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0521621895 - Priests, Witches and Power: Popular Christianity after Mission in Southern Tanzania

Maia Green

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PRIESTS, WITCHES AND POWER

In the aftermath of colonial mission, Christianity has come to have widespread acceptance in Southern Tanzania. In this book, Maia Green explores contemporary Catholic practice in a rural community of Southern Tanzania. Setting the adoption of Christianity and the suppression of witchcraft in an historical context, she suggests that power relations established during the colonial period continue to hold between both popular Christianity and orthodoxy, and local populations and indigenous clergy. Paradoxically, while local practices around the constitution of kinship and personhood remain defiantly free of Christian elements, they inform a popular Christianity experienced as a system of substances and practices. This book offers a challenge to idealist and interpretative accounts of African participation in twentieth-century religious forms, and argues for a politically grounded analysis of historical processes. It will appeal widely to scholars and students of anthropology, sociology and African Studies; particularly those interested in religion and kinship.

MAIA GREEN is a senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester.

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Preface

This book gives an anthropological account of popular religiosity in a largely Catholic community in Tanzania and of the shifting dynamics of its relationship with the Church as an institution enmeshed in the material world. The Roman Catholic Church is one of the largest Christian churches in Tanzania with some 9.3 million members out of a population recently estimated to be 63 million. According to the 1998 Catholic Directory of Tanzania it has a total of 9293520 members. Established in the country for over one hundred years and strongly associated with the provision of educational services in the colonial period, the Catholic Church is both widely respected and politically significant, counting among its public supporters leading statesmen and women, of whom the late president Julius Nyerere is the best-known example. Fully engaged in the post-adjustment political and economic transformations currently taking place in the country and still involved in the delivery of basic services, as well as education and training, the Catholic Church retains a position of some influence in post-colonial Tanzania. This influence is most pronounced in areas which have a long-established Catholic presence and infrastructure of mission. In such areas, often poor rural districts, even forty years after independence it is not unusual for populations to remain partially dependent on the Church for the delivery of some basic services and to seek, in their everyday relations with Church personnel and institutions, to perpetuate the kinds of relations of interdependency and obligation which were characteristic of colonial mission when the Church's need for Christians was reciprocated by popular desire for access to services and the public policies which channelled subsidy through Christian missions.

The context in which Christian churches now find themselves has changed since the missionary era. Churches must struggle to be self-financing and must seek local support to meet the rising costs of their expanded administration. Autonomy and localisation coexist with reliance on ex-missionary orders for funds and the persistence of what are essentially missionary structures and

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power relations between the institutional churches and Christian congregations. This situation contributes to some interesting contradictions in the ways in which Christianity is perceived and performed by its adherents, where those who define themselves as Catholic continue to perform what the Church categorises as unchristian practice at the same time as Christianity is to some extent now claimed as an authentically Tanzanian religion. As the Church attempts to redefine itself as a civil society organisation for the twenty-first century capable of mediating between state and family in a bid to maintain power in rural areas, it must address the fundamental contradictions between hierarchy and legitimacy and between institutional opulence and poverty if it is to achieve popular support. These contradictions may prove politically insurmountable, although they can be and are recognised and addressed through the kinds of ritual practices performed by Catholics and in their appropriations and interpretations of Catholicism. An exploration of these in one part of the country, Ulunga, and among a specific cultural group, Pogoro, is the focal point of this book.

Undertaking such an endeavour is not without its own problems and contradictions, especially in the politicised context of Tanzania where post-missionary churches and their personnel are significant actors in a translocal political arena. While the Diocese where this study was conducted was initially supportive of the research on which this book is based, my analysis of research findings concerning the Church proved unacceptable to the Bishop appointed after my fieldwork had finished. The article in question, *Why Christianity is the 'Religion of Business'*, the title being a quote from an informant, explored popular perceptions of the Church as an institution held by the rural poor within the diocese (Green 1995). The main arguments are reiterated, although not without some soul searching, in this book. It is not surprising that the Church is perceived as wealthy against the background of chronic poverty in Tanzania. Neither is it surprising that the Church feels threatened by work which explores these contradictions, especially since it is so dependent on access to overseas funding to ensure its institutional survival in a situation where falling rural incomes and user fees introduced in the aftermath of structural adjustment seem to render community support if not unsustainable, at least unable to sustain the Church in its present institutional form. The diocese and other representatives of the Catholic Church in Tanzania were helpful in the original research, allowing me access to personnel and to parish records. I am sorry that they are disappointed by some of the research findings. However, virtually ever resident of the diocese has an opinion about the Church and a position on Christianity, some of which do support the kinds of conclusions I reach in this study. Moreover, the strength of Catholic religiosity within the diocese cannot be understated, albeit in locally articulated forms which on occasion do not meet with the approval of the orthodox Church. On a more positive note these findings are an indication of the extent to which Catholic Christianity has become an authentically Tanzanian religion and an important aspect of personhood in twenty-first-century Tanzania.

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Completing this work has taken some twelve years, from initial fieldwork begun in 1989 and completed in 1991, to writing the manuscript in the spring of 2001. An indication of how much issues of inequality and poverty matter in Ulanga and in Tanzania is that in that time period a good many of the people with whom I worked and without whom I could not have produced this book are no longer around to see it or be thanked in person for their help and support, their time and generosity, their hospitality and kindness. One person in particular stands out as friend and confidante, landlord and neighbour, sister and mother. Bernadina Kuoko, thank you for everything. I am grateful to the late Mbui Linkono, to the late Dr Christopher Lwoga, the late Bibi Kalembwana, the late Vicent Kalinjuma of CARITAS, the late Emmanuel Senga of Ulanga District Council, the late Bwire Kaare and the late Bishop of Mahenge diocese, the Most Rev Patrick Iteka, for making the research possible.

I am grateful to the current Mbui Linkono, Mbui Mlali, Mbui Buda, Mbui Matimula, Mama Patia, Mama Asanteni, Tobias Mkamate, Binti Chalala, Mzee Mkwamira, Seraphina Manyenga, Theresia Linkundi, Akina Sangu, Martin Malekero and their families for all their assistance and support, and especially to Paulina Manyenga, Mama Lumeta, and Justin Kuoko for everything. Egen Chalala accompanied me on two visits to Ihowanja and worked as a research assistant in 1996 for a piece of development agency work that we completed together. I would like to thank him for his wisdom and companionship. Thanks too to John Mwanamilembe, Peter Eponda, Leonarda Choma, H. Tendeka, Binti Hakira and Chief Mponda and the staff at Ulanga District Council and to those who work with the Bibi at Ihowanja and Kilosa kwa Mpepo for their hospitality (Hamisa asante!) and assistance. I also thank Hawa, Eki, Dinah, Neema and Talaka for their companionship as children. Everywhere I went in Ulanga district I was met with hospitality and kindness. I particularly wish to thank the people of Mbagula, Nawenge, Makanga, Sangu Sangu, Midindo, Chikuti, Kisewe, Ilonga, Ihowanja, Mwaya, Idunda, Majengo, Chilombola, Mabanda, Msogezi and Mahenge Mjini.

Academic debts are owed to Odhiambo Anacleti and Sam Maghimbi for proposing Mahenge as a site for research, to Aylward Shorter for his advice on researching Catholicism in Tanzania and to Lorne Larson for his generosity in sharing his ideas and his excellent historical research on Ulanga so unselfishly with others. The influence of Maurice Bloch is evident in my work and I acknowledge his contribution to my thinking, in particular for ways of understanding the logic of ritual and for recognising the significance of the persistence of mission. In terms of the development of my work over the past decade I am grateful to colleagues at the London School of Economics, the University of Sussex and the University of Manchester, in particular to Clare Ferguson, Peter Loizos, Chris Fuller, Henrietta Moore, James Woodburn, Jock Stirrat, John Gledhill, Elvira Beaulandes, Sandy Robertson, Todd Sanders and outside these places but within the scholarly community, Katherine Snyder,

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Jean Lave and Gillian Feeley Harnik. My work on witchcraft suppression practices owes much to Ray Abrahams of Cambridge and Simeon Mesaki of the University of Dar es Salaam. Thanks also to Terence Ranger for his interest and assistance, especially when this project was at its earliest stages and to Jamie Monson, an historian of Ulanga district. Finally, Paul Baxter kindly read over and commented on the final manuscript, providing sound guidance and advice that is much appreciated.

Other factors have been significant in the completion of this piece of work, factors that are often understated in the production of academic texts – experience and ageing. When I began fieldwork I was a childless twenty-four year-old with little personal experience of life and death or of the emotional importance of kinship. As a mother of two I see life rather differently. This personal experience is reflected in the emphasis given in the text to ageing as a process of becoming and personhood as a dynamic, rather than a static category. Moreover, Ulanga and Tanzania are not simply sites for fieldwork but places where I have now known whole families for one third of my life, and where I strive to maintain personal and professional relationships. Experience of rural living conditions and comparative knowledge gained through academic and practical engagement with social policy issues in east Africa informs my professional priorities which aim to contribute to the development of an anthropology capable of addressing the real world in all its complexity, not merely for intellectual purposes, but to make change for the better possible. The United Republic of Tanzania has embarked on a strategy for achieving its Development Vision by the year 2025. Although this book will not contribute directly towards that vision, it may add to the understanding of rural socialities on which its achievement depends.

The initial research between 1989 and 1991 was supported by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, with further short visits to Tanzania in 1995 and 1996 funded by the University of Manchester. Additional brief periods of time were spent in Tanzania, and Mahenge, between 1998 and 2001. The original research on which the book is based was approved by the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology. At the time of the initial fieldwork I was a research associate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Dar es Salaam. I take this opportunity to thank both institutions for their cooperation and support in facilitating the research.

A significant proportion of this book is based on revisions of earlier pieces of work, some of which have been published as articles in journals and as chapters in books. Chapter 4 reiterates some of the ideas expressed in the *Journal of Religion in Africa* piece (1995) 'Why Christianity is the Religion of Business. Perceptions of the Church and Christianity among Pogoro Catholics, Southern Tanzania'. Chapter 6 is informed by an earlier piece entitled 'Medicines and the Embodiment of Substances among Pogoro Catholics, Southern Tanzania' which appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* in 1996

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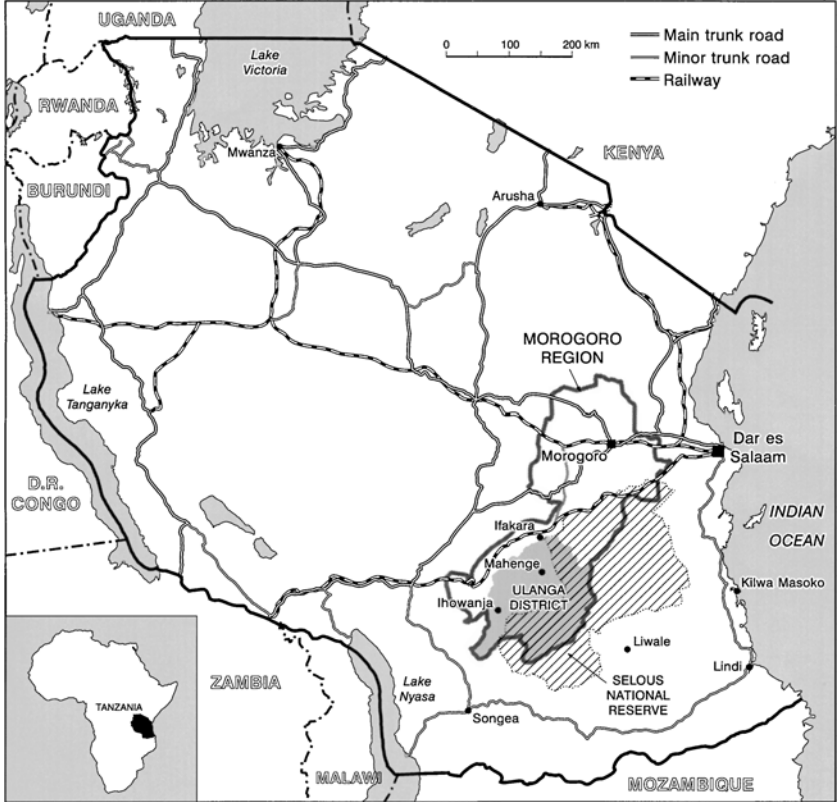
and a chapter on descent and kinship which I contributed to a volume edited by Patrick Heady and Peter Loizos in 1999. Some of the arguments expressed in chapters 7 and 8 were initially provisionally worked out in a piece which appeared in the volume edited by Henrietta Moore, Todd Sanders and the late Bwire Kaare in 1999. Finally, chapter 9 on 'Witchcraft Suppression Practices and Movements' first appeared in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* in 1997. Anonymous reviewers and editorial comments from these have contributed enormously towards the production of this piece of work. Josiah Hincks and Karen Egan helped me get the manuscript together at various stages. I could not have finished without their help. Finally, thanks to David, Leah and Saul for being my family, to my parents for living up to the extended obligations of kinship and to Annjoe and Stephen Dickson and Anita Igoe for plugging the gaps.

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Map 1 Ulanga district in Tanzania.



Map 2 Catholic parishes and dates of establishment.