

Religion and Race

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Partnership and Race in Mission Encounters in Tanzania

DOI 10.1515/opth-2016-0058

Received January 30, 2016; accepted June 28, 2016

Abstract: I examine racial and ethnic dynamics in encounters between Tanzanian church personnel, and visiting American partners or short-term missionaries. Contemporary mission work in Tanzania is situated within a historical context that includes, but is not ultimately determined by, race or ethnicity. Several kinds of engagements and partnerships exist between American religious organisations and the Tanzanian church, which I describe ethnographically, and discuss how encounters between Tanzanian Christians and American visitors become ethnically inflected. Two cases—encounters with Maasai and Chagga people respectively—provide a comparative illustration. Finally, I address the role played by new types of partnership between Tanzanian and American religious organisations, and how themes of hospitality and identities as guests and hosts contribute to encounters between American and Tanzanian Christians. In these encounters, multiple areas of shifting meanings of race come together, resulting in disjunctures of understanding. I suggest that these disjunctures, coupled with the guest-host dynamic and the lack of in-depth knowledge characteristic of short-term mission in general, reveal patterns of social inequality and tensions inherent in the changing context of Christian mission.

Keywords: Tanzania, Christianity, short-term mission, hospitality, ethnicity

In June 2014, I attended a week-long seminar for Sunday School teachers near Moshi, Tanzania. It was being run by Next Generation,¹ an American evangelical organisation whose mission is to “reach kids for Christ.” In Tanzania, they were working in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT), Northern Diocese. Already they had run this seminar for three consecutive years in another district of the Northern Diocese, and were now running it in the Eastern Kilimanjaro district.

I had arranged to stay with Rev. Ulomi, the local parish pastor, who was facilitating. He was also the district Christian Education coordinator, and had been assigned by the district to the seminar, helping the visitors with translation and recruitment, among other things. He had done the same job the previous year, and would do again the next year. During the seminar, the Next Generation team had been joined by Dave, a missionary in nearby Arusha and an old friend of one of the team members. At lunch on the fourth day, Rev. Ulomi came over to me. He was indignant. “Do you know what Dave just said to me? To my *face*? He said, ‘African brains work slowly.’”

The next morning, Rev. Ulomi and I had breakfast with Mitch, one of the team members. Mitch began discussing politics: “I think Obama will go down as one of the worst presidents in history. He’s uncriticisable, because people think he’s black. Every time he’s criticised, he plays the race card. And he’s a Muslim anyway.” Rev. Ulomi changed the subject.

The following day, I went with Rev. Ulomi and two team members, Brenda and Ruth, to a party. We were early, and began chatting. Ruth asked Rev. Ulomi if he thought there was still racial discrimination in the

1 Names of individuals and organisations have been changed, except for known public figures.

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US, since he had lived there while studying for his master's degree in theology. "Of course," he said. "Once I went to a church that I hadn't been to before. I was sitting a little towards the back. During the offering, when the offering plate got to me, everyone turned around to see if I would put any money in." Ruth and Brenda were shocked; they had not imagined that racism still existed. "I'm sorry that happened to you," Brenda said. "Did you ever go back?" Rev. Ulomi replied that he had not, but did not elaborate any further. That evening, though, he was puzzled. "Why would they think I would go back there a second time?" he asked me.

Western Christianity has often been implicated in racial discrimination, and the relationship between religion and racism is complicated, as these three uncomfortable situations show. Legacies of colonialism are also part of scholars' examinations of the effect of Western evangelistic movements in the Global South. However, uncomfortable moments such as those mentioned above cannot be described straightforwardly as a simple effect of white Christianity on black Africa; they emerge from shifting and overlapping understandings (and disjunctures of understanding), grounded in historical religious and political contexts. These disjunctures are moments in which inequalities and tensions become more apparent.

In the first part of this article, I situate contemporary issues in mission work in Tanzania (particularly in the ELCT, Northern Diocese) within a historical context that includes, but is not ultimately determined by, race or ethnicity. I then describe ethnographically several kinds of engagements between American religious organisations and the Tanzanian church. In the second part, I discuss ways in which encounters between Tanzanian Christians and American visitors become ethnically inflected. I examine two cases; encounters with Maasai and with Chagga people respectively. I conclude by discussing partnership between Tanzanian and American religious organisations, and how themes of hospitality and identities as guests and hosts contribute to encounters between American and Tanzanian Christians.

Discourse around race, among both my American and Tanzanian interlocutors, is a shifting ground, involving perceptions of race as colour, nationality, ethnicity, insider vs. outsider, and other dimensions; perceptions which are subject to change. In encounters between Tanzanian Christians and visiting missionaries, multiple areas of shifting ground meet each other, creating disjunctures where perceptions do not align. I suggest that these disjunctures, coupled with the guest-host dynamic and the lack of in-depth knowledge characteristic of short-term mission, reveal patterns of social inequality and tensions inherent in the changing context of Christian mission.²

Complicating the Narrative

On a sunny day in June, I went to see Rev. Towo. Now retired, he was formerly the head of Eastern Kilimanjaro district, and had been a pastor since 1972. "The German missionaries here did better than the others," he said, referring to the Leipzig Mission Society who began work in this area in 1893. "They studied the language and the culture, and tried to distinguish Christianity from European culture, though they still misunderstood some things." He told me that the diocese still has partnerships rooted in those early missionary years, first with German churches, and then Scandinavian and American churches after the World Wars – for example, the diocese continues to have a relationship with the Leipzig Mission Society. "The missionaries laid a foundation which is still here," said Rev. Towo, "and we continue with it. But there aren't any missionaries anymore, since missionaries bring something new. We don't have missionaries, we have partners."

Much of my research centres around relationships, integral to the work of the diocese, with various partners.³ Though some relationships may be long-term and deeply held, the actual presence of individuals in Tanzania is often a matter of weeks, and the nature of their work is very different from how mission

² Many research participants made this paper possible and I am indebted to them all. I particularly acknowledge the assistance of "Rev. Ulomi" and the generosity of Fredrick Shoo. However, interpretations are my own; thus any errors in fact or interpretation are also mine. I also wish to thank Laura Bear and the writing-up seminar at the London School of Economics for their comments.

³ I discuss the nature and scope of partnership, as well as the concept itself and what it means to be a partner, below.

was conceived of even 30 years ago. Gone are the days of the missionary who gets on a boat and never returns home. If I take my Tanzanian friends like Rev. Towo seriously, it is difficult to speak of the effects of something—Western mission—that, for them, may not exist, at least in their local context. Furthermore, a greater percentage of what is now considered mission work is carried out on a short-term and project-based model, often by non-professional missionaries (that is, they have other main jobs, and are travelling during temporary breaks). However, the concept of “mission” cannot be discarded. The Americans I encountered in Tanzania understood their work to be occurring within a context of mission. At the same time, what constitutes “mission” is not uncontested terrain: asking my Tanzanian friends about “short-term missionaries”—a term familiar to many Western Christians—initially caused much confusion. To local people, they are identified as guests, *wageni* in Swahili (sing. *mgeni*).⁴ In the next section, I discuss the context of mission in Africa, by addressing the shift to a model which prioritises “partnership” and which, for some Tanzanians, moves completely beyond the idea of mission. First, though, I examine briefly the racial history of mission work (including short-term mission).

Racial History in American Mission

To most observers of short-term mission, one demographic becomes obvious very quickly: Participating in a short-term mission trip⁵ is a *really* white thing to do. I encountered more than 130 American *wageni* during my research. All but five—that is, over 96%—were Caucasian. This is in contrast to the general demography of the US, and of American Christianity, where in both cases about 66% of the population is Caucasian.⁶ Numbers among long-term missionaries are even more Caucasian; some mission organisations estimate that only about one percent of American missionaries are black, despite 13% of the American population being black, and 78% of black Americans identifying as Christian.⁷

Historians have suggested that this imbalance is not due to a lack of interest in mission work by black Americans. In fact, a small but significant number were involved in mission work in Africa throughout the nineteenth century. For those who had experienced slavery personally, the Biblical concept of the Exodus from slavery in Egypt formed a powerful call to return to Africa with the gospel.⁸ Initially, white mission boards saw black missionaries as well-suited to work in Africa, since they would have a greater bond with other black people and would act as a civilising force.⁹ However, two factors which influenced the racial demography of missionaries emerged. First, the rise of black involvement in mission work coincided with European imperial expansion in Africa. Racist colonial policies, and the fear that black missionaries might side with native Africans to stir up unrest, eventually meant that black missionaries were no longer welcome in British and French colonies, or the settler colonies of South Africa and Rhodesia.¹⁰ Second, during decolonisation movements in Africa in the 1950s and 60s, many black American Christians were grappling with Civil Rights struggles, and focused their efforts on justice within their own towns and congregations.¹¹

With reference to ethnic demography of short-term mission specifically, this is a phenomenon which grew up in postwar America, and relied on a series of organisations and individuals which became prominent starting in the 1950s. Contemporary evangelical Christianity was greatly influenced by organisations such as Youth for Christ (founded 1946; Billy Graham was their first full-time evangelist), Campus Crusade for Christ (founded by Bill Bright in 1951, now known as Cru), and Operation Mobilization (founded by George Verwer in 1957). Youth for Christ was an inspiration for Worldwide Mission for Youth (WMY), a group I observed twice in Tanzania and discuss in detail below. Many of these groups were based around college

⁴ Hereafter I refer to *wageni*, but I do use “short-term missionary” where it is used as a self-identification. This also includes those doing what would generally be considered mission who do not call themselves missionaries.

⁵ I define this as travel for religious purposes, other than pilgrimage, for periods of two months or less.

⁶ Pew Forum, “America”.

⁷ Crabb, “Why?”

⁸ Killingray, “Black Atlantic”, 4.

⁹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰ Ibid., 21.

¹¹ Crabb, “Why?”

campuses. American college enrolments are whiter than the average population; they were even more so when short-term mission was developing.¹² I suggest that the roots of short-term mission in college-based ministry, appealing to those who were well-off enough to both attend college and have their summers free to travel, especially internationally,¹³ is one factor which particularly influences the overwhelmingly Caucasian makeup of short-term mission.¹⁴

Shift to Partnership Model of Mission

In July 2015, I visited the retired bishop of the Northern Diocese, Rt. Rev. Erasto Kweka. As we sat on his porch, drinking tea and snacking on fried bananas, we discussed relationships with European and American churches during his tenure (1976-2004). I asked whether he thought the nature of these relationships had changed at all, especially in terms of privileging discrete short-term projects. He agreed that most people who visit the diocese do so for only a short time, and their work consists of well-bounded projects rather than a long-term presence:

That is how it should be. We are at a place where we don't need continuous involvement, especially in pastoral work or evangelism. We do have some specific needs, for both long- and short-term people. For example we have a shortage of doctors, and in the seminary we need specialists in one or two areas; for short-term visitors we need assistance in the vocational schools, and again with some medical projects. But to really affect people through evangelism, one needs to understand their culture. I don't see a way [for *wageni*] to apply teachings in a way that really relates to people.

Here I point out two dynamics, both related to Rev. Towo's assertion that "there are no missionaries anymore". First is the project-based nature of mission work: most *wageni* who visit Tanzania have specific projects, well-bounded in time and scope. Second is the shift in focus to "partnership" as a motif in encounters between the Tanzanian church and Euro/American groups. Although it's certainly possible for a group of American Christians to show up in Tanzania and start preaching the gospel however they like, this is fairly rare; it is more common for groups of *wageni* to cooperate on some level with a local organisation, whether that is a particular church, denomination, or other ministry. In this section, I discuss first the concept of "relationship" or "partnership" as used by my Tanzanian interlocutors, and then examine three categories of partnerships I observed during my research. For each, I include an ethnographic description of a visit which I consider exemplary of the category.

Partnership and relationship

I have referred to "relationship" and "partnership" as key concepts within Tanzanian-American church engagement, and here describe them further. Both concepts are frequently mentioned within the diocese, using several terms. *Uhusiano* "relationship" is very common, and *ushirikiano* "cooperation, partnership" is also discussed frequently. Since "*ushirikiano*" and "partnership" are both difficult words to translate, neither completely expressing the other, sometimes Tanzanian pastors use the English word. For example, the bishop's report to the 2014 General Assembly included a section titled "*Mahusiano na Marafiki (Partnership)*", "Relationships with Friends¹⁵ (Partnership)". Similarly, when referring to partners, Tanzanians may call them *washiriki* "partners, cooperators", *marafiki* "friends", *wenzetu* "fellows, comrades", or just "partners" in English, sometimes even incorporating the Swahili plural prefix and non-rhotic accent, thus rendering it in speech *mapatna*. As such, the concept is used fairly loosely within the diocese; there is no official

¹² National Center for Education Statistics, "Digest", tables 302.60 and 306.10.

¹³ For more on the relation of short-term mission, travel, and tourism, which is beyond my scope, see Howell, "Short-Term"; Priest and Howell, "Introduction" and others in same issue; Priest et al., "Researching"; Trinitapoli and Vaisey, "Transformative"; Wesley, "Pilgrimage"; and Wuthnow and Offutt, "Transnational".

¹⁴ Whether college-based recruitment affects wider demographics in Christian mission is beyond the scope of this paper, and would require further research.

¹⁵ Though "friendship" is an important concept, I do not address it in detail for the sake of simplicity and brevity.

definition. I asked Rev. Shio, who facilitates the WMY visits, to elaborate more on the nature of *uhusiano* and *ushirikiano*:¹⁶

Elaine: What do people mean when they say, “These are friends” or “We have a relationship or partnership with so-and-so”? For example, with you and Fürth [their official partner district] or with WMY.

Rev. Shio: Friends are people that cooperate [*kushirikiana*], and who have a common outlook. First, Fürth is a Lutheran district like Siha [Rev. Shio’s district], because with Lutherans, there are issues where we are similar and we can cooperate.

E: Would you say that both are *uhusiano*?

S: Friends have to relate, you can’t have a friendship without a relationship. If there’s no relating, the friendship will die.

E: Let’s say with WMY, when the teenagers come, who are they to you? Friends, partners, guests, something else?

S: WMY, when they come here they’re friends, and our friendship comes from our relating [*kuhusiana*] together in the youth ministry. You can’t separate friendship and relationship. If relationship lacks friendship, it won’t be strong.

E: And what about the issue of *ushirikiano*? How does it compare to *uhusiano* and *urafiki* [friendship]?

S: *Ushirikiano* is to work together, and you can work together [*kushirikiana*] in areas that you get along in. Us and Fürth, there are times we’ve cooperated by exchanging pastors. I think you know the English word “**cooperation**”.

E: Yes.

S: That word carries *ushirikiano*. And if you have a friendly *uhusiano* you can cooperate. “**Partnership**” is that state of having *uhusiano*. **A state of having relationship.**

E: I see. So WMY is an example of *ushirikiano* as well?

S: Yes, because there are times we work together. They can’t come to my parish, go around the neighbourhood, and do evangelism by themselves. They have to do it with a local. So we cooperate [*tunashirikiana*].

The concept of partnership is closely tied to cooperation, not least in that *ushirikiano* covers both, and can describe both the active work of cooperating, and the state that cooperating parties are in relative to each other. Thus, diocese personnel are fairly quick to call others “partners”, since anyone who cooperates on anything is included under that umbrella.

In this article I refer to both “partnership models” and “short-term mission models” of mission. They are not equivalent, and a detailed discussion of their specific features and dynamics is beyond the scope of this article. However, for my purposes I consider them together, for two reasons. First, the diocese does not differentiate between “partnership” and “short-term mission”; the latter is not a stable conceptual category and they consider all *wageni* they work with to be a coherent set of people, albeit with some sub-distinctions. Therefore I refer to different types of partnership (described below). Second, my definition of short-term mission does include many visits carried out within stable long-term relationships (what I describe below as “structural partnerships”). That is, visits by both laypeople and those who work full-time for one of the partners are of short duration, and if a specific objective other than visiting is included, it is well-bounded in time and scope.

Partnerships can take many forms and occur simultaneously at several organisational levels. During my research I observed *wageni* visiting as individuals, as self-organised small groups, under the auspices of a para-church organisation, and as representatives of a specific parish, district, or diocese. Similarly, in Tanzania, they may work with individuals (lay or clergy), para-church organisations, specific parishes, districts, or the diocese as a whole.

¹⁶ This conversation occurred in Swahili, while bolded words were said in English.

Structural Partnerships

Structural partners are determined officially at global levels, and are supported by formal agreements and theologies. The Northern Diocese's partner within the global Lutheran Communion is the Nebraska Synod¹⁷ of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). Additionally, official "twinning" relationships exist at other administrative levels. All of the diocese's five districts have partnerships with German districts;¹⁸ there are also relationships at the *kanda*¹⁹ and individual parish level. Many of these relationships are rooted in specific mission histories, as Rev. Towo said; the foundation laid by early missionaries carries on in current relationships. Projects conducted through these types of partnerships include clergy exchanges, visits (in both directions), student sponsorships, and textbook distribution schemes.

The partner visits are a key part of these relationships. During my research I observed the annual visit from Nebraska, where visitors toured the diocese seeing various ministries. The group stayed in the diocese-owned hotel in Moshi Town. It was larger than previous years, with 37 members. Many of them were older professionals, with a good percentage being retired. The youngest group member looked to be in her mid-30s; the oldest was over 80. For about half the group, it was their first visit to Tanzania; others had been more than a dozen times. The schedule was jam-packed: In six days, the team visited a women's training centre, a primary school for disabled children, a vocational training centre, a house-building project for the chronically ill, a hospital, an orphanage, a seminary, a secondary school, an education centre for mentally disabled youth, the women's diaconal²⁰ centre and Montessori teacher training school, and village parishes (they split into smaller groups for weekend village visits) - all of these locations owned and operated by the Northern Diocese. They also toured public primary and secondary schools during their village visit, and attended the retirement ceremony for outgoing diocesan bishop Martin Shao.

Many of the sub-groups visited their partner parish during their village weekend. I went along with a couple group members to their partner parish in the Central Kilimanjaro district, where they discussed partnership projects with the parish council, including a milk collection scheme and sponsorship programs for parish orphans.²¹ Other individuals from Nebraska visited students whom they had sponsored at the diocesan schools. For many of these partnerships, visiting is the goal in itself; the Nebraskans did not have any particular job to do (aside from a sub-group distributing textbooks, another partnership program).

Official Lutheran relationships are supported by a theology of accompaniment, which is propagated at a global level through the Lutheran World Federation, and particularly by the ELCA. Accompaniment theology has its roots in a passage from the gospel of Luke: On the day of Jesus' resurrection, two of his disciples were making their way to Emmaus, about seven miles away from Jerusalem, and discussing the events of the day. Jesus caught up with them and joined their conversation, though they did not recognise him until after they had arrived in Emmaus, invited him to stay for dinner, and begun eating.²² This theology is put to work in different ways. Within the LWF, accompaniment is a method for reconciliation,²³ and the ELCA uses it as a methodology for mission. Nebraska imagines itself not as showing up to the other disciple—Tanzania—along with Jesus. Rather, Nebraska and Tanzania are the two disciples walking along the road together, and Jesus appears to both of them. In a handbook for a 2014 mission workshop put on by the ELCA, accompaniment is put forward as a way to adapt mission to changing global contexts:

A lot of mission work historically looked like this: there is God's story, my story and your story. Mission meant me bringing God's story to you. God's story is on my side, and you are on the other side. I'm crossing boundaries to bring God to you.

¹⁷ Generally "diocese" implies an episcopal polity (governance by bishops) and "synod" a congregational polity (with more autonomy in governance for individual congregations). In practice, the difference is quite minor.

¹⁸ In German *dekanat* "deanery", a similar sub-diocesan administrative level

¹⁹ A sub-district group of about five to ten parishes

²⁰ Diaconic work is ministry to the poor, ill, or needy

²¹ In Tanzania, generally defined as having lost a parent, not necessarily both.

²² Luke 24:13-35.

²³ See Lutheran World Federation, 'LWF'.



Accompaniment invites us to see differently: In reconciliation, we realize that my story and your story are not divided by boundaries, but are both reconciled within God's story.²⁴

The importance of going to Tanzania is discussed in terms of spending time together and metaphorically “walking together”, and this was evident not just in ELCA materials, but in the way individual Nebraska team members talked about their visit to Tanzania. I should note that although this seems like a happy model, it doesn't obviate all problems, as the handbook itself points out:

Because we live in the tension of already and not yet, between reconciliation and alienation from God, we continue to experience alienation from one another. We continue to experience, and to create, boundaries between ourselves and everything else. The categorization of what we encounter is unavoidable as we live in the world, but it can create boundaries between us and others.²⁵

Tensions still exist in several ways; the quote from the handbook mentions “already” and “not yet” aspects of salvation, and it hints at tensions of nationality and race. Guest-host dynamics are another tension. I discuss these further in the second half of this article.

When I spoke with Rev. Russell, who had been instrumental in developing the Nebraska-Northern Diocese partnership and in getting the annual visits started, he reiterated that the idea of building a relationship, whether at diocese or parish or individual level, is a primary goal in itself. Then, if people meet each other and want to take on a specific task (e.g., the textbook distribution program), they can do so. This corresponds to a downward shift in responsibility for mission work: it used to be handled by the

²⁴ Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, “Accompaniment”, 4–5.

²⁵ Ibid., 5.

ELCA, and now it is done at the synod and parish level. Indeed, the ELCA considers Accompaniment to be a “theology of mission”, and the partnership and annual visits fall under the Mission department of the Nebraska Synod. The relationship is rooted in a specific history, where the Augustana Synod (which merged into the Lutheran Church in America in 1962, and the ELCA in 1988) became involved in Tanzania during World War II. Therefore, though many Tanzanian pastors would be hesitant to label the Nebraska group “missionaries”, and the Nebraska group calls its visits “vision trips” rather than “mission trips”, nevertheless the encounters are part of the continuing history of Christian mission.

Instrumental Partnerships

The Northern Diocese works with many para-church organisations to carry out specific objectives or projects relevant to the diocese, which I see as the defining characteristic of instrumental partnerships: they are oriented to a discrete objective that both partners want to accomplish together. Next Generation, which I mention in introduction to this article, is a good example. They have a specific objective: to coordinate seminars where Sunday School teachers can learn techniques for teaching children more effectively about God.

Next Generation has been working with the Northern Diocese since 2010, when they started their seminar series in Hai district. These seminars (which they offer in more than 25 countries) operate for one week per year, in three successive years. Next Generation advertises on their website for volunteers to join their “mission trips” teaching the seminars. I observed the seminar in the Eastern Kilimanjaro district in 2014, its second year there. The team was composed of two Next Generation staff and two volunteers. Sixty-eight Sunday School teachers representing 27 of the district’s 45 parishes were registered, 21 of whom had attended the previous year. The sessions included “How do children learn best?”, “Getting your students involved in the lesson”, “How to lead a child to Christ”, “Helping children learn to pray”, “Bring the Bible to life”, and “Discipline: Theology, strategy and tips”. Participants divided into groups for lesson-planning sessions, which they presented to the other groups on the final day. Next Generation team members also visited two local parishes for worship services and Sunday School observation. The seminar itself was carried out under the auspices of the district office and hosted at the district headquarters; Rev. Ulomi, being the district coordinator for Christian Education, was delegated to oversee the seminar. Having a high level of English fluency, he also did all the translation, both oral and print materials. The district head and the diocesan coordinator for Christian Education made appearances, and the diocesan Sunday School coordinator was also in attendance. She had been very involved in the planning and recruitment; after the seminar it would be her responsibility to visit parishes to evaluate their Sunday Schools and teachers, and (with Rev. Ulomi) to organise meetings of Sunday School teachers where seminar attendees could discuss their experience with others.

In some ways, these types of partnerships pose a greater challenge to local facilitators. The relationship is not of a long-term or broad-based nature; it is based in the job to be done, although that does not mean that the job is seen as trivial. With Next Generation, Rev. Ulomi felt strongly that they were doing an important job which had the potential to be genuinely helpful to Sunday School teachers, and he wished it could be replicated in other areas. However, this meant that he felt stuck. Although Next Generation provided an honorarium for his translation work, it appeared that he thought it insufficient for a professional service; miscommunications between Next Generation and the district office about who would cover expenses (e.g. printing and equipment hire) meant that it came out of his pocket rather than the district budget, resulting in a net loss for him personally. Furthermore, the apparent discomfort he felt at some of the team members’ comments and actions, even though in general he did like them personally, seemed to make the experience a difficult one.

Next Generation is one of many groups the diocese has instrumental partnerships with; other organisations (and individuals) also work with the diocese to offer seminars on topics including sexual health, new media, and agriculture, or to carry out other specific but recurrent projects which can also be seen as instrumental. I noticed other cases where facilitators encountered challenges in their instrumental partnerships. For example, I visited a parish which has a relationship with a British volunteering

association. For several years in a row, they sent teams of about twenty people, three times per year, to work on building a children's home at the parish. Dawson, one of the parish staff, explained: "They've built this house, but the work belongs to the parish. We take care of the children. Building is the smaller job. Now we have more responsibilities than before, the operating costs are more than ten percent of the parish budget, and the British *wageni* don't realise this." Still, when I asked him whether he thought it was worth it, he smiled broadly and said, "Without a doubt." Therefore it must be emphasised that, similarly to how the inclusiveness of the "accompaniment" discourse with structural partners does not remove all tensions, having a relationship with obvious challenges does not make it less worthwhile.

Incidental Partnerships

I mentioned that it's possible, but quite rare, for a group to just show up and do their own thing. The groups who have incidental partnerships with the diocese come closest to this: they arrive on their own volition, and the diocese accommodates them because they feel it is their job to help them learn about Tanzania (and, partially, because some *wageni* do leave donations in cash or kind). Although the group may have an objective, it may not be seen by the diocese as having particular relevance to them. Often, incidental groups resemble more closely the stereotypical short-term summer mission trip: students on their school breaks who spend a few weeks doing evangelism or construction. Groups like these include Worldwide Mission for Youth, an interdenominational American organisation whose flagship programs are summer mission trips for high school students. I observed two of WMY's teams in Tanzania (none of the individual members were the same between the two visits). Additionally, I participated in one of their trips to Tanzania myself, as a teenager in 2000.

WMY has sent teams of students to Tanzania almost every summer since 1993. Initially teams did village evangelism, but more recently, projects have been divided into two phases. During the first, they continue construction of a free Bible School. Construction started in 2009 and had not finished by 2015, though it was complete enough for classes to start that year, with a student body of seven. This phase is conducted quite independently: The land is owned by WMY, and the Bible school is operated by WMY staff. The second phase consists of evangelism, which includes presentations at public schools (with songs, puppet shows, dramas, and testimonies by team members) and door-to-door evangelism. During this phase, WMY is hosted by one of the Northern Diocese parishes, with the parish pastor and evangelist²⁶ volunteering as facilitators and translators (along with a few parishioners). I observed one WMY team in its entirety (including their initial training and final debriefing in the US, and both project phases in Tanzania), and a later year's team during its evangelism phase, staying at the home of Rev. Shio whose parish was hosting them. The team members themselves stay in tents, doing their own cooking and socialising. During evangelism days, the team divided into groups of around 6-8 people and went to different houses. At most houses they were invited into the sitting room, where they sang a song, read Bible verses, and asked the residents if they would like prayer. These efforts were translated into Swahili, with varying degrees of success, by their parish facilitator.

Incidental partnerships have something in common with structural partnerships, in that the diocese hosts the *wageni* not in order to accomplish a specific objective, but because it is the right thing to do to help them learn something about Tanzania – and to maximise opportunities through maintaining broad networks. In contrast with instrumental partnerships, there was not a particular job that the diocese wanted them to do. While the team did have specific objectives (construction of the Bible school, and evangelism to unchurched people), neither of these made any measurable difference to the parish or the diocese: The Bible school did not belong to them, and being unaccredited, its graduates would not be qualified for ministry within the Lutheran Church;²⁷ during the door-to-door evangelism, the team wanted to visit homes of unchurched people, but the parish facilitators took them to the homes of prominent parishioners. Indeed, WMY would have done their evangelism with or without the parish, and the parish would have carried on its

²⁶ Evangelists are lay ministers who may teach, preach, and lead services but do not administer sacraments.

²⁷ The diocese requires its paid ministers, both ordained and lay, to have a four-year diploma or degree.

normal work with or without WMY. In contrast to both structural and instrumental partnerships, incidental partnerships are quite casual and informal. There is no communication between WMY and diocese top brass, no formal documentation of the relationship, and no reciprocity (Tanzanian people do not visit the US under WMY's auspices).

As with the other two types of partnerships, I add a caveat that this incidentality does not make incidental guests less worthy of diocese time or energy. As Rev. Towo told me:

The church's job is really to do other people's jobs. Strictly speaking, our work is to see to the churches, and help people to know God. But the government doesn't do its job to build schools or hospitals, so we do it. If people need help, the church needs to help them. So maybe we just end up spending our time on the *wageni* who come around, they do what they want, and we fix their mistakes sometimes. That's okay, it's just what we do.

E: Have you ever felt like you were just working in vain?

T: No. Never.

E: Even when the *wageni* just do whatever they feel like?

T: If they just stay by themselves, if they don't get to know people and just leave, that's not a success. But we still help them, try to advise them, and show them something about Tanzania.

Significantly, though, the WMY team members did *not* see themselves as “just visiting” as the Nebraska team members did; they considered the goal of their trip to be “sharing the Gospel” with Tanzanian people whether directly through evangelism, or indirectly by equipping Tanzanian ministers through the Bible school they were building.

Between these types of partnerships, the Northern Diocese has plenty of latitude in its engagement with other churches or religious groups. The diocese as a whole, and the people who work for it, from district heads to individual parish pastors, are relatively free to work with different types of visitors, at different levels of engagement, according to their own discretion.²⁸ For this reason, I suggest that interactions between American and Tanzanian Christians should not be seen in terms of the effect of Western mission on Tanzania. Although these encounters are part of the trajectory of mission, they also reveal some of the tensions inherent in contemporary mission, including questions of who is a “missionary” and what is “mission work”. Furthermore, although efforts at “mission” have always been racially and ethnically inflected, it is more productive to see this not in terms of one affecting or being overlaid on the other, but rather in terms of what these interactions can show us about different understandings of race, colour, ethnicity, tribe, and nationality. In the next section, I'll examine some of these interactions, with specific reference to how *wageni* engage with ideas of racial, ethnic, and national identities.

Race, African-ness, and Colour

In the introduction to this article, I presented three conversations, which took place on three consecutive days. All felt uncomfortable to me, as a Canadian researcher, and seemed to be uncomfortable for Rev. Ulomi as well. However, they did not seem uncomfortable to the American *wageni*. In this section, I discuss the ways in which *wageni* discuss ideas of race, and how African-ness and blackness can be selectively emphasised or de-emphasised; and when emphasised, can be considered as positive or negative. I consider ways in which this dynamic, as a disjuncture of understanding, contributes to such uncomfortable moments.

Returning to my opening example, I wondered if Mitch would have spoken to Rev. Ulomi as he did if Rev. Ulomi were American. Did the team members consider Rev. Ulomi more similar to themselves than a black

²⁸ Pastors would not be dissuaded from developing partnerships at their parish (especially incidental partnerships, which are often casual). At higher levels, more organisation among the constituent administrative levels would be required. Conversely, pastors may be assigned to facilitate visits; the pastors who facilitated the Nebraska visit, and Rev. Ulomi and the diocese Sunday School coordinator did not have a choice in those matters.

American person would be, due to the affinity they had built up over the course of the seminar? Perhaps they subconsciously thought of him as a different *type* of black person: black Americans are minorities, while black Tanzanians are not. There is some perception among Americans that African people aren't really "black" - for example, characterisations by Rush Limbaugh²⁹ and other media personalities³⁰ of Barack Obama as a "halffrican", suspicion that he might be a Muslim when the majority of black Americans are Christian, and Mitch's statement, "people *think* he's black." Certainly the Next Generation team were surprised that Rev. Ulomi had experienced racism in America, and though I did not ask them, I believe they would have been surprised to learn that some of their behaviour seemed to be considered racist. Their perception seemed to be that Tanzanians, being all black,³¹ don't experience racism.

On the contrary, although most of my Tanzanian friends agreed that there is not as much racial tension in Tanzania as there is in America, many could share experiences of discrimination. Furthermore, many were well-informed on international news. Television, radio, and print news outlets (as well as informal news sharing via Facebook and WhatsApp) ran comprehensive coverage of shootings and protests in Ferguson, Baltimore, Charleston, and elsewhere around the US. When I visited Rev. Towo and we adjourned our conversation for lunch, his nine year old grandson joined us. "Are you from America?"³² he asked me. "Don't they have a lot of shootings there?" The diocesan bishop even asked me, after Dylann Roof killed nine black people in a church, why America continues to struggle with white supremacy, a question I couldn't answer. These events, which didn't directly involve Tanzanian people, were seen as moments of concern to them as black people.

The perception by some *wageni* (by no means all) that racism is not salient anymore points to an ambiguous relationship with race. This is not surprising; "race" as an analytic concept is particularly challenging. As Wade suggests, "using the concept of race brings with it many dangers, because of the history of the concept, its multiple different meanings and the fact that it is used by different people, including in social science, in different and conflicting ways."³³ Considerations of physical characteristics like skin colour, hair texture, and other bodily features and comportment do play a part, along with genealogy, language, dress, occupation, and nationality.³⁴ Bashkow also points out how racial categories are not just attributed to human bodies, or generated top-down by Western colonialism; they include existing categories which shift and gain new meanings, and how even inanimate objects and abstract concepts can take on vernacular racial categorisations.³⁵ I discuss in the next section how concepts such as fierceness can take on ethnic or racial categorisation. However, the ability to capture two sets of phenomena—how people have thought about human differences as well as the "historical emergence of a set of broad categories"—makes "race" into a useful concept that allows us to see connections between different modes of thinking.³⁶

In encounters between Tanzanians and *wageni*, the degree to which race is seen to "matter" varies, as *wageni* emphasise or de-emphasise the role of race at different times. These shifting emphases given to race (in its dimensions of colour, ethnicity or tribal affiliation, nationality, or otherwise) demonstrate continued legacies of essentialised thought on race. For example, Dave's comment, "African brains think slowly", demonstrates a de-linking of colour and African-ness in that he would not have said, "Black brains think slowly."

Certainly, the idea that skin colour does not, or should not matter, is put to use in many theological assertions of the equality of all people before God. Tanzanian and American pastors alike modify St. Paul's

²⁹ Serwer, "Limbaugh".

³⁰ Maloy, "Fox News".

³¹ Tanzania does not enumerate either race or ethnicity in censuses though. Furthermore, local phenotypic categories exist within what most Americans take as "black".

³² I'm not, but a lot of people took me for either American or German.

³³ Wade, "Skin Colour", 1171.

³⁴ Wade, "Skin Colour", 1170, 1172; Wade, "Human Nature", 168.

³⁵ Bashkow, "Meaning".

³⁶ Wade, "Skin Colour", 1170, 1172.

words to the Galatians,³⁷ adding “There is neither white nor black”. On the other hand, the uncomfortable moments that Rev. Ulomi experienced with his group of *wageni* had to do with a different way of downplaying colour. The perception that racism would not be experienced anymore suggests a perception that blackness doesn’t matter – but of course it *does*, as Rev. Ulomi knew.³⁸

In fact, in its relation to African-ness, blackness is of immense importance for *wageni*. Much of the discourse from American groups about their work in Tanzania has to do with learning from what Africans can offer *because they are African*. Mitch discussed Rev. Ulomi’s parish on his blog, writing that American churches should learn from Africans who give money cheerfully, even in their poverty. Another Next Generation team member said that it was a great joy to see “lovely Tanzanian faces” and “people speaking Swahili”. Other groups of *wageni* viewed African Christians as having a different, but essential, complementary experience of God, as Rev. Russell described:

Tanzanians have so much to share with the vision trip participants. They have an experience of God that we can’t live without, that we need. Our experience is not complete. The Gospel offers a path to God, and a path to each other. Many people are touched by Tanzanians’ hospitality to strangers – it’s unfamiliar but refreshing.

Similarly, in WMY team reports, highlights included seeing how passionate local people are, and how much they love God; or how welcoming Tanzanian people are.

But while African-ness is at times associated with generosity and fervour of faith, at other times it is associated with spiritual lost-ness. WMY team members read in the brochure that they will be able to conduct evangelism among people who have never heard of God’s love. During a devotional session, a WMY team member prayed, “Lord, I thank you so much for everything you’re doing here in Africa; so many people are lost and I thank you so much for these people [i.e. the team] giving up their time to come here and do what you have called us to do.” Similarly, another WMY team member, discussing her personal devotions with teammates, said, “I feel like ... us being missionaries here in Tanzania, we’re surrounded by people who are lost, *who don’t know who God is or maybe have heard a little bit about him*, but don’t really know enough to know how awesome he truly is” (emphasis mine). In one instance, skin colour even became a metric by which they could measure how far they were taking the gospel.³⁹ One of WMY’s teams discussed their visit to a local mining community, where they had been intending to go shopping, but quickly changed their plans to evangelism when they were “bombarded by natives” who had “not seen any white people for a long time”.

None of these statements was true. Even very rural villages (nevermind where there is souvenir shopping to be done) see foreign visitors on a regular basis; as for knowing God, about 70% of Kilimanjaro Region is Christian, and my Tanzanian friends thought the idea of never having heard about God (whether or not one is a Christian) to be inconceivable. When I asked pastors if they thought anyone in this area had never heard of God, most laughed. “Not only is that not true now,” one said, “but it never was, even before the missionaries came.” Similarly, at the closing worship service for a LWF All-Africa Conference (hosted by the Northern Diocese), attended by over a thousand people, Munib Younan (Bishop of Jerusalem and LWF President) said in his sermon: “The missionaries who came here brought the Bible, but they did not bring God. He was already here.” This provoked an enthusiastic round of applause.

The Next Generation group also considered African-ness to be a barrier to some extent; after visiting a Sunday School, the group said they felt discouraged about how the teachers seemed to value memorisation and recitation over participatory methodologies. “We saw a lot of tradition,” one lamented. However, it’s not my intention to criticise visitors for their misconceptions about local religious and ethnic dynamics. Rather, what I want to point out is the way in which people’s African-ness, and by extension, blackness, is referenced by visitors in different ways. At times it is glossed over (for example, when visitors are surprised

³⁷ Gal. 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

³⁸ See Bonilla-Silva, *Racism*, for a discussion of how “colour-blind” discourse is itself a new ideology of racism.

³⁹ Referring to, among other passages, Acts 1:8 “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

that Tanzanians experience racism), at others used as an index of depth of faith, and others an indicator of lost-ness or backwardness.

Race, African-ness, and Ethnicity

I have been discussing two sets of shifting and sometimes overlapping layers of conceptions; Americans have notions of race, colour, and ethnicity, while Tanzanians similarly have concepts of *rangi* “colour”, *kabila* “tribe”, and *mbari* “clan, house, lineage”.⁴⁰ Neither of these sets of conceptions maps neatly onto each other. To analyse this further, I compare two cases: *Wageni* perception of Maasai and Chagga ethnic identities. Most of my research was in Chagga-dominated areas (namely the Northern Diocese), although Maasai people form a significant minority in many areas of the diocese, and a majority in some of the diocese’s western and southern parishes. I also observed one group of short-term missionaries, from a Midwestern college-based organisation, working outside the Northern Diocese in neighbouring Arusha Region, and they mainly were involved with Maasai people.

Case 1: The Maasai People

Maasai ethnicity is often highly visible, particularly in clothing, jewelry, and body modification. Many Maasai people retain their traditional dress, and ethnicity is often imprinted upon them bodily in the form of ear stretching and cheek scarification.⁴¹ The figure of the Maasai person with the colourful robes and elaborate beaded jewelry is immediately recognisable; it is replicated in souvenir shops country-wide in Maasai-inspired jewelry, statuary, paintings, and all manner of knick-knacks. Traditional round thatched Maasai houses are also visually distinctive. Many Maasai people continue a pastoral livelihood, herding cows and goats, although not as many are nomadic or semi-nomadic as in years past. In addition to some groups who do their mission projects in Maasai areas, a large number of *wageni* visit Maasai cultural villages or souvenir shops during their sightseeing; the northern safari parks (Tarangire, Ngorongoro, and Serengeti) are all in Maasai-majority areas.

Maasai ethnicity was, in some cases, seen by *wageni* as a particular distillation of African-ness, and was occasionally put to use in the sense of how far away from home one has gone in the service of God. One team leader for the Midwest group said at a Maasai girls’ program they visited, “I always dreamed to go to Africa, but never thought I would and especially never thought I would meet any Maasai. Nobody I know has met any Maasai, but now I have.” Later, talking to Jared and Hilary, two long-term American missionaries who facilitated the Midwest visit, I asked them about why they think Americans are so fixated on Maasai people.

Jared: Cause they’re – well, the way they would describe it is, they’re archaic, or they’re...

Hilary: So foreign. So foreign from what they know.

Jared: But they still, they adhere to the – they [Americans] would say that they feel like they are the things that most Africans are.

Hilary: Most people believe Africans to be – Maasai. ... for what I know, for the Westerners that come, why they fall in love with the Maasai people – I think because you’re totally immersed in it. And so when you’re out there, you’re just with the Maasai and they come and they *love* you and they *adore* you and they cling to you, and – I don’t know why though. It means more to them.

Elaine: It means more to the team or to the Maasai people?

⁴⁰ Neither “race” nor “ethnicity” has an exact equivalent in Swahili. “Racism” is usually rendered *ubaguzi wa rangi*, “discrimination of colour”; “genocide” is translated by *mauaji ya kimbari*, “lineage-based killings”.

⁴¹ Mothers often brand a small circle on their young child’s cheekbones.

Hilary: To the team. ... From what I've seen with short-term trips that come for like two weeks at a time, they might spend a week out in Maasailand and a week here, and almost every single time, they say, "We connected with the Maasai better than we did Tanzanians."

Elaine: I think maybe part of it has to do with – people have this conception of "they're so fierce".

Hilary: Yes. Yes. Yes. And I think... and they just, they look so foreign to you when you first come, and what people say is, "I never knew that we could be the same, that we could sit by each other and laugh over something, the exact same thing, because they're so different." Where, Tanzanians, we just look different in colour. ... I think with the Maasai you never think you *could* connect with them, because they're just so different.

I want to point out two things from this conversation. The first is the idea of fierceness. A lot of *wageni* learn about Maasai rituals, for example, how boys are circumcised in groups at around age 12-16 and are not supposed to make any reaction lest they be labelled a weakling for the rest of their lives, or how they are taught to fight lions. On the bus ride back to their home base after a day of outreach, one of the Midwest team leaders was laughing with me about an encounter he had that day: "I met this man whose right arm was badly mangled from a lion attack, and asked via the translator how it had happened. A couple guys nearby jumped in and said, 'It's his own fault! He flinched!' Apparently the way to fight a lion is to shove your arm down its throat and choke it from the inside, and this guy hesitated." He laughed again, entertained by the fierce masculinity of the situation. However, fierceness has another side for *wageni*, as they also perceive it as working against acceptance of Christianity. One of the other team leaders stood up at one of the team meetings to read a psalm. She was very emotional: "The Maasai tradition is so strong in its rejection of Christ, and I pray that this will be the generation that accepts it." Another leader added, "It's a privilege to be part of the process whereby when every people group is reached, the end will come."⁴²

Second, Hilary alludes to Maasai people being somehow other-than-Tanzanian: she notes that *wageni* tend to connect with Maasai better than they do with Tanzanians, and suggests this is because *wageni* and Tanzanians are basically only different in terms of colour, while Maasai people are on another order of difference. It would seem that *wageni* tend to see Maasai people as more authentically African due to their highly visible ethnic identity.

In fact, some Americans seem to associate Maasai identity not just with more authentic African-ness, but with having a "culture" in general: I spoke to some former WMY team members (from the team I was on in 2000, which stayed first in Moshi Town, then in two Chagga villages and one Maasai village) about some of their memories from 15 years previously. One recalled vividly her experience of visiting a Maasai village, and why she remembered it so clearly: "I think it's because that was the first time we really got to see people's culture, and how they actually lived." This distills the divergence in thinking about ethnicity, that certain highly visible and physical markers of ethnicity—clothing, jewelry, dancing, body modification, etc.—are associated with a real and authentic culture. This is in contrast to how a lot of *wageni* see Chagga ethnicity, which I discuss in the next section. However, the ready visibility of Maasai identity can also be perceived negatively in terms of authenticity. Some groups of *wageni* are starting to eschew Maasai cultural villages, suggesting that they have become overly commercialised, and that the various components of cultural villages (dancing, jumping, singing, and in fact the whole perceived performance of "living" in the village which the *wageni* suspect nobody actually lives in) have, in being performed for money, *lost* their authenticity. Thus, the Nebraska group no longer goes to Maasai cultural villages; instead they go a couple hours further afield to visit the Hadza people, who have traditionally been hunter-gatherers and "are not commercialised yet".

⁴² Referencing Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

Case 2: The Chagga People

Chagga ethnic identity is not immediately visible to the casual observer; Chagga people do not wear markedly different clothes or jewelry, or practice body modification such as earlobe stretching or scarification. The language difference (i.e. when people are speaking Kichagga vs. Kiswahili) is not apparent to short-term visitors who do not speak Swahili. The traditional Chagga homeland is in the Kilimanjaro highlands, a greenbelt between about 1000 and 1800 metres above sea level where most people live on small-holdings, growing bananas, coffee, and other vegetables and keeping small numbers of cows, goats, and chickens, usually in byres rather than free-grazing. Some have moved to the more arid lowlands, growing maize and sunflower or living in town (or even in Dar es Salaam), but still consider their “home place” to be on the mountain. Even those who work in other businesses maintain their small-holdings. Historically Chagga people lived in conical thatched huts; today they live in square houses (usually made of bricks or cinder blocks, although poorer families may use wood planks or wattle-and-daub) which look a lot more familiar to *wageni*. Many Chagga people pride themselves on an entrepreneurial spirit; indeed several of the country’s wealthier businessmen are Chagga.

To a very large extent, Chagga ethnic identity does not become a matter of discussion among *wageni*. There are Chagga cultural villages with traditional huts, but not very many, so it’s much less common for *wageni* to visit them: According to diocese records, the Nebraska group did include the Chagga Live Museum in its itinerary, but only until about 2011. In spite of its name, the collections at Chagga Live Museum are also presented as a historical past rather than a present lived reality. However, there is no discussion among *wageni* of the Chagga experiencing a deficient ethnic identity, compared to the Maasai. Neither is the relative lack of “cultural tourism” perceived by *wageni* as any more authentic compared to the overly commercialised Maasai. The conversation in both cases is non-existent. Of course some *wageni* do become familiar with Chagga customs, especially repeat visitors; I do not suggest that all are ignorant of Chagga dynamics. But even for those who do gain some familiarity, Chagga ethnic identity is not generally a topic of conversation.

This absence of Chagga ethnicity on the *wageni* radar is not new. In 1969, Sally Falk Moore was discouraged from studying the Chagga, being told, “They are too modern. They probably all wear pants.”⁴³ Even Chagga clergy are happy to discuss the ways in which Chagga customs fell out of use after the arrival of Leipzig missionaries. “We used to have our *jando*,⁴⁴ our holidays, and so on,” lamented Rev. Ulomi. “The missionaries took all of that. I think the Maasai are probably the only Tanzanians that still really have their *jando*.” While he may have been exaggerating, in that other Tanzanians do still practice *jando*, many Chagga pastors consider the Maasai to be exemplary: The pastor in charge of diaconic work at the diocese agreed that the Chagga lost their *jando* to the missionaries, and added wistfully, “The Maasai have done well though.” Other pastors discussed how although the missionaries did try to distinguish Christianity from culture, they still failed in some areas, and as a result, Chagga people were discouraged from practicing some of their religious customs – ancestor veneration, circumcision, etc.⁴⁵

The difference in perception of ethnicity may be inevitable for short-term visitors. Only being in Tanzania for a short time, they have less depth of knowledge about historical and contemporary ethnic dynamics. In some cases (e.g. the WMY teams) they may not be aware of any context of contemporary Christianity. In other cases (e.g. the Nebraska Synod) the team is working directly with the church and is aware of the scope of the church’s work. Nevertheless, they are generally unaware of the many interconnections between historical and contemporary ethnic and political legacies that shape religious experience. Hodgson’s study of Maasai Catholicism,⁴⁶ for example, discusses how women use conversion experiences to negotiate

⁴³ Moore, “Anthropology”, 131.

⁴⁴ Boys’ initiation rite.

⁴⁵ Shao, “Bruno Gutmann”; Urio, “Concept”; see also Fiedler, “Christianity” for a discussion of how several new Chagga converts actually took an even stricter position than missionaries, and the role of Chagga progressives in the circumcision controversy.

⁴⁶ Hodgson, “Church”.

gender and ethnic identities, and how spiritual practice, especially of women who form the majority of Maasai Christians, has been influenced by several historical trends, including pioneer missionary attitudes and policies that addressed cultural practices. She concludes by demonstrating how relationships are formed between spirituality and other domains of power. Likewise, the experience of many Chagga people is influenced deeply by their spiritual heritage,⁴⁷ and in fact the two identities have become so intertwined that Hasu was confident enough to write, “to be Chagga is to be Christian”.⁴⁸ Sermons in Chagga parishes often include vernacular proverbs which the preacher uses to reinforce his point, and guests are sent on their way with Chagga proverbs of blessing. Spiritual heritage as Chagga people is invoked in the presentation of food to guests, the continuing importance of trees in everyday practice and environmental theology, in funerary traditions (where membership in the *mbari* or *ukoo* “clan” of the deceased is a salient feature), and many others.

Contemporary Christianity and church politics are both deeply influenced by ethnic identity and by local perceptions of ethnic spiritual heritage; thus for Tanzanians, *kabila* is intimately connected to religious life. However, this is often below the level of perception of *wageni*. In one case (the Chagga) ethnic identity does not become a topic for discussion; in the other (the Maasai) it is relegated to a material discussion of clothes or beads, or a discourse of opposition and challenge rather than actual dynamics in Maasai Christianity.

Partnership and Hospitality

I conclude by returning to themes of partnership and hospitality, and their effect on racial and ethnic encounters between Tanzanians and *wageni*. Hospitality is something a majority of *wageni* comment on: how they felt welcomed by their Tanzanian hosts and were amazed at their great hospitality. However, there is always tension in hospitality, in the possibility that it might break down⁴⁹ and in the shifting identities at play, and various tensions and implications of being a host.⁵⁰

When speaking of who is *mgeni*, it should be understood that the word includes several scales. It means both “guest, visitor” and “stranger, foreigner”. *Wageni* could therefore be complete strangers from overseas, or your next-door neighbours who have come over for dinner. “Host” is *mwenyeji* (*pl. wenyaji*), a contracted form of *mwenye mji*, literally, “the one having the town”, although *mji* “town” is also used (especially in formal contexts) to designate the domestic homestead. Identities are further complicated in that an *mgeni* can become a *mwenyeji*, at least at some levels. My Tanzanian friends have told me that I am not *mgeni* anymore; some would even joke that I’ve become Chagga. Categories may overlap; were the bishop invited to his natal parish as the *mgeni rasmi*, “official guest”, for an event, he would be *mgeni* and *mwenyeji* at the same time. It is significant that the partnership or short-term model of mission keeps partners as *wageni*. This maintains a distinct role for partners: although the possibility of becoming *mwenyeji* does exist, it is partial. Furthermore, keeping partners as *wageni* necessitates hospitality.

Some of the tensions in hosting and hospitality may be best illustrated by proverbs. One is *Anayetembelewa, afya mapema*, “he who is visited [returns to] health quickly.” I first heard this recited in a hospital room, where the patient (one of the diocese staff) was happy to see some visitors from the diocese office, including the bishop. Later, I heard a second proverb: *Mgeni aje, mwenyeji apone*, “The guest comes, the host feels better.”⁵¹ I asked my host mama about it, thinking it would mean the same thing as the first. She laughed. “No, that’s not it. It’s actually talking about the neighbours – when you see your neighbour is having guests over, you know they will be serving nice food, so you try to go as well.” My host father, the bishop, concurred. “Do you remember when we were guests at the nursing school graduation, and the students were so excited? It was because they were serving a lot of good food because of the special event.”

⁴⁷ One of the chapters of my forthcoming dissertation discusses the interwoven concepts of identity as Chagga people and Christians, particularly Lutherans, and how Chagga spiritual heritage connects to both.

⁴⁸ Hasu, “Desire”, 42.

⁴⁹ Shryock, “Breaking”, S20.

⁵⁰ Candea and Da Col, “Return”.

⁵¹ I have also heard *mwenyeji ashibe*, “the host eats his fill”.

This shows that hospitality can have vicarious material benefit for others surrounding the host. A third phrase was one I heard many times: *Mgeni ni kazi na baraka*, “a guest is work and blessing.” Having guests is hard work; one has to clean, provide food and drink (tea, coffee, or bottled soda or water), entertain, and clean again. Hosts will breathe huge sighs of relief after their guests leave; at times they have complained about guests showing up unannounced in the early morning or late evening. But the fact that the *kazi* “work” and *baraka* “blessing” of guests are held in tension, does not mean that they conflict. Perhaps the phrase that best illustrates this is *Hongera, na pole*, “congratulations, and my condolences.” It is entirely appropriate to say to someone who has sat through a long church service, or has been promoted at work to a position with greater responsibility, or is having a large group of guests. I suggest that this forms a useful way of interpreting partnerships and short-term mission. The relationship may be rooted in an inclusive theology, but still come with challenges; it may be based in a partner’s well-meaning ignorance of local Christian experience, but still be enjoyed; it may produce uncomfortable moments of racial misunderstanding, but still be a valuable resource. Though “congratulations” and “my condolences” seem to contradict each other, they do not necessarily conflict; both the difficulties and the opportunities may be freely acknowledged.

The partnership and short-term mission models are steeped in ambiguity: Are the *wageni* missionaries, guests, tourists? As for Tanzanian Christians, are they partners, beneficiaries, recipients? Disjunctures between *wageni* and local understandings are always present, and though not always explicit, do become evident at times. Partnerships are ostensibly based in equality; both Tanzanians and *wageni* (especially in structural and instrumental partnerships) discuss how they appreciate that both parties contribute to the partnership equally. Nevertheless, power imbalances remain which ensure that the relationship can never be completely equal, and these imbalances are not always acknowledged by *wageni* although they are readily apparent to Tanzanians. For example, Americans visiting Tanzania can obtain a visa easily and affordably upon arrival. Conversely, for Tanzanians to visit America is an undertaking which is unaffordable to many Tanzanians and unpleasant for the rest. One must pay the application fee and go in person for an interview at the embassy in Dar es Salaam; the visa may not be granted, and the application fee is non-refundable.

In this context of ambiguities and inequalities of power, it is clear that racial and ethnic understandings, misunderstandings, and disjunctures of understanding also flourish. These are helped along in no small part by the absence of in-depth knowledge inherent to short-term mission. The gaps and divergences visible in the various levels of understandings of race (as colour, as ethnicity, as African-ness) lead to situations where different elements can be emphasised or de-emphasised for different purposes, in ways that reveal patterns of racialised thinking and social inequality. Highly visible ethnicity is more recognised as an “ethnicity” or a “culture”; colour on the other hand, is universalised in some ways and de-universalised in others. Blackness is common to all of Africa in the discourse about our “African brothers and sisters”; but in its being common to all of Africa, it somehow loses its ability to be a source of discrimination. In that sense, blackness is not common to all black people worldwide in terms of something experienced as a basis for discrimination. In the end, even as these divergent understandings and selective (de)emphasising emerge in interactions between Tanzanian people and *wageni*, the uncomfortable moments that may result are not necessarily seen as a threat to a productive partnership. The “work” part of the equation does not obviate the “blessing”, and vice versa. *Hongera, na pole*.

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