it as a way of life.

Thus, African proverbs can be read and used from a gender sensitive approach and usher in a new wave of a gender-balanced way of societal socialisation in all aspects of life. In so doing, it can amount to the genuine “salvation” of the world that we live in.

6.3 Ways in which the African Church may utilise its cultural heritage in a way that does not dehumanise women.

The church must be gender sensitive; for in so doing, it will have a moral authority to challenge all cultural practices that demean the dignity of both men and women. Special attention needs to be given to practices found in rites of passages for it is in these rites that we have taboos, beliefs and attitudes that affect humanity. Consequently they shape the mind a given society has towards different people and other creatures.

Additionally the church must demolish all the gendered structures in the church, which are enhanced by the biblical and African cultures, as well as church traditional teachings. This includes the gendered roles of men and women that hinder women to have access to full participation in church as seen in the liturgical books that were made by men and use masculine language that assumes women are included when men are mentioned. Also the language it uses in church should be inclusive, sermons and Bible interpretations should be done by both men and women so that they can look at the Bible from both man’s and woman’s perspective.

The Church must realise that women are and must be part of decision making body that is usually dominated by men who, therefore, make decisions for women including women's organisations. It should also empower women by giving them equal opportunities in theological training institutions and offering them equal job opportunities with men on completion of their theological studies.

There is need to sensitise and release people from centuries of socio-cultural and theological conditionings based on a false understanding of humanity. There is need to reclaim the cultural heritage that elevates and identifies women as human beings. For example, women in African traditional culture performed religious duties; they were healers, mediums, rainmakers.

All women of Africa need to work together to challenge the status quo and look for ways to dismantle sexism found in all aspects of community life as a way of bringing hope and new life to women. In addition to that, women need to be theologically trained in order to be part of decision-makers in any church forum and that will bring forth gender-balanced policies and structures. Theological education will also empower women to reject all measures that contradict their divine vocation as agents of life and they will be able to struggle for their God-given rights.

6.4 How to make African proverbs a tool for liberation for women.

Upholding good proverbs

Some of the good proverbs include, "*Gutiri wanda na wamugongo.*" That is, "There is no child from the back or from the womb." This means that all children are equal. Since all of them were one day in the womb, they all have equal value.

Another proverb that needs to be upheld is, "*Mwana nota uria ungi.*" That is, "*Every child is like the other.*" Though the proverb does not explain in which way that a child is like the other, it however means that children in general should be treated kindly without being abused. For the way one values his or her child, he/she should also value other

people's children regardless of their gender. In any case, in Christ, there are neither men nor women, neither Jew nor Gentile as Christ has made us equal (Galatians 3:28).

Creating new proverbs.

This has been elaborated with examples above (in 6.1 a. and 6.1 b).

Dismantling destructive proverbs.

This has also been elaborated with examples above (in 6.1 a. and 6.1 b).

Applying a new interpretation of the old proverbs e.g. looking at them from a woman's perspective.

This has also been elaborated with examples above (in 6.1 a. and 6.1 b).

6.5 The way forward.

The church, society, women and men have a role to play so as to implement the new anthropology as discussed above. Writing literature on inclusive anthropology needs to be strengthened by people who should be determined to change their minds and attitudes towards one another. The new understanding of an inclusive anthropology should be put into practice; that is, people should not only be hearers but also doers of what they have learnt. This therefore means that practical measures need to be taken by everyone in order to implement the new anthropology in the lives of the people as suggested below.

Women should develop self-affirmation and self-esteem; thus they need to arise and reject all practices that dehumanise their image and identity. Oduyoye (1995: 189- 207) and Njoroge's (1996:26) assertion that women are capable of making decisions, acting and encountering God without a male intermediary because (like men) they are created in the image and likeness of God, need to be re-emphasised for the sake of the emerging community.

Men need to be conscientised on the need to get liberated from their wrong attitudes and misconceptions about humanity; for to liberate women from the bondage of patriarchy also means to liberate men from the same bondage because oppression destroys humanity on both

sides; that is, "the oppressed person is robbed of humanity and the oppressor becomes an inhuman monster" (Tappa 1986: 104).

In conclusion, it is the recommendation of this study, as a way forward, that African women scholars and theologians, together with "concerned" men should publish books that now highlight the reconstituted and the created proverbs. Otherwise, it would be defeatist to say that we are upholding some proverbs, creating new proverbs or dismantling some proverbs without engaging ourselves in publications. In addition, we should make it as a habit to severally quote the "new" proverbs in our speeches and in our publications in our endeavour to bring or form a new community of men and women where the lion and the goat are able to sit together at a round table of interaction – and where non will be harmed or made to fear. In so doing, there would be no categorisation of goats versus lions - as all will be one people of God - reflecting the new humanity that will be created by the new cultural hermeneutics.

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APPENDIX 1

KEY INFORMANTS

ASSESSMENT OF INFORMANTS OF THE IMPACT OF PROVERBS ABOUT WOMEN.

Gender/Ag	No.	Magumu Centre (06/07/2004)	Aware ?	No.	Njabini Centre (27/07/2004)	Aware?
Women 0 – 40 yrs	1	Mary Wambui	No	1	Mugure Koogi (Sub Chief)	Yes
	2	Tabitha Nyokabi Kihoro	No	2	Joyce Kimani	No
	3	Alice Wangari	Yes	3	Irene Njeri	Yes
	4	Josephine Nyambura	No	4	Hellen Wangai	No
	5	Jane Njeri	No	5	Lucy Muthoni	No
Women 0 – 80 yrs	1	Milkah Wanjiru Wainaina	No	1	Grace N. David (Sub Chief)	Yes
	2	Margaret Wanjiku (Nyakairu)	No	2	Mary Kimani	Yes
	3	Ruth Njeri	Yes	3	Miriam Chege	No
	4	Beth Muthoni	Yes	4	Esther Wainaina	No
	5	Martha Wangari	No	5	Jane Kariuki	Yes
Men 0 – 40 yrs	1	Josephat Muhia Kariuki	No	1	Moses Ndungu	Yes
	2	Peter Warui Munyua	No	2	Peter Kimani	Yes
	3	Gerald Kiguma Mburu	No	3	John Ndichu	Yes
	4	John Mwangi	Yes	4	Njoroge Wanjau	No
	5	Joseph Wainaina	No	5	Mwaniki Njoroge	No
Men 0 – 80 yrs	1	Hezekiah Wainaina	Yes	1	Mwaura Kiburu	Yes
	2	Stephen Mwaura	Yes	2	Michael Njoroge (Reverend)	Yes
	3	Kenneth Kamau	No	3	David Kimani	No
	4	Julius Mwangi	No	4	Hezron Kamau	No
	5	Kariuki Kimori	Yes	5	Gitau Maina	No

Gender/Age	No.	Munyaka Centre (20/07/2004)	Aware?	No.	Engineer Centre (12/07/2004)	Aware?
Women 30 – 40 yrs	1	Beth Wangeci Irungu	Yes	1	Mama Faith	Yes
	2	Hellen Wanjiku	Yes	2	Mama Wambui	Yes
	3	Milka Nyakio	No	3	Milka Wangui	No
	4	Elizabeth Wanjiru	No	4	Rosemary Njeri	No
	5	Mary Wambui	No	5	Mary Wanjiru	No
Women 40 – 80 yrs	1	Miriam Wakonyo	Yes	1	Mary Nyakieni Mbugua	Yes
	2	Dorcas wambui	No	2	Monica Waruguru Ngugi	Yes
	3	Leah Wangui Nyenjeri	Yes	3	Magdalene Wangui	Yes
	4	Tabitha Wanjiku Apollo	No	4	Keziah Nyambura	No
	5	Hellen Wanjiku Gathangu	No	5	Lucy wangui	No
Men 30 – 40 yrs	1	Anthony Wanjahi (Reverend)	Yes	1	Isaac Kanduku	Yes
	2	James Karanja	Yes	2	David Njoroge Mwanja	No
	3	Francis Mbacio	No	3	Peter Theuri	No
	4	Jackson Gatuire	Yes	4	John Mbugua	No
	5	James Kariuki	No	5	Michael Karanja	Yes
Men 40 – 80 yrs	1	David Mukiri	Yes	1	Joseph Mbugua Kamau	No
	2	Bedan Mwangi	Yes	2	Cyrus Waweru	Yes
	3	Benjamin Mwangi	No	3	Peter Ndiritu	Yes
	4	Kiarie Wanjau	No	4	Joseph Njoroge	No
	5	Njoroge Mwangi	No	5	Chege Waweru	Yes

APPENDIX 2

Guidelines for interviews

NO.-----

FIELD RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN KINANGOP DIVISION (CENTAL KENYA).

FORM TO BE FILLED BY THE INFORMANTS

NAME: -----

AGE & SEX-----

RESIDENCE-----

OCCUPATION-----

DATE OF INTERVIEW-----

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
PIETERMARITZBURG
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

Research semi structured questions to be used during the interview by the researcher- on "a theological analysis of African proverbs about women: with reference to Proverbs from Gikuyu people of Central Kenya."

SEMI STRUCTURED QUESTIONS:

1. Tell me some of the proverbs you know which are related to women

2. Narrate to me an incident that happened in which one of the proverbs was used.

3. Do you think the proverbs you have mentioned reflect who women are in your society?

4. Have you ever heard some of these proverbs being used in the church? Who used them?

APPENDIX 4

PROVERBS THAT WERE COLLECTED FROM INFORMANTS AT KINANGOP DIVISION

GIKUYU PROVERBS ABOUT WOMEN

No.	Proverb	Positive proverbs or negative (from respondents perspective)	Women		Men		Recorder
			Over 40 yrs	20-40 yrs	40-80 yrs	20-40 yrs	
1.	The woman who gives birth is like a banana tree, it breaks under the weight of its fruits	-		✓			S 67:22
2.	One womb can give birth to a thief and a witch	+	✓				S 68:31
3.	Many births, many burials	+			✓		S 69:37
4.	The baby nursed by the grandmother can never be corrected	+			✓		S 48:4
5.	The baby who refuses its mothers breasts will never be fully grown	+	✓				S 38:12
6.	The mother of the beautiful one has no ears	-				✓	S 40:30
7.	With money, no mother	-				✓	S 40:32
8.	The hyena does not eat its baby and you know how greedy it is	+	✓				B 154
9.	The cow has a bad delivery though her owner is present	+			✓		B 159
10.	A plant loses its blossom as soon as it bears fruit	-		✓			B 185
11.	The fed baby plays on its mother's breasts	+			✓		B 230
12.	A person who is advised and controlled by his mother is like the one who is controlled by his stomach	-		✓			NR
13.	Whoever hides her womanhood never gives birth	-		✓			NR
14.	A fool sucks his mother's breasts even when she is dead	-		✓			NR
15.	You unfavoured woman, you will one day get a baby boy	+		✓			NR
16.	A stepmother is not a mother	+				✓	NR
17.	However dirty your mother may be, she's better than your neighbours mother	+			✓		NR
18.	One who does not give birth is called barren	+		✓			NR
19.	A home with daughters only is a sad home	+			✓		NR
20.	You are restless as a pregnancy which is being miscarried	+			✓		NR
21.	It is only a foolish child who despises his mother	+				✓	NR
22.	The child who does not move from place to place thinks that his mother is the best cook	-		✓			NR
23.	Even if your mother is very old or dressed in rags, you wont despise her	+				✓	NR
24.	Even the lazy woman does not put her children hungry	+	✓				NR

No.	Proverb	Positive proverbs or negative (from respondents perspective)	Women		Men		Recorder
			Over 40 yrs	20-40 yrs	40-80 yrs	20-40 yrs	
25.	Hail mother though hideous	-		✓			NR
26.	The umbilical cord of the mother and the child are the same thing	-				✓	NR
27.	A girl child is born looking towards blessing while a boy looks towards poverty	+			✓		NR
28.	Illicit love spoils the uncircumcised girl	-		✓			S 59:12
29.	The child is not given away without price	-		✓			B 607
30.	The youth who has enough to buy his girl needs to beseech her	+	✓				B 619
31.	A girl does not stop at a poor youth's door	+			✓		B 621
32.	The bell needs its tongue	-		✓			S 63:18
33.	A woman who roves never fails to get a child	-	✓				S 64:30
34.	The woman whose sons have died is richer than the barren woman	-		✓			S 71:9
35.	Who will draw water for the childless woman?	-				✓	S 71:5
36.	Two wives, two pots of poison	+	✓				S 35:29
37.	A man who married many wives can stay hungry	+			✓		S 35:30
38.	Hatred that exists between two wives is like a hunchback on the human body. It stays in the family forever	+				✓	NR
39.	No wife will have her white hair shaved at her mother's	-				✓	S 51:21
40.	When the young wife dies, one returns to the old	+	✓				S 52:24
41.	The man may be the head of the home: the wife is the heart	+	✓				S 29:11
42.	Wives and oxen have no friends	+			✓		S 29:18
43.	A man changing his abode is like a woman marrying	+				✓	S 30:28
44.	The food found Wacu in the field	+	✓				B 17
45.	The buying of a wife begins from a little thing	+			✓		B 26
46.	The breaking up of a betrothal is not small matter	+		✓			B 30
47.	Clear out of "ihakiria!" (nyumba-hut) for women	-	✓				B 35
48.	A good mortar never meets a good pestle	+	✓				B 670
49.	Missing goats is missing a wife	+			✓		NR
50.	The woman who has once married is better than a girl	-		✓			NR
51.	A good wife is her husband's pride and joy but a wife who brings shame on her husband is like a cancer in his bones	+				✓	NR
52.	A nagging wife is like water going drip! drip!	+				✓	NR
53.	The woman you marry is not an oil pot	+				✓	NR
54.	Food for a mean wife is eaten during rainy season	-	✓				NR
55.	A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband	+			✓		NR

No.	Proverb	Positive proverbs or negative (from respondents perspective)	Women		Men		Recorder
			Over 40 yrs	20-40 yrs	40-80 yrs	20-40 yrs	
56.	A woman is like a bridge where everyone pass through	-	✓				NR
57.	A lazy woman is a burden to her family	+	✓				NR
58.	Better to live on the roof than to share the house with a nagging wife	+			✓		NR
59.	Women are like matatus (public vehicles). You miss one you get another	+			✓		NR
60.	Women are like wheelbarrows, they have to be pushed	-			✓		NR
61.	Homes are made by wisdom of women but are destroyed by their foolishness	+	✓				NR
62.	Beauty of a woman brings troubles	-		✓			NR
63.	A woman is not given secrets by men	-	✓				NR
64.	A coward cannot win a beautiful lady	+			✓		NR
65.	The widow's sons have no tears – A widow struggles to bring children up without a husband	+	✓				B 22
66.	A widow never fails to praise her husband	-	✓				NR
67.	The man comes out of childhood, the woman stays in childhood	-	✓				S 86:4a
68.	The eggs of males do not hatch each other	+			✓		B 377
69.	A woman does not split the head	+			✓		B 588
70.	If a he-goat does not overturn, would a she-goat manage?	+			✓		NR
71.	A woman with debts is a quarrelsome woman	-		✓			S 76:4
72.	Women's quarrel never end	-	✓				S 76:5a
73.	Men's anger does not last like women's	+				✓	S 76:56
74.	Women's strife will cost no sheep	+			✓		S 78:21
75.	Believe a woman's words the day after	+			✓		S 80:8
76.	Women have only crooked words	-	✓				S 80:10
77.	Women and sky cannot be understood	+			✓		S 24:4
78.	Women are like guards, they cannot balance	+			✓		S 25:13
79.	Men's skills cut like knives (words are for women, actions for men)	+			✓		B 888
80.	The bump is a choice morsel for young men when the ox is young but if it is old, women must eat it	-	✓				B 168
81.	He who robbed in company with a boy will live in fear until the boy is circumcised	+			✓		B 468
82.	He who robbed in company with a woman will live in fear until she dies	+			✓		B 469
83.	A woman must not be killed	+			✓		B 507
84.	A woman and an invalid man are the same thing	+			✓		B 587
85.	Old age is like being lame (the proverb is told by or to old women)	+	✓				B 904
86.	A woman's word may at times prevail over a man's word	+		✓			NR

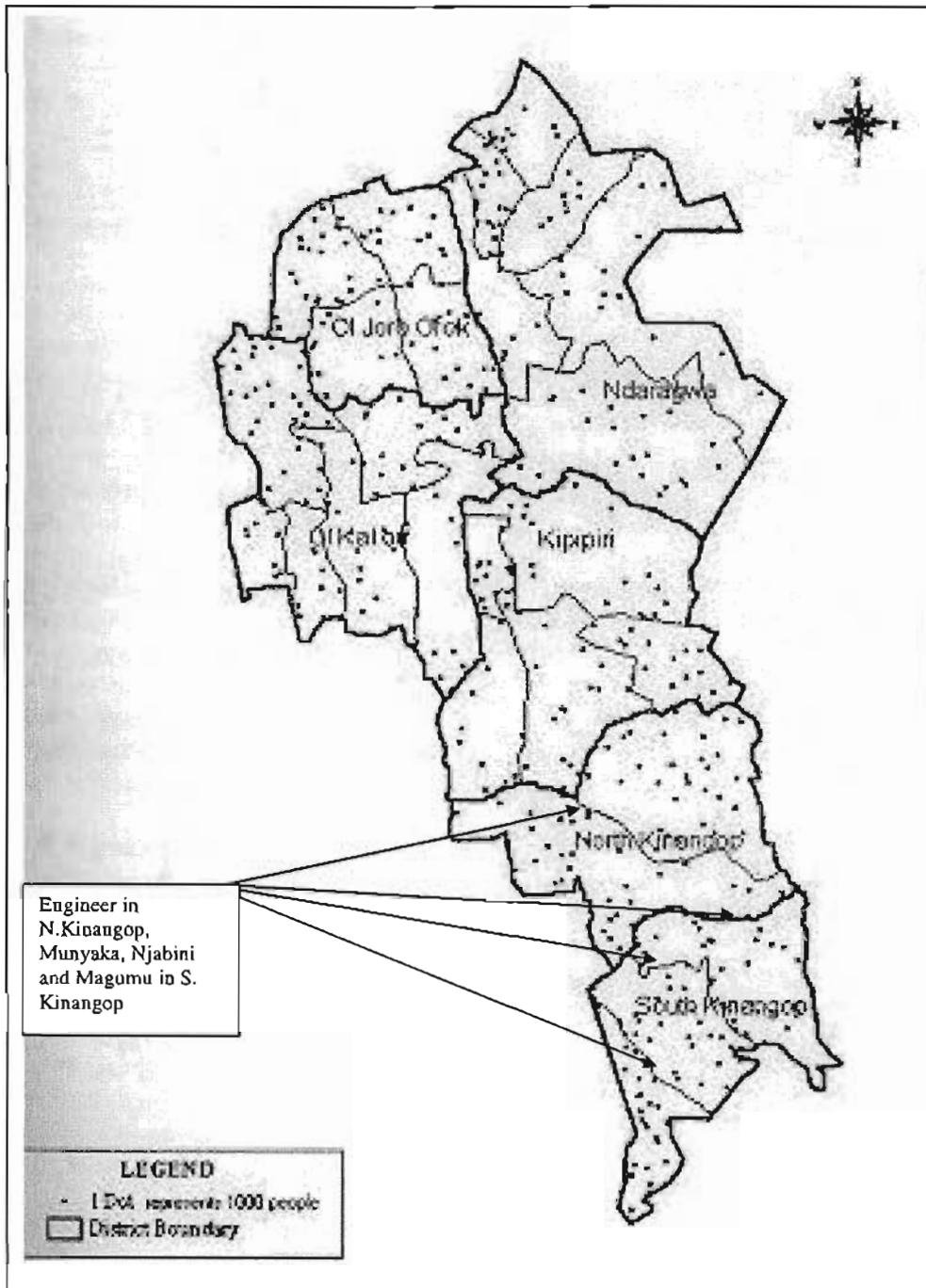
No.	Proverb	Positive proverbs or negative (from respondents perspective)	Women		Men		Recorder
			Over 40 yrs	20-40 yrs	40-80 yrs	20-40 yrs	
87.	A woman nearly thinks and acts like a child	-				✓	NR
88.	Beauty is not edible	-				✓	NR
89.	A woman is source of evil only the goodness of human soul saves us from her	+				✓	NR
90.	A woman is like a maize cob, after you eat it, throw it away	+				✓	NR
91.	The beautiful woman will bring diseases	-					NR
92.	A gracious woman is respected but a woman without virtue is a disgrace	+	✓				NR
93.	A woman is not oxygen that you can survive without	+				✓	NR
94.	Behind every successful man, there is a woman	+	✓				NR
95.	Women are like clothes which are disposed when they get old	-		✓			NR
96.	A good woman is known by her characters and not beauty	+	✓				NR
97.	A woman is called woman (mutumia) because she should not speak out	+				✓	NR
98.	If a woman becomes bad return her to her home	+	✓				NR
99.	A good wife never grumbles	+	✓				NR
100	One with one wife is like a man with one eye	-				✓	NR

KEY:

S - Schipper
B - Barra
NR - Not Recorded

APPENDIX 7

MAP 3. NYANDARUA DISTRICT POPULATION DISTRIBUTION 1999



APPENDIX 8

TABLE 2. NYANDARUA DISTRICT POPULATION DENSITY

POPULATION BY AGE AND SEX, 1999

Age	Male	Female	Total
0-4	37,759	37,011	74,770
5-9	35,118	34,585	69,703
10-14	37,609	36,281	73,890
15-19	28,985	26,973	55,958
20-24	19,601	22,229	41,830
25-29	16,037	19,365	35,402
30-34	13,695	15,620	29,315
35-39	11,071	12,486	23,557
40-44	6,801	7,304	14,105
45-49	5,470	6,347	11,817
50-54	4,942	5,966	10,908
55-59	3,720	5,286	9,006
60-64	3,457	3,675	7,132
65-69	2,541	2,684	5,225
70-74	2,047	2,144	4,191
75-79	1,497	1,544	3,041
80+	1,885	2,399	4,284
Not Sure	2,817	2,951	5,768
Total	235,052	244,850	479,902

Source : CBS 1999