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Condemned and Condoned: Polygynous Marriage in Christian Africa

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Abstract

Objective: This study contributes to a better understanding of the role of Christianity in the persistence of polygyny in sub-Saharan Africa.

Background: Marital systems and practices are closely connected to religious norms, but these connections are often complex and contradictory. Polygynous marriage remains widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, including its heavily Christianized parts, where public opposition to it should be strongest.

Methods: The study analyzes a rich combination of quantitative and qualitative data from a predominantly Christian district in Mozambique. The data include a household-based survey, a census of the district's religious congregations, and focus group discussions and individual interviews with leaders and rank-and-file members of various churches.

Results: The multivariate statistical tests point to instructive denominational differences in the prevalence and acceptance of polygyny, with the starkest contrast being between two types of African Initiated Churches – one that is more lenient on pre-Christian practices and the other that is vehemently opposed to them. These tests also show a contrast between church leaders and rank-and-file members, the latter being generally more accepting of polygyny, and illustrate variations in acceptability of polygyny across different church membership scenarios. The analysis of the qualitative data complements the statistical tests by highlighting ideological and social mechanisms through which polygynous marriage is both rejected and legitimized in Christian communities.

Conclusion: Both condemnation and toleration of polygyny by Christian churches reflect the complexities of the transformation of sub-Saharan marital systems and of the role that religion plays in that process.

Keywords

Family systems; Mixed-methodology; Marriage; Religion

INTRODUCTION

Polygynous marriage remains widespread in sub-Saharan Africa. Sustained by demographic factors, such as high fertility, large spousal age gap, and excess male mortality (Goldman & Pebley, 1989), as well as economic inequalities (Pollet & Nettle, 2009) and women's high productive and reproductive value (Gibson and Mace 2007; Jacoby 1995; Klomegah 1997), polygyny is common even in those sub-Saharan settings where both legal and religious norms are supposed to discourage it (Baloyi, 2014; Fenske, 2015; Kyara, 2013). Although the Bible contains various examples of polygynous marriages, Western Christian churches, with few exceptions, have long condemned polygyny as incompatible with Christian doctrine and have helped to devise and enforce the legal ban on plural marriage throughout the Western world (Witte, 2015). However, the relationship between Christianity and polygyny in the sub-Sahara has been historically more complex (Hillman, 1975). The long presence and strong influence of Christian churches in the sub-continent has not translated to any substantial retreat of polygyny. In fact, it may be argued that, as with other indigenous beliefs and practices that African Christianity has adapted to, or even de facto adopted (Anderson 2001), tolerance of polygyny may have contributed to Christianity's very rapid expansion in the sub-continent.

The Western historical experience of banning polygyny or of its persistence among relatively marginal religious groups thus offers little guidance to an understanding of the relationship between Christianity and polygyny in the sub-Sahara. Nevertheless, the Western experience is not completely irrelevant, as in broader evolutionary terms it illustrates both the transformations of key societal institutions and religion's adaptation to such transformations (Atran, 2002; Norenzayan, 2010). The adaptation story never ends: even in settings where polygyny has been long banned, Christian churches have been continuously struggling to adjust to new, yet comparable "moral" challenges, such as non-marital sex and childbearing (e.g., DeRogatis, 2014; Regnerus, 2007; Steele, 2011) or homosexuality and same-sex marriage (e.g., Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Brittain & McKinnon, 2011; Olson et al., 2006; Robinson, 2012; White, 2015; Whitehead, 2012). These adjustments typically respond to external secular pressures as well as to constraints of the religious market that churches cannot ignore. Yet, these adjustments vary greatly across denominations, usually reflecting the liberal-vs.-conservative spectrum (e.g., DeRogatis, 2014; Olson et al., 2006; Whitehead, 2012), even if the specific configuration of this spectrum as well as the nature of adjustments are in continuous flux (Brittain & McKinnon, 2011; Hoffmann & Johnson, 2005). Notably, however, as Steele (2011) showed in her analysis of religious attitudes toward single motherhood among Catholics and Evangelicals in Brazil, both groups do not simply tolerate it as an inevitable and widespread social reality but also seek to justify it morally on religious grounds – by extolling the value of motherhood and affirming their opposition to abortion.

Acceptability of problematic or controversial realities and negotiability of corresponding normative infractions may vary between religious hierarchs and congregation rank-and-file members. At the same time, both leaders and members mutually adjust their views and actions in the interest of their churches' ideological coherence and organizational health, especially in the context of such inordinate societal challenges as the HIV/AIDS epidemic in

sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Agadjanian & Menjivar, 2008; 2011; Trinitapoli, 2015; Trinitapoli & Weinreb, 2012), but also with respect to relatively “ordinary” yet highly consequential matters such as birth control (e.g., Agadjanian, 2013). However, due to data limitations, studies of doctrinally and socially contentious issues within religious organizations typically focus on either the pronouncements of religious leaders or the opinions and actions of organization members, without directly juxtaposing the two.

In this study, I contribute to a better understanding of the connection between Christianity and polygyny in a predominantly Christian area in Mozambique. I first look at the heterogeneity in the practice of and attitudes toward polygyny across Christian denominations with different levels of adaptability to indigenous social norms and cultural practices. Next, I examine the gap in (un)acceptability of polygyny between church leaders and rank-and-file members across different denominations. Then I focus on different church membership scenarios under which polygyny becomes more or less acceptable. These analyses employ a unique combination of data from a census of religious congregation leaders and from a household-based survey conducted in the study area. I then engage data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, carried out in the same area mainly as a complement to the census and the survey, to explore ideological and institutional mechanisms through which polygyny is both rejected and legitimized in Christian communities. The persistence of polygyny is then situated within the dynamic context of the religious marketplace and of fundamental transformations of the institution of marriage in the sub-Sahara.

BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUALIZATION

Considerable research has addressed the association of organized religion with polygyny in sub-Saharan Africa. Much of that research, however, has focused on Christian-Muslim differences. Thus Islam, which doctrinally permits polygyny, is usually thought to be more conducive to it than Christianity (e.g., Hayase & Liaw 1997; Klomegah 1997). Indeed, in predominantly Muslim parts of the sub-continent, polygyny is often justified by references to the Islamic canon (e.g., Agadjanian & Ezeh 2000). In Kudo’s (2014) study in Malawi, Muslim women (along with women with no formal religion) were more likely to be in polygynous unions than were Christian women. In their study of five sub-Saharan countries, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia, Timæus & Reynar (1998) found that Muslims and other non-Christian women were more likely to be married polygynously than their Christian counterparts, although in Kenya the association of religion and polygynous marriage was not statistically significant after adjusting for other characteristics. More recent multi-national analyses of Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data documented higher rates of polygyny among Muslims, compared to non-Muslims (Dalton & Leung, 2014; Westoff & Bietsch, 2015). Yet, the cross-national evidence on Christian-Muslim differences in polygyny levels is inconclusive (e.g., Arnaldo 2011; Barber 2008), and, as Madhavan (2002) argued, even in predominantly Islamic societies attitudes toward polygyny vary across cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

Likewise, although it is often assumed that Christianity is uniformly opposed to polygyny, the Christian experience of the sub-Sahara does not align with the European and North

American model. Thus, Falen (2008) argues against a generalization that Christian Africans prefer monogamy, as marriage choices are influenced by considerations of economic rationality and social prestige. Accordingly, there is some evidence of variations in polygyny levels across Christian denominations. Historically, most Catholic and Protestant missions in Africa condemned polygyny as incompatible with Christian doctrine and values and even as a source of abuse against women, and the prevalence of polygyny today is indeed somewhat lower in areas where the presence of Christian missions has been the longest (Fenske, 2015). Yet, the reality has often conflicted with this seemingly unambiguous stance, especially as Christian churches became increasingly indigenized, ideologically and organizationally, in many parts of the sub-continent (e.g., Nmah, 2012; Walker, 1983). Thus, in Cameroon, local interpretations of Christianity (often articulated by women), presented polygyny as fully congruent with Christian faith (Notermans, 2002). In fact, justification for polygyny is often sought in biblical texts, especially the Old Testament (Phiri, 2006). In South Africa, some churches, such as *Shembe* church (the Nazareth Baptist Church), an AIC founded by Isaiah Shembe in 1910 that blends Christianity with elements of Zulu traditional religion, took a lenient, if not favorable, attitude toward polygyny (Hillman, 1975). Not surprisingly, in a study conducted in a South African demographic surveillance site, polygyny levels were higher among followers of that church compared to the rest of the population (Hosegood et al., 2009). Baloyi (2013) found greater acceptance of polygyny among AICs and similar early Pentecostal churches, compared to mission-initiated ones. Klomegah (1997) reported lower levels of polygyny among Catholics and mission-based Protestants, relative to other Christians as well as non-Christians, in Ghana. In his analyses of correlates of polygyny based on the national population census and DHS data from Mozambique, Arnaldo (2011) found significantly lower levels of polygyny among Roman Catholics and no significant difference across other Christian denominations or between non-Catholic Christians and Muslims.

In sum, the generic Christian repudiation of polygyny may vary in strength and consequence across denominations: churches that are typically more accepting of pre-/non-Christian traditions, however Christianity-adapted those traditions might be, tend to be more tolerant of polygyny than churches that for ideological and/or marketing reasons have taken a more definitive negative stance on such traditions. Accordingly, my primary general hypothesis is that acceptability of plural marriage will be greater and polygyny rates will be higher in denominations that are more lenient on traditional religious and cultural practices, net of other characteristics (Hypothesis 1).

However, I also posit that knowledge, interpretation, and application of religious prescriptions and proscriptions, in general, and with regard to polygyny, in particular, may vary between church leaders and rank-a-file members. Church official pronouncements articulated by church leadership, while rarely questioned directly by congregation members, are necessarily adapted by them to the reality of their everyday lives – or may even be ignored altogether when such adaptations are too difficult or costly. Applying this perspective to polygyny, I hypothesize that rank-and-file congregation members will demonstrate greater tolerance of plural marriage, compared to church leaders, across the denominational spectrum (Hypothesis 2).

Finally, I propose that ideological and organizational flexibility with respect to polygyny should vary across different scenarios under which polygyny may become more or less tolerated (Hypothesis 3). For example, in the case of polygynous converts, the burden of the sin of plural marriage may rest with the converts' previous church, which oversaw their entry into the second union; hence, the new church, regardless of denomination, should be more accepting of such *fait accompli* than of the wish of a current married member to take a second wife. In addition, the church stance on polygyny should vary by individuals' role in the congregation: second and higher-order marriages may be deemed particularly unacceptable for church leaders, whose compliance with the church canon may be viewed as more consequential for the church's ideological and organizational well-being than that of a simple parishioner.

These general hypotheses are tested using data collected from church leaders and members in a typical Christian sub-Saharan setting. I then engage qualitative data collected in the same area to expand upon the last part of the quantitative inquiry. Specifically, I explore different scenarios that church leaders and members, regardless of denomination, deploy to reconcile polygyny with, and even situate it within, the church doctrinal and social narrative.

CONTEXT

The data for this study come from Chibuto, a typical district of some 220,000 inhabitants in southern Mozambique. The mainstay of this predominantly rural district's economy is subsistence farming. Low agriculture yields, aggravated by frequent floods and droughts, and the proximity of the area to South Africa have made male labor migration to the neighboring country an important element of the district's economic and social life. The district is largely monoethnic, dominated by the Changana ethnicity and language. The traditional lineage system of southern Mozambique is patrilineal, and its culture is deeply patriarchal (Loforte, 2000). As in many patrilineal sub-Saharan settings, traditional marriage in southern Mozambique is bridewealth-based. However, even in rural areas, the institution of marriage has undergone considerable erosion, with bridewealth payments often delayed or foregone altogether and marital dissolution becoming increasingly common (Agadjanian & Hayford, 2018).

In the study area, as in other patrilineal sub-Saharan societies, polygyny has deep roots (e.g., Junod, 1912) and continues to be normative and widespread (Arnaldo, 2011; Sithoe, 2009), even though plural marriage is not recognized under Mozambique's civil law (Boletim da República, 2004). As elsewhere in the sub-continent, polygyny is demographically sustained by high birth rates, gender difference in age at marriage, and excess male adult mortality. High levels of men's out-migration further magnify the gender imbalance in the population of marriageable ages and thus may contribute to polygyny. Also, as in other predominantly agricultural and pronatalist sub-Saharan settings, women's productive and reproductive value is a strong economic incentive for having multiple wives. Polygynous marriage is therefore an investment that well-to-do men make to enhance the economic and reproductive capacity of their households and to assert and further elevate their community status. Finally, persistence of polygyny is also related to very low prevalence of official marriage registration and of religious marriage. Thus, in the representative household survey used in

this analysis, only about 3% of respondents who considered themselves married had their unions formalized through either a religious ceremony or civil registration.

The area is predominantly Christian, with considerable denominational diversity. Roman Catholicism was almost the official church in the Portuguese colonial empire, of which Mozambique was part until its independence in 1975. Yet, the colonial times also saw the arrival and spread of mission-initiated Protestant denominations, such as Anglican, Baptist Union, Methodist (of different varieties), Nazarene, Presbyterian, Reformed, and others (Cruz e Silva, 2001). These churches, both in sub-Saharan and other contexts, are also often referred to as “mainline” churches, to stress their distinction from historically more recent Evangelical and Pentecostal modalities, and following earlier research (e.g., Agadjanian, 2015; 2017; Agadjanian and Yabiku 2015). I use “mission-based” and “mainline” as fully synonymous terms. Although the doctrinal identities of these churches differ, their similar history in Mozambique and their present-day close organizational ties warrant their grouping into one denominational category. Starting in the late colonial period and well into independence, the district experienced a massive proliferation of Pentecostal-type African Initiated Churches (AICs). Among them, Zionist churches, first brought to the area from South Africa, grew especially fast. Zionists’ emphasis on miracle healing through the power of the Holy Spirit has been a particularly strong attraction. Similarly to AIC experience in other parts of the sub-Sahara (Anderson 2001), Zionists’ accommodating stance on many traditional practices, often repackaged and rebranded as Christian-congruent and even integrated into church canon and rituals, further boosted their attractiveness, causing massive defections from the Catholic Church and mainline Protestant denominations (Agadjanian, 1999). Although individual Zionist churches are typically small, together Zionists make up the largest denominational block in southern Mozambique. Because Zionists generally represent AICs that have been most lenient and adaptable to traditional beliefs, norms, and practices, I compare them to the other denominations in testing my first hypothesis. Another group of AICs that has gained ground in the area is composed of churches that I label as Apostolic. Unlike ideologically and organizationally amorphous Zionists, Apostolic churches, especially the Church of Old Apostles, by far the largest church in this category, are typically characterized by very rigid and insular ideology and organizational structure, and explicit intolerance of many traditional, non-Christian practices. Their doctrinal purism and strict demands for compliance and discipline have found considerable appeal in Mozambique, as elsewhere in southern Africa, and have contributed to their substantial numeric growth in a way similar to the rise of conservative churches in the West (e.g., Iannaccone, 1994; Kelley, 1972). Finally, historically most recent arrivals onto the area’s religious scene are the churches that can be summarily defined as neo-Pentecostal. In contrast to earlier Pentecostals, these new religious actors, often originating outside the African continent, are typically focused on individualized pursuit of holistic wellness and on fending off the devil’s threats to this pursuit (Agadjanian & Yabiku, 2015; Van de Kamp 2016).

As elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, in Chibuto, women, regardless of denomination, are much more engaged in church activities than are men, and it has been argued that church involvement in such contexts has more important consequences for women’s well-being than for men’s (Agadjanian, 2015; Agadjanian & Yabiku, 2015).

DATA AND METHODS

My study is based on both quantitative and qualitative data. The collection of these data was approved by the Institutional Review Boards of Arizona State University, the University of Kansas, and the University of California – Los Angeles, and by the Ethics Board of Mozambique’s Ministry of Health. For statistical tests of the hypothesized variations in polygyny acceptance across denominations, congregation actors, and organizational scenarios I use quantitative data from two sources: a) a census of religious congregations; and b) a household survey. Both the census and the survey were conducted mainly in 2008 in the district of Chibuto. While the two datasets cannot be linked directly at the congregation level, they offer a unique opportunity to compare the top-down and bottom-up perspectives on religion and polygyny. The census covered all religious congregations registered with the district’s Commission for Religious Affairs (the registry was updated by additional canvassing of all urban and rural communities). It used a standardized questionnaire administered in-person to a congregation leader (e.g., a priest, pastor, deacon, or another person formally elected or designated by the church as congregation’s head). In total, leaders of 1125 congregations were interviewed. The household survey used three-stage cluster sampling. First, in the district’s rural areas, 66 communities (clusters) were selected with probability proportional to the population size estimated from the national census data. In the district’s headquarters and its only urban area, a total of 16 boroughs or sub-boroughs were selected using the same approach. At the next stage, in each of the 82 clusters, 25 households were randomly selected. Finally, in each selected household, a woman aged 18–50 was randomly chosen and administered an in-person interview by a female interviewer. This procedure yielded a final sample of 2019 valid cases (a review of the data indicated that no women married to the same men were interviewed). The survey data reflect women’s perspective on religion and polygyny. I acknowledge this as a limitation although it should be noted that given the very high levels of male labor out-migration from the study area, any sample of currently present adult men would be very biased.

I employ the denominational classification that reflects the earlier described religious composition of the area and includes five denominational groups – Roman Catholic, Mainline (or Mission-initiated) Protestant, Zionist, Apostolic, and Neo-Pentecostal. While this grouping may not fully capture the infinite diversity of the local religious scene, it has been successfully used in several prior studies (e.g., Agadjanian, 2013; 2015; 2017; Agadjanian & Yabiku, 2015). I exclude Muslims from the analysis (three mosques in the census and eleven survey respondents), because of the tiny size of the Islamic community in the district and its highly selective nature. I also exclude Jehovah’s Witnesses (one case in the census and three cases in the survey) as this group cannot be easily fitted into the proposed denominational classification. The resulting census and survey samples are 1121 and 2005, respectively (the analytic sample sizes are further reduced depending on model specifications and missing values in covariates). Table 1 displays the distribution of the denominational groups in the census and the survey sample.

As described earlier, Zionists generally represent the AICs that have been relatively lenient and adaptable to traditional beliefs, norms and practices, and they are used as the reference category in multivariate tests. I first use the household survey data to assess the prevalence

of polygyny among members of different denominations as well as women not affiliated with organized religion. Next, I look at denominational variations among religiously affiliated survey respondents in perceived acceptability of polygyny in their churches (Hypothesis 1). This analysis is based on respondents' answers to the following question: "Does your church allow that a member of the church who already has one wife takes another wife?" Then, I use the congregation census data to examine leaders' attitudes toward polygyny. This analysis allows for a comparison with household survey data as the census questionnaire included a question that had the exact same wording as the above survey question (Hypothesis 2). However, it also expands beyond that comparison as the census asked two additional polygyny-related questions: 1) whether or not a polygynous man may be admitted into the church; and 2) whether or not a polygynous man may hold a leadership position in the congregation (Hypothesis 3).

I start with a descriptive overview of the associations of interest and then fit a series of multivariate logistic regressions. The multivariate models include control for characteristics that are likely to correlate with the outcomes of interest. The model predicting the likelihood of a survey respondent being in a polygynous union is restricted to currently married women, i.e., women who answered "yes" to the question "Do you currently have a husband or a partner with whom you live?" Following earlier analyses of the determinants of polygyny (e.g., Chae & Agadjanian, 2019; Fenske, 2015; Grossbard, 1976), the model controls for respondent's age, education, area of residence (rural vs. district headquarter), and household economic conditions (a scale based on household ownership of such items as a bed with a mattress, radio, TV set, bicycle, refrigerator, motorcycle, automobile, etc.). Because at least some polygynous marriages may be less formalized than monogamous ones, the model controls for formalization of the current marital union through bridewealth payment (at least some bridewealth paid vs. none). Polygynous marriages often absorb women who experience marital dissolution; therefore, the model includes a control for previous marital relationship (whether or not the respondent had a previous union). The model predicting perceived acceptability of polygyny by the church is based on the subsample of all affiliated women (both married and not married) and controls for the same characteristics as the previous model, except for bridewealth status of marriage. It also adds a control for current marital status – not in union, monogamous, and polygynous – as the perception of the church's acceptability of polygyny might be higher among women who are already in a polygynous union. The model also controls for frequency of recent church attendance – a proxy for respondent's church involvement and for familiarity with and adherence to church prescriptions and proscriptions. To account for the cluster design of the household survey sample and possible variations in unobserved characteristics across the survey clusters (villages, urban neighborhoods), I fit multilevel models that allow the intercept to vary randomly by survey cluster (the results of one-level models and of models allowing the intercept to vary by denominational type are very similar to those presented here and are available upon request).

The models using the census data control for the gender of congregation leader as attitudes toward polygyny may vary by gender. They also control for congregation's location (rural vs. district headquarter), which may reflect the degree of congregation's exposure to church official messages and directives. The size of congregation, approximated by the number of

attendees at last regular service, and the type of congregation facility (wooden/brick wall structure, reed wall structure, no built facility) are controlled for as proxies for congregation's organizational and financial health. Although the controls included in both sets of models may not be exhaustive of factors influencing the likelihood of polygynous marriage or attitudes thereto, they are deemed sufficient to elicit net cross-denominational variations in these outcomes.

To complement and elaborate upon the results of the statistical tests, I use qualitative data collected after the census and the survey. These qualitative data are part of a larger ethnography of religious life carried out in the study setting for over a decade and a half. The data used in this study consist of both individual in-depth interviews (n=33) and focus group discussions (n=6) with leaders and members of various religious congregations that were conducted in Changana or Portuguese, Mozambique's official language. The general topics and specific questions of the interviews and discussions were chosen so as to parallel and expand upon the content of the census and survey questionnaires (including but not limited to polygyny), and participants, both women and men were purposefully selected from different segments of the area's denominational spectrum. The interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim in Portuguese (the Changana recordings were translated into Portuguese). The transcripts were coded sentence-by-sentence with the codes capturing stated rationales and justifications for polygynous marriage in participants' respective religious communities. From the codes, the following major themes emerged: 1) separating (and thus reconciling) the religious and the secular; 2) making exceptions to the rules; 3) dispensing relatively minor penalties for breaking the rules; 4) shifting the institutional responsibility for infractions to other (previous) churches; 5) reducing the visibility of polygynous marriages in the church community; and 6) putting faith in god above church rule (if the two are in conflict). Although the qualitative data cannot be linked directly to the evidence generated by the statistical analyses, they produce valid generalizations that enrich and enliven the quantitative results.

RESULTS

Denominational Variations in Acceptability of Polygyny: Survey and Census Data Analysis

Descriptive Results—Descriptive statistics offer initial insights into the associations of interest. Table 2, Section A, shows the prevalence of polygyny among currently married household survey respondents.

Conforming to Hypothesis 1, among affiliated women, Zionists, the religious group typically associated with greatest acceptance indigenous beliefs and practices, had the highest level of polygyny (30.2%), followed by neo-Pentecostals, mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Apostolics (note that the overall means reflect the denominational composition of the sample). Not surprisingly, unaffiliated women had the highest share of those in a polygynous union, 32.2%. However, it is notable that unaffiliated women were not very different from Zionists in polygyny prevalence.

Section B of Table 2 shows the distribution of church-affiliated survey respondents' answers to the question on whether their church allows that a married man takes another wife. As can be seen, there is a big difference between the share of women who considered this acceptable and the share of polygynously married women in most denominational categories shown in Section 2.A: perceived acceptability of entering a polygynous marriage by a church member was much lower than the recorded prevalence of polygynous marriages. Zionists were the only exception: in fact, in this group, acceptability of taking a second wife was slightly higher than the actual polygyny level. It is also to note that a small but non-negligible fraction of affiliated women did not know their churches' position on the matter. Notably, this fraction was distinctly smaller among Apostolics than in other denominational categories. It should be acknowledged that some of the discrepancy between the actual prevalence of polygyny and its perceived acceptability may owe to the formulation of the acceptability question: that question did not contemplate scenarios when non-members who are already polygynously married would ask to join the church. Even so, the difference between the perceived norm and reality in most denominations is noteworthy.

Table 3 shows the denominational distribution of responses to three questions asked in the congregation census (note, again, that figures for the total sample reflect the relative size of each denominational category). The first question (Section 3.A) is identical to the survey question on whether it is acceptable for a member who already has a wife to take another wife. There was a noticeable denominational variation in responses to this question. Again, in line with what I hypothesized, Zionists stood out with the highest share of leaders who would accept this possibility. However, even among them, this share was just twenty percent, in stark contrast with the corresponding share among survey Zionist respondents and the actual prevalence of polygyny in the Zionist survey subsample. In all other denominational groups the general pattern was similar, with Apostolics and Catholics displaying a somewhat bigger gap between the survey and census figures. This general pattern conforms to Hypothesis 2.

Section B of Table 3 displays the shares of positive responses to the question on whether the church would admit a polygynous man as a new member. Overall, as I anticipated, the acceptability of this scenario was much greater than of the previous one, and the differences across denominations are rather minor, with denominational percentages hovering around the sample average, eighty percent. Finally, Section 3.C shows the shares of interviewed leaders who said that a polygynous man may hold a leadership post in the congregation. Overall, only thirteen percent of the census respondents accepted this possibility. Zionists clearly stood out, especially in comparison with Apostolics and Roman Catholics. Yet, even among Zionists, only one-fifth of respondents gave an affirmative answer. The general pattern fits with my expectations under Hypothesis 3. Interestingly, on all three measures presented in Table 3 the five denominational clusters ranked identically, with Apostolics at the bottom and Zionists at the top of the distribution.

Multivariate results—The model presented in Table 4.A compares married survey respondents in different denominations as well as unaffiliated women on polygyny status of their marriages. It displays a strong contrast between Zionists, the reference group, and Apostolics: controlling for individual, household, and community characteristics, the odds of

being in a polygynous union were 52% lower among the latter ($OR = \exp(-.65) = 0.52$). In comparison, the difference between Zionists and Catholics was only marginally significant ($p < .07$) and no other denominational group was different from the reference group. These results provide some support to the first hypothesis.

Section B of Table 4 presents results of the analysis of the survey respondents' opinion on whether a married male church member may take another wife. Only women with a religious affiliation were included in this analysis. Net of other factors, Zionists were significantly more likely than members of all other denominations to think that their church would accept a second marriage by a married man. However, Apostolics again stood out. In fact, Apostolics were significantly less likely to think that polygynous marriage would be acceptable in their churches not only compared to Zionists, but also compared women in all other denominations (results are not shown but are available upon request). These results, while generally conforming to Hypothesis 1, add important nuances to it.

Next, I examine responses to the same question – if the church would allow a married male member to take another wife – among congregation leaders interviewed in the census. The results of these tests are presented in Section A of Table 5. These results are in stark contrast with those of the survey data analysis: controlling for congregation's characteristics, no differences at the conventional significance threshold ($p < .05$) were detected, and only Apostolic leaders were marginally less likely to accept that a married church member could take another wife, compared to Zionist leaders ($p < .08$). Notably, no other covariates had significant effects.

Section B of Table 5 shows the results of a model predicting the affirmative answer to the question if a polygynous man may become a member of the church. Here, only Catholic leaders were significantly less likely to accept this possibility than are Zionist leaders. Among other covariates, leaders of urban congregations were less inclined to admit a polygynous man to the church, compared to leaders of rural ones. Admissibility of polygynous men into congregation was also positively associated with the size of the congregation.

Finally, I compare responses of congregation leaders to the question on whether a polygynous man may assume a leadership post in the congregation. The results, presented in Section C of Table 5, conform to the expected denominational pattern: Zionists were significantly more likely than the rest to accept that a polygynous man may become a congregation leader. Notably, the contrast was again particularly large between Zionists and Apostolics. Also interestingly, female congregation leaders were, *ceteris paribus*, less likely to accept a polygynous man as a congregation leader than were male leaders.

In sum, the three tests presented in Table 5 suggest important adjustments to Hypothesis 1, while also connecting it with the other two hypotheses. The anticipated salience of Zionist churches was fully present only with respect to acceptability of polygynists as church leaders, arguably the most morally problematic scenario contemplated under Hypothesis 3. At the same, time, the contrast between the survey and census results for acceptability of taking a second wife by a married church member (Table 4.B vs. Table 5.A), qualifies, even

if indirectly, the hypothesized disjuncture between rank-and-file members' and leaders' views on polygyny (Hypothesis 2).

Negotiating polygyny: Insights from qualitative data

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions shed important light on the nuances of how church attitudes and practices regarding polygyny. The qualitative data analysis points to several overlapping pathways for reconciling the rejection of plural marriage with its acceptance. While present more in some denominations than in others, largely in congruence with the shown distributions in the census and survey data, these pathways are, in general, similarly articulated across the denominational spectrum. Below, I define these pathways and illustrate them with examples from the data. The statements by focus group discussion participants are specified as such; the remaining statements are from individual interviews. All names are pseudonyms.

Separating (and thus reconciling) the religious and the secular.

The two realms are presented as independent and legitimate in their own ways. Both the prohibition of polygyny within the church and its acceptance outside of it are construed as normal, or at least as not contradictory. Ana Maria, a Presbyterian woman, summed this up in the following simple way: "Our church doesn't accept that a man marries two women, but a person, as a person, does it."

In fact, to discourage polygyny, religious leaders may resort to "secular" rationality arguments, which are inevitably less radical – but may also be less effective – than the arguments drawn directly from the church canon. The following exchange with Francisco, an Apostolic leader, illustrates this strategy:

Interviewer What do you think about polygyny?

Francisco In a home, the husband is the head and the wife is the body. So, imagine having two bodies for one head?"

Interviewer So, what would you do if a church member wanted to take another wife? Would you prohibit it? Expel him if he insists?

Francisco No, I would counsel him. I would show him that in real life, it is hard to put up even with one wife, let alone two. These women will have their own problems, and you won't be able to treat them equally. So, I would explain to him the difficulties he could face. If he insists, let him take a chance. And if he come to present these social problems tomorrow, I will tell him: "See, I gave you advice and you didn't listen."

Francisco's logic was echoed by the argument of Carlos, a Zionist pastor: "When you have two wives, you have to have two judgments, two hearts. You may think that one wife has relations with another man, you'll be nervous. In order not have these problems, you better be with just one woman." When probed further, Carlos added that his church does not prohibit polygynous marriage.

Making exceptions.—Overarching social imperatives may offer further incentive to bend the rules. For example, in this high-fertility context, wife’s inability to bear children may serve, at least in the eyes of some religious leaders, as an acceptable justification for marrying another woman. Bonifácio, a Zionist leader, who first stated that his church does not allow members to take another wife, adjusted his stance when probed for the sterility scenario, with a reference to the Scriptures: “My instruction would be that a man can take another wife to have children with her. We saw that Sarah, Abraham’s wife, was not bearing children, so he got together with a servant. God knew that it was wrong, but because Sarah did not have children, he agreed to it. So, such a man can marry another wife in order to have children.”

Dispensing relatively minor penalties.—To uphold their line on polygyny without causing much organizational strain and risking members’ discontent and possible exit, churches may come up with relatively minor penalties for polygynous couples. Thus, first wife and other co-wives may be classified differently, often with a justification drawn from the Bible: Bonifácio, the Zionist pastor quoted above, qualified in his example that when Abraham took a second wife, “the authority remained with the first wife, Sarah.” Armando, a pastor of a neo-Pentecostal church, who, enticed by a promise of a new building for his once-Zionist congregation and a new suit for him personally, had moved his entire congregation to that church, said that a church member can have a second wife and she can be part of the church, but she cannot attend the church as *his wife*.

The nature and scale of penalties may vary depending on whether the first marriage involved a religious ceremony. Gertrudes, a Catholic catechist, explained in a focus group discussion: “If the man is not married [to his first wife] through church, the church doesn’t care that much [if he takes other wives]. But if a man who got married through church decides to take another wife, he and the second wife cannot take communion. Only the first wife can.” Of course, given the earlier mentioned extremely low prevalence of religious marriage in the setting, this scenario rarely occurs.

Shifting the institutional responsibility.—As we saw in the analysis of the census data, church leaders across the denominational spectrum were much more willing to admit a polygynous man to their churches than to allow their members to marry a second wife. As I argued earlier, this may be because the responsibility for the sin of entering a polygynous union rests with the convert’s previous church. Even the churches with strongest ideological opposition to polygyny seem quite flexible when it comes to admitting polygynists into their ranks. As Orlando, an *elder* of the Old Apostles Church, reasoned: “We are not in favor of polygamy. But when someone enters the church with his two wives, no one condemns him.”

Reducing the visibility.—Women greatly predominate among church attendees, and polygynous men, like most men, rarely come to church services. In fact, polygynous men may be even less likely than monogamous men to show up. As Clara, a Catholic cell coordinator, explained: “Polygynous men know that the church doesn’t accept polygyny, so some of them may choose not come to church, to stay at home, [and to let their wives to attend].” Some church members may choose not to publicize the fact that they took a second wife. Manuel, from Assemblies of God, said in a focus group discussion: “What happens is

that a person, when he decides to marry another woman, doesn't tell the [church] leader, and just goes and takes a [new] wife. And the church doesn't expel him, but it doesn't accept it either. He knows that it [taking another wife] cannot be done. But he does it on his own, without consulting with the leader."

Putting faith above rule.—Although polygyny may be incompatible with Christian doctrine, it is not necessarily seen as irreconcilable with Christian *faith*, especially when difficult decisions are to be made. Thus, Pedro, an Assemblies of God pastor responding to a general question about acceptability of polygyny in his church said: "As Christians, we can only have one wife. But if [a polygynous] man follows God, he can still come to the church."

The acceptability of polygynous couples may also reflect the relative rank of polygyny on the scale of church proscriptions. Thus, polygynous men's reversal to monogamous status by divorcing one of his wives is typically unacceptable, as divorce is deemed to be in a much greater conflict with Christian faith than having multiple spouses. As Ercilia, a female focus group participant, eloquently stated, "to divorce is to die" (*kuhambana i kufa*, in Changana).

Restricting access to church leadership.—As the analysis of the congregation census data showed, most churches restrict polygynous men's access to leadership roles. This restriction is typically justified with a reference to the New Testament (Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:6), but often polygynous men are simply thought not to have enough time and energy left to care for the needs of the congregation. The restriction depends on the level of leadership, again, reflecting some ambiguity of the biblical text in that regard (the most commonly used Changana translation of the Bible uses the term *murisi*, or pastor, which, depending on interpretation, may include certain leadership positions but not others).

In Zionist churches, as I also showed in the census data analysis, leadership roles of polygynous men are generally less problematic than in any other denominational group. For example, a Zionist pastor, when asked if a polygynous man can hold a leadership post in the church, gave the following answer: "Yes, he can, because we consider only his first wife. Because if we follow the doctrine, the Bible says that God took a lung [sic], made Eve from it, and gave her to Adam. God didn't take two lungs to make two women. So, we consider the first wife to be the wife of the pastor, or whatever his post is. Those other wives he might have, that's his own business."

Yet, as the census data analysis showed, even Zionist churches vary greatly in their stance on leadership and polygyny. For example, Sérgio, a Zionist pastor had three wives, and all of them had formal posts in the congregation reflecting their co-wife rank: his first wife was a "women's pastor" (a shadow title of her husband's), his second wife was a deacon, and his third wife was an evangelist. In fact, he saw this as a natural and the most effective leadership arrangement.

As we also saw in the census data analysis, other denominations are more restrictive in granting polygynous men access to leadership roles. However, among non-Zionists, many such leadership-related decisions do not follow clear predetermined rules but rather rely on

divine signals, especially when such signals seemingly contradict the rules. Even among Apostolics, the most polygyny-opposed group, some leaders acknowledge a possibility of such conflict. Thus, when Luís, an elder of the Old Apostles church was asked if a polygynous man can become a Servant (a leader) in his church, he replied: “You see, it’s not people who choose Servants, God himself does ... It’s a gift which someone is born with, it is all programmed by God.” “I’m not sure if God will allow someone with two or three wives to be a Servant,” he then qualified, “but we have not had any such cases yet.”

In fact, god’s judgement (or non-judgement) may be used to justify the reality of a church leader himself having more than one wife. For example, Armando, the above-quoted pastor of a neo-Pentecostal church who had migrated to that church with his entire once-Zionist congregation, had two wives (or maybe even three, as a member of his congregation confided to me). When asked about his church’s position on polygyny, Armando passionately affirmed that polygyny is incompatible with his church’s teachings. But when probed about his own two (or three?) wives, he calmly replied: “God has not told me yet that it is wrong.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Persistence of polygyny in sub-Saharan Africa is typically explained by a combination of demographic constraints, socioeconomic pressures, and cultural norms. My analysis turned attention to a relatively understudied aspect of plural marriage in the sub-continent – its connection with Christianity, a historical Western cultural import that could be expected to precipitate the decline of polygyny but has not.

I see a major reason for this paradox in the saturated and highly competitive religious marketplace, where churches continuously adjust their rhetoric and practice in order to recruit and retain members. Importantly, while active church participation is overwhelmingly female, church membership is marital unit-based (for married members), and as in any competitive religious market, it is the membership of affluent families that is most consequential for congregation’s financial health. The association of polygyny with wealth has long been established (e.g., Grossbard, 1976; Pollet and Nettle, 2008). Like elsewhere, in Chibuto polygynous families are typically among the wealthiest and most influential community members (as also indirectly suggested by the net positive association of household wealth with the likelihood of being in a polygynous union and acceptability of polygyny in Table 4). For many religious congregations, membership of such families nourishes an expectation that they will provide financial support to the church; it also adds to the congregation’s community standing and visibility. Intense inter-church competition for members, especially those who can help to pay for a new roof on the congregation building, leads to ever greater lenience in many church leaders’ positions and actions with regard to polygyny (not to mention other, more trivial aberrations, such as recourse to witchdoctor services). In fact, the ultimate irony, transpired in the ethnographic data, is that many a church hierarch, despite ostensibly, and often adamantly, rejecting polygynous marriage and stressing its incompatibility with being a true Christian, themselves have several wives – so as to demonstrate and even legitimize their preeminence and authority, without casting doubt on their righteousness. In sum, I argue, polygyny is not simply inevitable in the

contemporary sub-Saharan Christian environment but is instrumental for church ideological and organizational sustainability. It is a social institution that can be both condemned—to celebrate the church’s spiritual and moral virtue – and condoned – to ensure its numeric, social, and financial vigor.

Yet, the variations across denominations in stated attitudes toward polygyny that my analyses detected are quite instructive. On one extreme, Zionist churches, i.e., African-initiated churches whose doctrine and ritual, while ostensibly rejecting many pre-Christian traditional beliefs and practices, in reality have absorbed and appropriated them, had the highest prevalence and acceptance polygyny. It has long been argued that many AICs’ success in the sub-Saharan religious marketplace has largely owed to their embrace or tolerance of local pre-Christian traditions (Anderson, 2001). In line with this argument, one may propose that Zionist churches’ lenience on polygyny may contribute to their attractiveness and explain, at least in part, their demographic preponderance. On the other extreme were Apostolics, also an African-initiated group of churches, but with a much more hostile stance on non/pre-Christian forms and expressions, which, at least in this sample, had the lowest prevalence of polygyny. Doctrinal strictness and organizational rigidity, which characterizes these churches, also help to reduce “free riding” and thus may translate to greater financial solvency (cf. Iannaccone, 1994), and, by extension, lesser incentive for moral compromise. This contrast illustrates the complexity of the AIC phenomenon, and more broadly, the intricate dynamics of today’s sub-Saharan religious marketplace, where both strict and loose definitions of righteousness find their niched appeal. Yet, even among Zionist leaders less than a third deemed it acceptable for a married church member to take another wife, and in “official” attitudes, the difference between Apostolic and Zionist leaders was fully statistically noticeable only in (not)accepting the possibility that a polygynous man assumes a leadership post in the congregation (Table 5.C). And as far as admitting a polygynous man to church, it was the Catholic Church, with its long-standing, even if generally flaccid, opposition to polygyny – and also, importantly, with a very low rate of in-conversion (Agadjanian, 2017) – that stood out. Following the perspective of congregation’s organizational vitality and linking it to the importance of church extra-local connections for church societal engagement (e.g., Manglos & Weinreb, 2013), I conjecture that local Catholic congregations’ financial security may be cushioned by transfers from the Church’s national and even global networks. Yet, even among Catholic congregation leaders, fully three-quarters would allow a polygynous man to become a member of the church, a share that was only slightly lower than in other denominations (Table 3.B). While this remarkably high level of admissibility of polygynous men is a response to market pressures, the qualitative insights suggest that this response is often articulated and legitimated by shifting the institutional responsibility for polygyny away from the church and also by the construction of polygyny as a relatively low-level sin, compared with such egregious transgressions as divorce. This moralized hierarchy of normative infractions finds parallels in how churches across the world strive to navigate through ever-changing moral labyrinths (e.g., Brittain & McKinnon 2011; DeRogatis, 2014; Steele 2011).

Interestingly, the analyses did not reveal a distinct pattern for neo-Pentecostals. Of course, this conglomerate is ideologically and organizationally heterogeneous in the study setting as it is elsewhere in the sub-continent and in the world (e.g., Garrand, 2009; Martin, 2002;

Kalu, 2008). While neo-Pentecostal churches are poised to make substantial membership gains in Mozambique as they have done throughout the globe (e.g., Robbins, 2004), the combination of heightened spirituality and rigid moral codes with encouragement of individualism and choice that typically characterizes them (Anderson, 2013; Smilde, 2007; Van de Kamp, 2016) may have a unique impact on local marital practices. It should also be mentioned, however, that while denominational boundaries in Chibuto seem rigidly demarcated, ideological narratives of different churches there, as elsewhere in the sub-Saharan (e.g., Manglos, 2010), often overlap and converge. Hence the denominational variations in acceptability of polygyny that my study detected may also evolve with time.

My study speaks to another important aspect of the religion-polygyny association – differences in interpretations of and attitudes toward polygyny between church leadership and congregation rank-and-file members, the latter being considerably more accepting of polygyny. That religious dogma, prescriptions, and proscriptions are differently articulated, interpreted, and acted upon by church members and leaders (and oftentimes, by leaders at different levels) is part of real-life dynamics of many, if not all, religious organizations, and it is more broadly reflective of continuous negotiation and re-interpretation of any social norms (e.g., Bendor & Swistak, 2001; Bicchieri, 2006). In fact, this apparent disjunction, I argue, helps to ensure the ideological and organizational viability of the church. At the same time, compared to most contemporary Western settings, where exit from a church, or from organized religion in general, is a widely available and practiced option for church members who disagree with their leadership (Chou, 2008; Gooren, 2010), in predominantly rural sub-Saharan settings, such as the one examined here, this option is socially more costly (Agadjanian, 2017). As a result, in such settings, negotiation, rather than exit, is a more common strategy to deal with discordant views and preferences, which, in turn, further increases the fluidity of religious norms and elasticity in their application. Notably, this negotiation is typically a two-way process: while members often acquiesce to their leaders' directives, the pressures from the bottom, even if not explicitly articulated as a challenge to the religious schema or authority, also inevitably affect the rhetoric and action at the top. As a consequence, church frequently accepts deviations from the canon, especially if such deviations are perpetrated by wealthy or otherwise influential congregation members (and at times, by church leaders themselves) with only minor sanctions or even without any sanctions at all. And importantly, as the qualitative data show, church leaders do not just ignore or downplay the presence of polygyny; they may actively justify it by invoking its religious precedents or by lowering its position on the scale of religious virtuousness. Moreover, the transcendental origin of the ban on polygyny may further facilitate acceptance of plural marriage. As with other religious proscriptions, it is god's (in)action to enforce the ban, rather than some intrinsic nature of it, that is often construed as the ultimate – if not the only – proof of its legitimacy.

Like any data that are collected cross-sectionally or over a relatively short time span, these data do not allow for assessing changes in polygyny prevalence and in attitudes toward plural marriage among Christians and across Christian denominations. Unfortunately, longitudinal data that would be necessary for such assessments have not been collected in sub-Saharan Africa, and one can only speculate whether African Christian churches will arrive at effectively rejecting polygyny as did their Western counterparts in the past. While

such speculations lie outside the scope of my analysis, it seems important to acknowledge the possibility that the evolution of African churches' positions and actions with regard to polygyny may follow, rather than foster, the decline of this institution. In the context of a dramatic transformation of marriage and of rapidly changing economies in the sub-continent, polygyny may gradually diminish in social and economic efficiency, in some way following the path of Western societies, where shifting notions and expectations regarding men's intrasexual competition, wives' quality, child investment, and household productivity combined to ensure the dominance of the monogamous model (Gould, Moav, & Simhon, 2008; Henrich, Boyd, & Richerson, 2012). Although marriage trends in the sub-Saharan do not replicate Western experience (e.g., Hosegood et al., 2009), recent evidence from sub-Saharan countries suggests that the prevalence of polygyny has indeed been declining in most of them (Chae & Agadjanian 2019), as formal polygynous unions may be increasingly replaced by non-formalized multiple or serial partnerships. As with other historical shifts in the human condition, religious norms and practices should eventually adapt to this changing marital landscape (cf. Atran, 2002; Norenzayan, 2010).

Finally, it is also important to note that church discourse and actions on polygyny in today's sub-Saharan are not framed in terms of or possible negative implications of polygyny for women's or their children's well-being (see, e.g., Omariba & Boyle, 2007), or more generally, relative gender equitability of polygynous vs. monogamous marriage models. Rejection, condemnation, or acceptance of polygyny are typically argued on the basis of Christian tenets and not on the ground that it might be oppressive and harmful for women (cf. McDermott, 2018; Oppong, Monebenimp, & Dapi Nzeffa, 2018). Interestingly, other research in this study setting shows that churches that are most hostile to polygyny, such as Apostolic, and those that are most tolerant of it, such as Zionist, are no different when it comes to women's decision-making power and autonomy (Agadjanian & Yabiku, 2015). Yet, the significant net gender difference in acceptability of polygynous men as congregation leaders in the Chibuto census data analysis (Table 5.C) suggests the potential importance of the gendered angle in church views and actions regarding polygyny, echoing earlier research on how women's leadership may transform religious congregations' ideological identity and social practice even in highly patriarchal contexts (Agadjanian, 2015). Although I cannot examine the impact of these dynamics on polygyny and on marriage in general with the data at hand, these are important destinations for future inquiries.

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Table 1.

Denominational composition of the Chibuto Congregation Census and Household Survey (percent)

Denominational category	Census	Survey
Roman Catholic	8.3	12.6
Mainline Protestant	15.7	9.6
Zionist	48.2	43.1
Apostolic	9.6	12.0
Neo-Pentecostal	18.2	11.0
Unaffiliated	n/a	11.6
<i>Number of cases</i>	1121	2005

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Table 2.

Prevalence of polygyny among currently married respondents (A) and perceived acceptability of polygyny among all respondents (B) by denominational category, Chibuto Household Survey (percent)

Denominational category	A. Prevalence of polygyny (N=1549)	B. "May a church member who already has a wife take another wife?" (N=1770)		
		Yes	No	Doesn't know
Roman Catholic	19.5	13.0	79.1	7.9
Mainline Protestant	25.5	13.5	81.9	4.7
Zionist	30.2	31.7	61.4	6.9
Apostolic	18.0	7.1	90.5	2.5
Neo-Pentecostal	26.2	14.0	78.7	7.2
Unaffiliated	32.2	n/a	n/a	n/a
All	27.6	21.5	72.3	6.3

Table 3.

Acceptability of polygynous marriage by congregation members (A), admissibility of polygynous men into church (B), and suitability of polygynous members for leadership positions (C), Chibuto Congregation Census, N=1119 (percent)

Denominational category	A. Church accepts that a married member takes another wife	B. A polygynous man may be admitted to church	C. Polygynous man may have a leadership post
Roman Catholic	4.3	75.3	3.2
Mainline Protestant	5.7	78.0	5.1
Zionist	9.2	81.7	20.0
Apostolic	5.8	78.5	1.9
Neo-Pentecostal	6.9	79.4	9.8
All denominations	7.6	79.9	12.9

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Table 4.

Denominational variations in (A) the likelihood of being in a polygynous union (all currently married women) and (B) the perception of acceptability of polygynous marriage in the church (all affiliated women). Chibuto Household Survey. Two-level logistic regression, parameter estimates and standard errors

Covariates	A		B			
	B	SE	B	SE		
Denomination category						
Roman Catholic	-0.41	0.22	+	-1.06	0.22	**
Mainline Protestant [Zionist]	-0.15	0.23		-1.05	0.24	**
Apostolic	-0.64	0.22	**	-1.79	0.27	**
Neo-Pentecostal	-0.19	0.21		-1.08	0.22	**
Unaffiliated	0.19	0.19		n/a		
Age	0.04	0.01	**	-0.03	0.05	*
[No education]						
1 to 4 years of education	-0.03	0.14		-0.25	0.15	
5 of more years	-0.32	0.19		-0.20	0.18	
[Rural residence]						
Urban residence	-0.38	0.19	*	0.12	0.22	
[In polygynous union]						
In monogamous union	n/a			-0.49	0.16	**
Not married	n/a			-0.38	0.20	*
[Did not have a previous marriage]						
Had a previous marriage	1.07	0.15	**	0.18	0.16	
Household material possession scale	0.15	0.07	*	0.13	0.07	*
[No bridewealth paid]						
At least some bridewealth paid	0.17	0.14		n/a		
[Did not go to church in past 2 weeks]						
Went to church 1–2 times in past 2 weeks	n/a			-0.11	0.15	
Went to church 3 or more times in past 2 weeks	n/a			-0.00	0.17	
Constant	-2.80	0.33		0.41	0.37	
Constant 2 (cluster)	0.15	0.07		0.40	0.12	
Number of cases		1549			1770	

Notes: Reference categories in brackets; significance levels:

**
p<.01,

*
p<.05;

+
p<.10.

Table 5.

Acceptability of polygynous marriage for congregation members (A), admissibility of polygynous men into church (B), and suitability of polygynous men for leadership positions (C). Chibuto Congregation Census. Logistic regression, parameter estimates and standard errors

Covariates	A. Married member may take another wife		B. Polygynous man may be admitted to church		C. Polygynous man may have a leadership post			
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
Denomination category								
Roman Catholic	-0.81	0.54	-0.64	0.28	*	-1.95	0.60	**
Mainline Protestant [Zionist]	-0.50	0.36	-0.34	0.22		-1.50	0.36	**
Apostolic	-0.86	0.49	+ †	-0.33	0.28	-2.63	0.73	**
Neo-Pentecostal	-0.34	0.32	-0.20	0.21		-0.86	0.26	**
Congregation leader is a woman [man]	-0.31	0.27	0.26	0.17		-0.53	0.21	*
Urban location [rural]	-0.32	0.32	-0.50	0.19	**	-0.36	0.26	
Number of attendees at last regular service	0.09	0.08	0.27	0.06	**	-0.05	0.07	
Type of congregation building [no building]								
Reed walls	0.05	0.25	-0.21	0.17		0.23	0.20	
Wooden or brick walls	-0.35	0.39	0.08	0.24		-0.24	0.32	
Constant	-2.27	0.26	1.18	0.18		-1.15	0.20	
Number of cases		1119		1119			1119	

Notes: reference categories in brackets; significance levels:

** p<.01,

* p<.05;

+ p<.10.