

An Investigation of the Effects of Cultural Practices on Marriage in Africa Inland Church: Nakuru East Region

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of cultural practices on marriage within the Africa Inland Church (AIC) in the Nakuru East Region. The research seeks to understand the tensions among church members regarding the integration of traditional cultural practices into Christian marriage ceremonies. Specifically, the study examines members' perceptions of these practices, their alignment with the church's constitution and policies, and the roles played by church leaders and youth in their implementation. The study adopts an ethnographic research design to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of church members. Data were collected through open-ended interviews and focus group discussions with church elders, youth, and married couples in the AIC Nakuru East Region. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and interpretations related to cultural practices in marriage within the church context. The findings reveal that cultural practices continue to influence marriage processes within the church, often creating tension between traditional customs and church doctrines. While some members view these practices as essential for preserving cultural identity and community cohesion, others perceive them as conflicting with biblical teachings and church regulations. The study also found inconsistencies in the interpretation and application of church policies regarding cultural practices in marriage. The study highlights the need for clearer guidelines and enhanced dialogue within the church regarding the place of cultural practices in Christian marriage. Strengthening theological guidance and promoting contextualized teaching may help harmonize cultural traditions with church doctrines, thereby reducing conflicts among members.

Keywords: *Cultural practices, Christian marriage, Africa Inland Church, ethnography, church policy, Nakuru East Region.*

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1. Introduction

The Africa Inland Church (AIC), being one of the oldest Protestant churches in Kenya, continues to influence the spiritual and social life of its church members. Nevertheless, despite a well-developed constitution and clear doctrinal standpoints, conflicts persist between Christian doctrines and entrenched African cultural traditions, especially in marriage and

funeral practices. Such practices can be traced back to ancient communal principles, ancestral devotion, and social pressures that dominate in the life of the church. Their ongoing interrelationship has created theological, pastoral, and social problems which influence spiritual development, unity, and expansion of the church. This research aims to analyze how such cultural practices manifest in AIC congregations in the Nakuru East Region, the forces that have perpetuated them, and the roles of various actors within the church in negotiating this tension.

Africa Inland Church (AIC): A Short History and Formation Profile

The AIC was actually founded in 1943, but its origins go back even further. The initial missionaries faced very stiff opposition and gained recognition only slowly (Mumo, 1997). The church is governed by a special hybrid, a composite of episcopal and Presbyterian politics (AIC Constitution, 1981). At the regional level, bishops are responsible for ensuring that policy is followed, and day-to-day affairs are handled by local church councils, which consist of elders. This leads to an extremely strong reliance on local leadership in implementing national policy, which is a source of the very practice difference the current study seeks to explain.

Background

Africa Inland Church (AIC) was a historic organization in African Christianity, officially formed in 1972 after a long, multiphased interaction between local converts and foreign missionaries of the Africa Inland Mission (AIM). Its formation was not only an administrative reorganization but a radical theological and sociological food court, where two differing ecclesiastical traditions were intentionally converged into a standard church structure that was a synthesis of Presbyterian and congregational forms of governance (Zabulon, 2019). This synthesis developed in an environment of tension: missionaries still held a good deal of administrative power, but the collaborative effort to create a single church reflected existing discord and a bargained-for, though not perfect, solution.

The essence of this dilemma lies in the principles of the African worldview, which remain quite strong. According to Olupona (1990), the African cosmological concept is basically holistic, where the empirical life and super-empirical (life after death) cannot exist independently and are mutually dependent (pp. 119-121). This perception of the world supports the rites, worshipping ancestors not only the dead but also the living-dead who are actively involved in the affairs of their descendants. Such rituals as libation, animal sacrifice, and certain burial ceremonies are not customary practices but rather necessary processes for preserving the balance between the visible and the invisible worlds, which are necessary to guarantee fertility, health, and prosperity and to appease spirits that would otherwise bring ill fortune.

As a result, members of these mainline churches, such as the AIC, face a constant spiritual dilemma. They can demonstrate their Africanness in the private sphere of traditional rituals, and in the outside world, missionaries can influence people to adhere to their doctrines (Ntombaba, 2023, pp. 104-119). This schizophrenic identity, as some other scholars call it, forms a major cause of psychological and spiritual stress. The possibility of the disfavour of ancestors, the conviction in witchcraft, and a developed sense of necessity to seek approval of the community through the culturally prescriptive means still have their strong pull.

Syncretism Within Lifecycle Rituals: Marriages

Such tension is most evident and acute in the life-cycle rituals, especially marriages, which are major points of social and spiritual transition. Even in married affairs, church-approved ceremonies, such as counseling, the exchanging of vows and rings during a service of worship, and a brotherly celebration, are at times overshadowed by underground cultural ceremonies. This can be dowry bargaining by invoking ancestors, the hand-running ceremony, when chants and offerings are made to appease the spirits (Chitando, 2020), or confidential talks with diviners to gain compatibility and ancestral blessings. Even church leaders might experience their loyalty to be divided, as Ngeweni (2020) notes, as they have to appeal to extended families whose cultural requirements contradict their vows in the church.

The Church

The Africa Inland Church (AIC) developed a serious conflict between the formal ecclesiastical organization and actual religious life. As a contemporary Christian organization, the AIC has developed a constitution and a detailed policy structure to govern funeral practices in accordance with biblical interpretation. This is an indication of the church's wish for coherence in its doctrine, order in its institutions, and faithfulness to theology. The presence of explicit policies, therefore, implies the church's attempt to steer members towards practices based on its interpretation of Scripture and what it means to be a Christian.

Even with these institutional arrangements, indigenous funeral practices have remained as a significant variance between doctrine and practice in AIC institutions. This deviation is not only accidental but also shows that the members of the church still seek meaning in some pre-Christian cultural practices. African funeral practices are highly communal and spiritual, in that they deal not just with the factual aspect of death, but also with continuity of emotions, stability of the social organization, and perceived connection between the living and the dead. The persistence of such practices argues in favor of the idea that the symbolic and experiential roles historically played by the indigenous rituals have not been completely taken over by institutional Christianity.

Notably, the paragraph restates this tension not as one of disobedience or of not comprehending theology, but as an advanced form of communication. By maintaining indigenous practices, believers can manifest the needs that have not been effectively taught in the church. These incorporate psychosocial issues like grief issues, community assurance, and the fear of spiritual disturbance following death. On a more profound level, the phenomenon reveals the unresolved theological issues concerning the connection among God, Christ, ancestors, and the world of the spirits, issues that Western missionary theology tends to downplay or deny altogether.

A further suggestion made in the paragraph is that the African Christians are in a continual process of seeking a faith that is genuinely relevant to their lived experiences. They are negotiating the meaning of Christianity within their cultural worldview rather than rejecting it. This conflict is indicative of the need to have an integrated theology- that is, based on biblical faith but at the same time does not ignore African notions of personhood, community, and spirituality. Consequently, Christian faith and indigenous practice are not a source of theological confusion, but, on a deeper level, an initiative to create a holistic and contextualized African Christian identity.

2. Literature Review

The rationale for writing this chapter is to critically assess and synthesize academic literature on the prevalence of indigenous cultural practices among mission-founded evangelical churches in Kenya, specifically within the Africa Inland Church (AIC) Nakuru East Region. Although there has been an exponential growth in African Christianity over the last century, the persistence of indigenous ritual continuity and evangelical commitments to doctrines remains a major theological and sociological issue. The chapter takes a critically appraising position and transcends beyond summarizing to questioning the assumptions, methodologies, and conclusions of the existing literature. Instead of taking African Christianity as a homogeneous phenomenon, it identifies denominational diversity, generational identity, and contextual uniqueness that influence the negotiation of cultural practices in congregational life.

The review is thus carried out in eight stages of movement. First, it examines how culture is conceptualized in African societies, comparing anthropological paradigms and their implications for religious change. Second, it challenges the connection between culture and the process of Christian identity formation and the debates of discontinuity, continuity, and reconstruction. Third, it critically examines the controversial category of syncretism with a distinction between the pejorative missionary context and the modern descriptive context. Fourth, it examines the ancestors' cosmology and how it has persisted in the Christian world, considering both categorical rejection of theology and reinterpretation. Fifth, it explores the communal covenant of marriage, which studies the conflicts between Christian ecclesial rites and native ceremonial demands. Sixth, it examines funerals as the location of enhanced cosmological bargaining. Seventh, it is a critical engagement with current African theological scholarship that reveals divergent paths and unresolved conflicts. Eighth, it brings together the identified research gaps and explains why localized empirical research in AIC Nakuru East remains needed.

In the chapter, the focus is not only on reviewing past research but also on assessing the researchers' assumptions, identifying contradictions between academic paths, and demonstrating the need for empirical research that reflects the subtleties of congregational life.

Theoretical Review

A theoretical framework is the interpretive framework for understanding and interpreting data. It relates the research to the available literature and presents the ideas that justify the phenomena being researched. This research was theoretically supported by Inculturation Theology, drawing mainly on the works of early African theologians Aylward Shorter, John S. Mbiti, and Kwame Bediako. This theory was a strong, place-based approach to analyzing the multifaceted interplay between African cultural traditions and Christian beliefs in the AIC, beyond the simplistic binaries of right or wrong, Christian or pagan.

The Gospel criticizes and purifies cultures, and cultures give the special flesh, language, and symbols, through which the Gospel is lived and known in a given place. This is an action of dialogue, discernment, and being transformed together over time. Shorter (1998) also notes that it is grassroots, usually unconscious process that occurs in the everyday lives of believers rather than a theological project of scholars.

Several complementary practices were also applied. In keeping with the ethnographic tradition, the study was based on a set of tools and methods, namely, participant observation, semi-

structured and informal interviews, and document analysis. This triangulation method reinforced the results, as information was cross-validated across various sources (Merriam, 2009). As an illustration, a pastor may say in an interview that the church highly disapproves of ancestral libations.

Nonetheless, this paper was biased towards a critical ethnography. Whereas traditional ethnography pursues the idea of descriptive fidelity, critical ethnography includes an overt aspect of critique and an interest in power, inequality, and social justice (Atkinson, 2001; Madison, 2012). It not only answers the question What is happening here? But also, who gains by such practices? And how does power operate or dispute? This important dimension was operationalized in several ways within the AIC. It triggered the exploration of pastoral and elder authority in determining what is acceptable and what is not. Who is capable of identifying a practice as either syncretistic or contextualized?

The design also examined the reproduction of gender dynamics in the ritual practices. It monitored and asked questions about the various expectations of men and women regarding mourning, bride price, and post-funeral rites. It touched on the economic and class aspects of ritual, asking how rites such as extravagant funeral feasts or excessive bride price could become an economic burden for poor families, and created a coercive social duty that is contrary to the Christian doctrine of stewardship and justice. Critical ethnography does not assume the social order of the church but explores how it is produced, maintained, and disputed in practices such as marriage.

Therefore, it was not a passive observation of what happens, but an intense, critical task that examines the social and power structures that determine the continuity and change of cultural practices in this Christian community. It enabled the study not only to document the harmony but also to document the tensions, silences, and contradictions, which are the main focus of the inculturation process. It conformed to the theoretical scenario, in that it saw inculturation as a struggle, rather than a facilitated, mutually comfortable process (had it been perceived as a mere descriptive ethnography), but as a place in which theological ideals, cultural imperatives, and social power were negotiated. This critical prism was needed to achieve the study's goal of examining the perceptions and roles of various actors (elders, youth, pastors) and to develop recommendations responsive to questions of power and justice in the church.

Concept of Culture in African Societies

The cultural pattern referred to comprises a series of at least facets or universal aspects in which each “volk” displays its own particular variations, however small they may be. These fifteen facets are: economic organization, technical creations, propagation system, social organization, system of government, military system, legal system, judicial system, religion, knowledge system, artistic creations, education system, language, value system, games and recreation.

This raises a very important analytical question: why are some ritual practices in evangelical settings exceptionally resilient, yet culture is seen as dynamic? A potential explanation is in the difference between the surface behavioral adaptation and deep cosmological continuity. Even as external appearances might modernize, with cash replacing livestock in bride-wealth payments and church buildings used in wedding rites, existential fears of the legitimacy of marriage, fertility, death, and spiritual safety are here to stay. Ritual practices that seek to respond to such anxieties thus continue to possess symbolic potential despite changes in their external manifestations. Douglas (1966) contends that rituals concerning bodily limits and

passages have special emotional significance because they touch on the central human issues of order, danger, and purity. This ritual power is particularly awakened in marriage and death as changes of social and existential status. Another explanatory theory is the intellectualist theory of African traditional religion (Horton, 1971). Horton claims that traditional African cosmologies are explanatory and predictive systems that address misfortune, fertility, and survival.

In evangelical theology, conversion is not just cognitive assent but a spiritual renewal, a process by the Holy Spirit through the gospel of conversion of the heart. Such a change in its essence places the loyalties, affections, and ultimate commitments in a different place. It is, in this view, the continuity of ancestral practice that indicates the incompleteness of discipleship, rather than cosmological continuity. This theological objection cannot be dismissed without empirical inquiry; it casts doubt on the effectiveness of catechesis, the thoroughness of congregational instruction, and the coverage of evangelical formation, not just on obedience to rules.

The dilemma of cultural embeddedness and spiritual agency is a fundamental cornerstone of the study. It requires an empirical method that can identify the continuity of rituals as arising from theological belief, social coercion, anxiety, or institutional uncertainty. These are not mutually exclusive alternatives; they can exist simultaneously in an individual's experience, only in different manifestations. To comprehend how they are arranged in AIC Nakuru East, one needs to have the type of thick description that ethnographic approaches can provide.

Culture and Christian Identity Formation

The next question the literature raises, drawing on an anthropological perspective, is how Christian identity is negotiated within African cultural systems. Missionary theology often focused on rupture early on conversion as the abandonment of previous ways. According to this model of discontinuity, genuine Christian identity necessitated the categorical distinction between indigenous cosmology and authentic Christian identity. The theological history of the discontinuity model can be found in some interpretations of Old Testament taboos on Canaanite religious customs and Pauline warnings to come out of among them and be separate (2 Cor. 6:17). The missionary work in this system interpreted the practices of the indigenous African people in terms of Old Testament idolatry, asking them to fully abandon them as the condition of baptism and entry into the church.

According to Sanneh (1989), this strategy was not only a theological belief, but also cultural encapsulation; missionaries tended to fail to draw the line between the biblical norms and their Western cultural assumptions, which they then criticized practices that they did not comprehend, and practices that were ineffective and incapable of holding any faith that was Christian. An example of the application of the discontinuity model and its implications is the controversy over Kikuyu female circumcision in 1929-1931. On the one hand, when missionaries of the Church of Scotland and AIM imposed demands that African converts give up the practice, they faced strong opposition, resulting in the mass withdrawal of churches and the establishment of independent schools and churches. This historical episode shows that prohibitive methods, regardless of their theological basis, could have the same effect as the opposite of the desired effect, eradication practices, but alienation of mission churches and creation of syncretic substitutes. AIC, a direct by-product of AIM's missionary work, left a complicated legacy of prohibition, resistance, and compromise.

According to Bediako, contemporary African theologians practice a similar kind of discernment, discovering areas of continuity and discontinuity of African categories and Christian faith. Bediako's translatability thesis is endowed with considerable historical and theological merit. Throughout its history, Christianity has already embraced linguistic and philosophical classifications of the host cultures: Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Germanic, and Slavic. Even the New Testament is a translation of Aramaic oral tradition into literary forms of Greek culture influenced by Hellenist rhetoric and philosophy. Had Christianity been inseparably connected to a single cultural manifestation, it would not have become the world religion it is today.

Mugambi is a proponent of reconstruction theology, which emphasizes culture in postcolonial Africa. His model is right in criticizing missionary paternalism and in reinstating the agency of African theology. According to Mugambi (1995), African theology needs to be beyond the missionary condemnation response to building theological structures that respond positively to African realities, such as poverty, oppression, ethnic strife, and cultural dislocation. Reconstruction theology uses the Old Testament restoration texts as tools of envisioning postcolonial renewal. However, reconstruction theology sometimes places greater emphasis on sociocultural rehabilitation than on clarifying doctrine. This focus may be viewed as not attentive enough to scriptural exclusivity and the uniqueness of Christian faith, which are the concerns of conservative evangelical traditions like AIC. Life-cycle rituals are particularly salient occasions for identity negotiation.

Marriage creates lineage continuity; funerals guarantee communal memory. Disobedience to adhere to the socially accepted rites can lead to the individual being socially excluded. As such, African Christians frequently have both ecclesial and communal obligations to juggle. Such navigation does not necessarily occur in conflict. Most believers might not see any contradiction in engaging in bride-wealth negotiation, in which they call upon the blessing of their ancestors, and in church weddings, in which they call upon the blessing of God. On their part, these are complementary, not competing rituals, all of which cover different aspects of the marriage: that of familial legitimacy and ecclesial recognition.

The problem with theological analysis is to determine whether such complementarity is actually integration or an unresolved dual allegation. The idea of split-level Christianity, as it has been popularized among the missiologists, assumes that African Christians are characterized by two religious systems that cannot be integrated; however, they are active in their lives: they have some intellectual affirmation of the Christian tradition alongside the practical use of traditional spiritual tools to solve the problems of daily life. This idea, though descriptively helpful, has pejorative overtones that can conceal the theological creativity of African Christian synthesis. Schreiter (1985) provides a more subtle model by critically discerning between syncretism and inculturation as uncontrolled blending and critical discerning, respectively.

Inculturation, in this view, is a conscious theological engagement with the interplay between the gospel and culture, leading to the manifestation of Christian faith that is both Christian and local. Other researchers believe that the dual-identity thesis overconflicts. They argue that many believers do not see any contradiction between Christian faith and cultural rituals. This opposing argument highlights the importance of empirical study over hypothetical assumptions. The current research thus examines how the members of AIC themselves

understand this intersection, with attention to the hermeneutical approaches they adopt, the classifications they use, and the parameters they apply in identifying which practices they believe are compatible with the Christian faith and which are inconsistent with it.

Stewart and Shaw (1994) suggest that the notion of syncretism has been demonized in missiological discussions as a boundary-marking tool that defines authentic Christianity against the purported contamination of alternatives. Therefore, all religious traditions are syncretic, meaning they evolve through interaction with their own cultures.

The psychological accounts of syncretic adaptation shed light on the idea of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). When people hold beliefs or practices that are not in line with what they claim to believe, they experience psychological uneasiness that drives them to resolve the situation. The solution can be to abandon inconsistent practice, redefine meaning, or compartmentalize cognitive domains so that inconsistency does not manifest consciously.

All of these strategies may be used by African Christians who engage in the rituals of their ancestors, even though they are professing to be Christians. Others can redefine family rites as cultural rather than religious without accepting that their involvement would constitute a theological impairment. Some can be easily compartmentalized, attending church services for spiritual matters and ancestral rituals for practical matters. There will still be those who will find themselves in continuous pain that cannot be eased using either approach. It is necessary to conduct empirical research to know what strategies prevail in AIC Nakuru East. According to Gilbert (2002), syncretism can be a continuity-seeking adaptation rather than a revolt. In this sense, the blending of rituals is an indication of the attempts to combine new belief systems with inherited cosmologies. Such continuity-seeking drive is not exclusive to African Christianity. The continuity-seeking adaptation illustrated by historical Christianity offers many instances: the dates of pagan festivals became the dates of the Christian Christmas and Easter, and sacred pagan sites were converted into Christian churches.

Byang Kato cautioned that we should not blindly contextualize since this can lead to the loss of Christological exclusivity. In this view, the biblical revelation is directly opposed to the idea of ancestral mediation. To justify his argument, Kato (1975) proposed that African theology should be evaluated according to the fidelity to scriptural revelation rather than its appeal to the local categories. Although he admitted that everything in theology is culturally contextualized, Kato affirmed that Scripture offers normative criteria for evaluating cultural manifestations of faith. Ancestral veneration in that view cannot find a place in Christian theology since it ascribes to created things the functions of Christ alone, to mediate, intercession, and spiritual protection.

Kato and his exclusivist stance still influence conservative evangelism in Africa, even in the official doctrinal opinion of AIC. Modern evangelical theologians have developed Kato's stance without forgoing the main commitments of his position. Turaki (1999) recommends recognizing the continuity and discontinuity between the biblical faith and African tradition. Most areas of continuity would be those where traditional values align with biblical ethics, such as respect for the elderly, communal solidarity, and hospitality. The discontinuity lies in the fact that traditional cosmology attributes functions to spiritual beings, whereas only God is supposed to execute them.

The Turaki model allows radical appropriation of cultural values while still upholding Christological exclusivity. Nonetheless, to use this framework, we need exactly that type of

contextual judgment which institutional documents so frequently lack. The idea of syncretism is conceptually ambiguous, making it hard to analyze. When interpreted broadly, almost the entire contextualization becomes syncretic. Being narrow might obscure subtle dual allegiances. The difference between syncretism and inculturation, as given by Schreier (1985), provides analytical power. Syncretism, according to Schreier, refers to careless mixing caused by poor theological inquiry- the unthinking adoption of incompatible things.

According to anthropologists, ancient rituals have a solution to existential fears, such as fertility issues, disease etiology, and dying. The historic Azande witchcraft study by Evans-Pritchard (1937) showed that African cosmologies functioned as closed systems of explanation, attributing misfortune to spiritual agency rather than chance. Ancestral discontent describes the failure of crops, infertility, illness, and death to provide structure for the interpretation and action concerning suffering.

Missionary taboos did not tend to generate similar existential structures, and underground continuity ensued. The intellectualist theory developed by Horton (1971) sheds light on the reason why. The conventional cosmology interprets unfortunate events as those caused by association with spiritual beings whose goodwill has to be preserved by performing rituals. In its Western Protestant version, Missionary Christianity tended to stress personal sin and the judgment of God as the reasons for suffering, but offered less developed models of dealing with the daily misfortunes of crop failure, sickness, and infertility. Although prayer is also a core Christian tradition, it might not seem as effective as classical rituals, whose effectiveness has been proven over centuries of experience. Such a lack of experience creates space for traditional structures to persist within Christian devotion.

The study by Turner (1967) in the Ndembu ritual also sheds more light on the existential aspect of an ancestral practice. Rituals dealing with ancestors are not only cognitively correct but also affectively oriented; they draw on emotional resources, reestablish broken relationships, and reembrace people into the community. The magic of the ritual does not only lie in its explanatory role but also in its ability to create a healing, reconciling, and renewing experience. Theologically sound Christian liturgies might not, however, recreate this experiential aspect and leave believers with unmet affective needs, which are met by traditional rituals.

But evangelical theology holds that Christ is the sole mediator. The scriptural texts like 1 Tim. 2:5 and Heb. 9:27 are deciphered to be contrary to ancestral intercession. Hebrews elaborates a long line of argument that the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ renders the Levitical priesthood and its constant sacrifices superfluous. The implication of this argument for ancestral mediation is that, in the presence of Christ as the sole mediator between God and humanity, no other mediators, such as angels, saints, or ancestors, may operate rightfully. Col. 2:15 describes Christ's victory over "principalities and powers," and this text is sometimes read as voiding the spiritual entities that most traditional cosmologies would include. In this sense, further application of the ancestral mediation can be seen as not harmless cultural preservation but theological backwardness, the reversion to weak and useless elemental spirits (Gal. 4:9).

Kaunda (2015) implies that the Holy Spirit is the presence of Christ in the church, one that can be experienced, fulfilling the roles played by ancestors: protection, direction, intercession, and community cohesion. This proposal has pastoral sensitivity, with a framework that helps believers realize Christian faith, a framework that responds to the same existential issues that the ancient religion addressed. Those who have reservations against this method, however, also

ask whether it is subject to projecting onto the Holy Spirit categories of the ancestors that distort biblical pneumatology.

The fact that such a transformation has occurred in AIC Nakuru East cannot be presumed; it needs to be researched on the ground, by paying attention to how believers interpret their experience, make choices, and bargain between conflicting frameworks. The current paper does not assume ignorance regarding doctrine. Rather, it raises the question of whether institutional teaching is responsive to existential fears, which have traditionally been addressed by the ancestral cosmology. This question acknowledges that the pastoral effectiveness of the Christian teaching is not just the ability to be correct in doctrine but the ability to address the profound questions that the human experience has created, the questions about suffering, death, and meaning that were answered by traditional cosmologies in existential immediacy.

Marriage as Communal Covenant

African marriage is not just a contractual one, but communal. The inter-lineage alliance is represented by bride-wealth negotiations. Dedication to ritual-based blessing brings in continuity with the ancestors. The structural-functional analysis of the African kinship systems presented by Radcliffe-Brown (1950) helps to shed light on the communal aspects of marriage. This conception of marriage is that marriage is not a union mostly between individuals; it is a union between lineages, which creates rights and encompassing duties that go beyond the marital couple to their extended families and descendants. Bride-wealth payments, of livestock, cash, goods, represent and complete this alliance, and compensate the lineage of the bride for losing its productive and reproductive power, and in creating succession rights of the lineage of the groom. These economic aspects cannot be distinguished from social and spiritual aspects; they are combined sides of a complete social phenomenon.

The liturgies of the Christian marriages lay stress on the covenant in the presence of God. However, academics believe they do not always go far enough in addressing communal legitimacy. In most African societies, church weddings are surrounded by long traditional negotiations and ceremonies that determine the legitimacy of marriages within extended family circles. Couples that exert direct invitation to church weddings without undergoing the traditional rites might have their marriages invalid in the eyes of their families, the children they bear are recognized as illegitimate, and their relationships with their in-laws are permanently damaged. Such social reality implies that the traditional rites are not optional cultural forms but requirements for becoming acknowledged by the community. Even so solemn and beautiful, church weddings cannot replace the communal legitimation that the traditional rites offer.

According to Shorter (1998), Christian marriage theology should address this aspect of community seriously because it is never an individual decision to marry in Africa, but a community affair. His theory is based on pastoral methods that accompany the couple throughout the course of marriage, from the first negotiating stage to the traditional ceremonies in church weddings, giving theological meaning to the link between the traditions and the Christian meaning. This modality, nevertheless, raises the question of what conventional practices can be explained in a Christian way and what should be discarded. Christian ethics do not always fit into the traditional marriage practices; some bring about rituals that suggest the use of the ancestors to mediate, others that enforce patriarchal systems contrary to mutual

submission as taught in Ephesians 5. In cases where ecclesial practices do not meet the long-term expectations of the extended family, additional ceremonies may arise.

Dubeen (2019) lists the occurrence of the so-called double marriage in other African contexts: couples go through the traditional ceremony and the church service, with the former being more socially binding and the latter more spiritually meaningful. This is not a sign of confusion, but rather a pragmatic balancing of conflicting demands. The traditional rites meet the family's expectations, whilst the church weddings meet the couple's ecclesial expectations. It is a matter of how the participants themselves understand the connection between the two ceremonies, which makes or breaks this negotiation and determines whether it becomes true integration or dual allegiance. Such supplementation, evangelical critics argue, undermines theology. However, the burden of pastoral practice is that the rejection of participation can lead to family division. Helping such couples could be in line with the theology and offend families and cause social problems in the marriage.

The need to accommodate the traditional expectations can ensure that the family relationships are maintained at the expense of theological consistency. Lack of institutional direction on how to address such dilemmas leaves pastors to create space and discretion in their practice without sufficient resources, creating inconsistency in practice that further clouds the church's position. According to Baloyi (2022), the concept of bride-wealth should not be perceived as the wife's purchase; rather, it represents the symbolic acknowledgment of the bride's worth and the promise of good husbandry that the groom makes. The issue in this sense, however, is not bride-wealth, but its commercialization. Such a distinction between bride-wealth as cultural value and bride-wealth as economic exploitation provides the analytical advantage of identifying which elements of the traditional marriage practice are affirmed and which ones require criticism.

This conflict between communal expectations and fidelity to a particular doctrine becomes one of the key empirical questions of this study. What are the AIC members in Nakuru East doing to survive the conflicting demands? Is the traditional marriage practice compatible with the Christian faith, and do they understand it in terms of theological constructs? Do they feel them as sacrifices that need to be made and grudgingly embraced to keep the family relationships alive? Are there any generational differences in the perception and or negotiation of these practices? The questions cannot be addressed through theoretical discussion, but they require research into lived experience in congregational settings.

These theological commitments influenced the AIM's view of African culture. The African traditional religion was not an object to be converted by the missionaries through the gospel, but an opponent that needed to be overpowered by the missionaries as a system of idolatry that converts should, in every aspect, be separated from. Such a point of view, though honestly accepted, was based on inadequate knowledge of African integration of cosmology and the social implications of insisting on an absolute distance between community rituals.

The reading of Scripture in indigenous languages by African Christians could only be interpreted in local categories, giving an understanding that the missionaries would not have hoped to obtain. In Sanneh's analysis, this translation dynamic ultimately undermined missionary control and enabled the emergence of authentically African Christianity. However, the dynamics of translation were not even present in various situations of the mission. Where missionaries had a stronger hold over theological education and the management of the church,

as in the AIM societies, native interpretation would have been tighter, resulting not in creative synthesis but in unresolved dual loyalty.

Historical analysis indicates that the church's disciplinary measures were sometimes punitive, pushing such practices underground rather than eradicating them. By excommunicating the church. They were practiced by families privately without being exposed to the scrutiny of missionaries, and families remained members of the church. This tendency toward secret observance established the circumstances of incomparable dual loyalty: people who outwardly adhered to the church's requirements and inwardly observed the traditional obligations. This history still lingers in the modern-day evangelical churches, where the practices that are not openly discussed are secretly carried on.

Some of the translation models can allow considerable cultural modification, provided that fundamental doctrines are not changed. Adaptation models can also allow the form to change, but require the continuity of meaning. Conceptualization models can help reframe the meaning of doctrines in emergent situations.

Too much accommodation runs the danger of theological dilution; too much separation, alienation. This conflict can never be solved on the theoretical level; it has to be compromised in the practical arena in every setting. The negotiating requirements, which are fidelity to Scripture, responsiveness to culture, pastoral effectiveness, and congregational unity, can drag in different directions, and need nurture that cannot be made into rules. This paper will examine the bargaining taking place in AIC Nakuru East and consider the standards these parties use and the stresses they face.

3. Methodology

The methodological framework that dictated the study's implementation process for the persistence of cultural practices in marriage and funeral rituals within the Africa Inland Church (AIC), Nakuru East Region, has been elaborately and extensively expounded. Qualitative research requires a stringent, clear methodology that can ensure the credibility, ethical rigor, and academic rigor of the results.

A qualitative research method was deliberately chosen as the most suitable way for this inquiry. Qualitative research essentially involves investigating and explaining phenomena as observed through the eyes of people who experience them. It seeks to answer questions about the why and how of human behavior, which concerns meanings, processes, and contexts (Creswell, 2014). This is in contrast to quantitative research, which focuses on what, where, and when, and, in many cases, uses statistical analysis to test hypotheses set beforehand.

The need to use a qualitative approach in this study was complex and strong. To begin with, the character of the research problem required a deep dive into conviction, internalization, figurative interpretation, and interpersonal processes. Questions like How do members mediate the tension between cultural demands and church teaching? Or what theological meanings are attached to ongoing cultural rites? These are, in nature, qualitative questions.

The ethnographic design was chosen for several reasons. The requirement for immersion and extended involvement demanded prolonged fieldwork in the AIC congregations of the Nakuru East Region. It was not a succession of isolated interviews but a constant attendance at church services, committee meetings, social life, and last but not least, the planning and carrying out of marriages. This ten-month immersion was crucial to the development of trust (rapport) and

to observing behaviors in their natural settings, and to experiencing the unspoken rules and mutual understandings that regulate the life of a community. It is this continued presence that helps the researcher transition from the status of an outsider to that of a participant, allowing him or her to gain access to more genuine behaviors and discussions (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). It allowed the researcher to be there for both the Sunday service and the wedding, and for the nerve-inducing dowry negotiations at the bride's house the week prior, when the cultural pressures were most evident.

4. Results

This research aimed to investigate the effects of cultural practices on marriage in the African inland church, Nakuru region, to understand what the African inland church policy says about cultural practices in the church, awareness of the cultural practices in marriage by the members and clergy, and hence what recommendations can be made. The findings are presented in accordance with the study questions.

What are the contributing factors of cultural practices in marriages within the Africa Inland Church, Nakuru East?

The findings reveal that social belonging remains a dominant factor influencing the persistence of cultural practices in marriages within the Africa Inland Church (AIC), Nakuru East Region. Marriage in African contexts is not merely a union between two individuals but a communal affair involving extended families and clans. As such, individuals often feel compelled to conform to cultural expectations to maintain harmony and acceptance within their social networks. This sense of belonging exerts pressure on couples to uphold traditions such as bride price negotiations, traditional ceremonies, and family rituals, even when these may conflict with Christian teachings.

Closely related to social belonging is the fear of family conflict, which emerged as another significant contributing factor. Many respondents indicated that failure to observe cultural practices could result in strained relationships, rejection, or even conflict between families. In some cases, couples feared being ostracized or denied familial support if they disregarded traditions. This fear reinforces compliance with cultural expectations, as individuals prioritize social cohesion over personal or doctrinal convictions. Consequently, cultural practices continue to thrive, not necessarily because individuals fully endorse them, but because they seek to avoid relational disruptions.

Additionally, the desire to preserve cultural heritage is crucial to sustaining these practices. Cultural rituals are often viewed as markers of identity and continuity, linking individuals to their ancestry and community history. Participants expressed concern that abandoning such practices would lead to cultural erosion and loss of identity. This perspective aligns with African communitarian philosophy, which emphasizes collective identity over individual autonomy. As a result, cultural practices are maintained not only as social obligations but also as expressions of cultural pride and continuity.

These findings highlight a broader limitation of individualistic approaches to Christian discipleship. The study suggests that faith decisions in African contexts are rarely made in isolation but are deeply embedded within relational and communal structures. Therefore, effective discipleship within the AIC must move beyond focusing solely on personal transformation to addressing the communal dimensions of belief and practice. By recognizing

the interconnected nature of decision-making, the church can better engage with cultural realities and guide believers in navigating the tension between faith and tradition.

What is the church's understanding of cultural practices in marriages within the Africa Inland Church, Nakuru East?

The study found that there is no unified theological understanding of cultural practices in marriage among clergy, elders, and congregants within the AIC Nakuru East Region. This lack of consensus creates confusion regarding what is acceptable within Christian marriage and what should be discouraged. While some church leaders view certain cultural practices as compatible with Christianity, others perceive them as contradictory to biblical teachings. This divergence of views reflects an ongoing struggle within the church to define its position on cultural integration.

The absence of a shared interpretation points to an incomplete process of inculturation, where Christianity has not been fully contextualized within African cultural settings. Instead of critically engaging with culture, the church appears to oscillate between acceptance and rejection, without providing clear theological guidance. As a result, members often develop their own interpretations, leading to inconsistencies in practice across congregations. This situation fosters an environment where cultural and Christian elements coexist without clear boundaries, resulting in syncretism.

Furthermore, the study indicates that many congregants interpret the church's silence on certain practices as implicit approval. In the absence of explicit teaching or guidance, cultural rituals such as traditional marriage rites continue to be practiced alongside Christian ceremonies. This ambiguity undermines the church's authority and contributes to confusion among believers, who struggle to reconcile their faith with cultural expectations. The blending of practices often dilutes doctrinal clarity and weakens the distinctiveness of Christian teaching on marriage.

The findings also reveal a significant gap in catechesis and theological communication within the church. Differences in understanding among pastors, elders, and congregants suggest that teachings are not being effectively transmitted across different levels of church leadership. This communication breakdown may stem from inadequate seminary training, limited engagement with cultural issues among pastors, or inconsistent teaching at the congregational level. Addressing this gap requires a coordinated effort to strengthen theological education, improve communication, and develop a shared framework for interpreting cultural practices in light of Christian doctrine.

What is the position of the Africa Inland Church's constitution and policy on cultural practices in marriages within the Africa Inland Church, Nakuru East?

The findings indicate a significant institutional gap in the Africa Inland Church's constitution and policy regarding cultural practices in marriage. The absence of clear guidelines leaves church leaders uncertain about how to address or regulate cultural practices within their congregations. Without formal policy direction, pastors and elders often rely on personal judgment, leading to inconsistencies in decision-making and practice across churches.

This lack of policy clarity reflects a deeper theological challenge rather than merely an administrative oversight. The church appears to struggle with articulating a coherent theological framework for engaging with culture. In the absence of such a framework, leaders may either default to inherited missionary teachings that may not fully resonate with local contexts or adopt an uncritical acceptance of cultural practices. Both approaches are

inadequate, as they fail to provide a balanced and contextually relevant response to the interaction between faith and culture.

Moreover, the absence of institutional guidance limits the church's ability to exercise authority and provide pastoral care in matters related to marriage. Leaders may hesitate to intervene in culturally sensitive issues due to fear of backlash or lack of clear directives. This situation creates a leadership vacuum, where cultural practices continue unchecked, even when they may conflict with Christian teachings. Consequently, the church's role as a moral and spiritual guide is weakened, and its influence on marital practices is diminished.

To address this gap, the study underscores the need for theological self-determination within African Christianity. The church must develop contextually grounded policies rooted in Scripture, informed by local cultural realities. This process involves critical engagement with both gospel and culture, allowing the church to affirm what is consistent with Christian values and challenge what is not. By doing so, the AIC can establish a clear and authoritative position on cultural practices in marriage, enhancing both doctrinal clarity and pastoral effectiveness.

What is the role of youths, the elderly, and the church leaders in the perpetuation of cultural practices in marriages within the Africa Inland Church, Nakuru East?

The study found that elders and church leaders play a significant role in perpetuating cultural practices, often acting as custodians and interpreters of tradition rather than as theological guides. Their influence within the community gives them authority to shape marital practices, and in many cases, they prioritize cultural continuity over doctrinal considerations. This tendency reflects the deep respect accorded to elders in African societies, where their guidance is rarely questioned. As a result, cultural practices are reinforced and transmitted across generations.

At the same time, the findings reveal that youth and women are disproportionately affected by the persistence of these practices. Young people often experience tension between modern Christian teachings and traditional expectations, leading to confusion and internal conflict. Women, in particular, may face marginalization within certain cultural rituals, limiting their participation and agency in marital decisions. These dynamics highlight issues of power and inequality within both the cultural and ecclesial contexts.

The study also points to the limited involvement of youth and women in theological discussions and decision-making processes within the church. Their voices are often underrepresented, despite being the most affected by cultural practices. This exclusion perpetuates a cycle in which decisions are made without adequately considering the experiences and perspectives of those affected. Consequently, the church risks maintaining practices that may be harmful or outdated while failing to address the evolving needs of its members.

These findings raise important concerns regarding ecclesial justice and pastoral care. The unequal burden placed on vulnerable groups underscores the need for a more inclusive approach to church leadership and theological reflection. The church must create platforms for dialogue that incorporate diverse voices, particularly those of youth and women. By doing so, it can develop more equitable and contextually relevant responses to cultural practices, ensuring that its teachings promote both spiritual growth and social justice within the community

5. Conclusion

This study examined the effects of cultural practices on marriage within the Africa Inland Church (AIC) in Nakuru East Region. The findings show that the persistence of these practices is largely influenced by institutional silence, a lack of clear policy guidance, and strong communal expectations, rather than by a deliberate rejection of Christian doctrine. Cultural practices remain significant because they provide social legitimacy, family acceptance, and communal belonging, which church structures have not fully addressed.

The study also revealed inconsistencies in theological understanding among pastors, elders, and congregants, leading to varied interpretations and practices. Youth and women were particularly affected by unresolved cultural expectations. Overall, the findings highlight the need for clearer theological guidance, contextual discipleship, and inclusive dialogue within the church. The Cultural Practices in Church Reconstruction Model (CPCRM) provides a useful framework for engaging culture critically while remaining faithful to biblical teaching.

6. Recommendations

1. **Review the AIC Constitution:** Revise church policies to provide clear biblical and theological guidance on cultural practices related to marriage.
2. **Strengthen Theological Training:** Include courses on inculturation, African traditional religion, and pastoral ethics in AIC training institutions.
3. **Develop Teaching Materials:** Prepare contextual teaching resources for premarital counseling, Bible studies, and discipleship programs.
4. **Provide Pastoral Guidelines:** Develop practical guidelines to help pastors and elders address cultural practices consistently.
5. **Encourage Dialogue:** Establish forums for intergenerational discussions on culture and Christian faith within congregations.
6. **Promote Inclusion:** Involve youth and women more actively in discussions and decision-making related to cultural practices.
7. **Contextualize Christian Marriage Practices:** Develop marriage liturgies and church practices that respect culture while remaining biblically grounded.
8. **Support Ongoing Research:** Encourage continued study and documentation of cultural practices within the church.
9. **Implement CPCRM:** Adopt the Cultural Practices in Church Reconstruction Model to guide constructive engagement with culture in the church.

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